

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118921
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291287
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	845
6th form	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Mocroft
Headteacher	Jane Percy
Date of previous school inspection	26 March 2001
School address	Abbey Place Faversham ME13 7BQ
Telephone number	01795 533132
Fax number	01795 538474

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Almost one quarter of the school's students are in the sixth form. The percentage of students who have English as an additional language is below average. About 95% of students are White British with small numbers of students from ethnic minority groups. The percentage of students taking free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below the national average. The school achieved mathematics and computing specialist status in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with several significant strengths, some of which have emerged in the last three years since the school acquired specialist status. For example, students make outstanding progress in mathematics in Years 7 to 9 and standards have gone up. Information and communication technology (ICT) resources have improved dramatically and all students study a GCSE course in business and communications. This develops their computer skills and prepares them well for life beyond school. Students appreciate the role they can play in addressing global problems such as inequality. The school has a keen focus on such issues, selling FairTrade products and holding a successful global climate conference for Year 10 students.

Standards are high in all years and students achieve well. The average total GCSE points score has gone up for the last three years, reflecting the improved percentage of A* and A grades. The school is determined to make this, and the percentage of A and B grades at GCE A level, higher and is aware that some gifted and talented students could do even better. Boys do not attain as well as girls and many subjects have introduced ways to tackle this, such as teaching Year 9 boys and girls separately in art.

Teaching and learning are good and students are encouraged to work together and share their ideas. They do this well which supports their good learning. However, teaching is not always matched to students' different abilities, gifts and talents. The curriculum is good but there are minor weaknesses such as insufficient drama in Years 7 to 9 and few vocational courses offered in Years 11 to 13.

Students are confident, articulate and they mature into thoughtful young adults. They feel happy talking to staff if they need help or support. They enjoy school, feel safe and state that racism and bullying are very rare and dealt with firmly. Although the school discusses different faiths and cultures in several subjects, students do not fully appreciate how these are linked to life in multicultural Britain.

Students' personal development and well-being are good because students receive good, sensitive care, guidance and support in all years. They are fully aware of what they should do to lead healthy lives, although they admit that they do not always put this into practice. The school council and the house system are relatively new and students do not yet feel that their voice is considered enough in school developments.

The school's knowledge and evaluation of its strengths and areas for development are very good so its capacity to improve further is strong. With many new senior leaders and heads of departments in the last three years, leadership and management are good and becoming increasingly effective. The headteacher gives a very good steer to driving up standards further and receives much support from all staff. Under a new chair, the governing body is fully involved in long-term plans, being knowledgeable about the school and the developments needed.

One of the school's aims is to give students a 'realistic sense of ambition and achievement' which it achieves because practically all students proceed to the universities of their choice. A student sums up other reasons why she loves being at the school and would not be anywhere else: 'Everyone gets on well, and teachers are really friendly and they encourage you to do well.'

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form students reach high standards and continue the good progress they make in Years 7 to 11. The increasing number of students who enter the school in Year 12 do as well as those who have been at the school since Year 7. Good progress is a result of the good teaching and the same good quality of care, guidance and support as in the main school. Leadership and management are good and contribute to the excellent relationships between adults and students. Students have an impressive maturity and are generally well prepared for their next stages of their lives, which they face with a great deal of confidence. Their personal development and well-being are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Match teaching more closely to students' different abilities, gifts and talents.
- Consult with students about ways to improve school life and their learning.
- Make students aware of how the work they do in several subjects is preparing them for living and working in multicultural Britain.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are high and students achieve well in all years. In the 2006 end of Year 9 tests, almost all students attained level 7 or higher in mathematics, over half did so in science and one third in English. Girls did better than boys in all subjects with a wider gap in English than that seen nationally. Students who enter the school with slightly lower standards than the majority achieve very well, as do those from ethnic minority backgrounds and students who have English as an additional language.

In 2006, 97% of students attained at least five GCSE A*-C grades including English and mathematics. Over 40 % of the grades attained were A* or A. As in Years 7 to 9, girls did better than boys. English and mathematics results were the best the school has attained in the last five years: almost half the students attained A* or A grades and the figure was two thirds in English literature. Other strong subjects were food technology, textiles and religious studies.

The impact of the school's specialism continues to be evident in the sixth form where two thirds of the students who took GCE A level mathematics in 2006 attained A or B grades and students who took an information and communication technology (ICT) qualification made very good progress. GCE A level results have shown an upward trend in the last few years; in 17 of the 24 subjects taken in 2006, students attained at least 50% A or B grades.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enjoy being in school, have very positive attitudes in lessons and work hard. Attendance is above average. Behaviour is very good, although, in a few lessons, students in Years 7 to 9 feel that low level disruption affects how well they learn.

The relationships between students and staff are outstanding; Year 11 students particularly enjoy being served by staff at their leaving lunch. Sixth formers appreciate that the school does not only focus on academic achievement but encourages them to succeed in other ways. Students' relationships with staff mean that they feel safe and confidently seek help if they have a problem. Bullying is not an issue because it is dealt with well on the rare occasions when it happens.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their work in personal, social and health education and citizenship lessons gives them an appreciation of different lifestyles and topics covered in several subjects focus on different faiths and cultures. Their appreciation of how these topics are linked with multicultural British society is more limited. The school council is not yet well established to give students real influence over what happens in school. Students give generously to charities and regularly support specific projects overseas.

Students have an appreciation of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, although this does not always influence what they do outside school and their participation in extra-curricular sports could be higher. The students' strong literacy, numeracy and ICT skills provide a very good basis for the world of higher education and work, although sixth formers do not do any extended work experience and Year 10 students find one week too short.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students feel that the school provides good, interesting lessons. Teachers plan activities and use teaching methods to generate a good atmosphere in which students confidently help and talk to each other. Students do this willingly and learn from each other. In a Year 7 history lesson, for example, several team activities made the lesson enjoyable. The teacher's skilful questions developed students' thinking skills so that progress was very good. In an outstanding Year 13 English lesson, different ideas about how to revise were introduced through a stimulating discussion on characters in literature.

Students are aware of their target levels and grades and most know what to do to improve. Where teaching is not as strong, there are too few different activities and tasks to fully match the breadth of students' abilities, especially those who are gifted and more able to assimilate ideas quickly. The school is developing its provision in this area but such practice is not consistent in all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum meets students' aspirations and interests well. The range of academic subjects offered has increased in recent years in Years 10 to 13 and the students are pleased with the options offered. This is reflected both in the high retention rate into the sixth form and the successful recruitment of students from other schools. Students say that the designation of the school as a specialist college in mathematics and computing has had a good impact on the range of subjects offered.

The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities. A positive approach to sustainability has developed well in recent years; students are well aware of global warming and the Eco-group contributes to improving the school grounds. Home-grown rhubarb and herbs are used in food technology lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The arrangements to secure the health, safety and safeguarding of all students are excellent, with all necessary procedures followed meticulously. The few students with learning difficulties and disabilities have individual profiles that ensure they receive the right support to make good progress. Students' academic progress is assessed regularly and monitored well, linked to their overall development, although some subjects do this better than others. In several subjects, students receive good, subject-specific guidance on what to do to improve.

Careers guidance, which has improved in recent months, helps students to make informed choices at all stages of their education. Links with primary schools are very good. Particularly through its specialism and sporting contacts, the school is well involved in the community and local area. Sixth form students benefit from and enjoy helping to organise activities in other schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has successfully overseen the development of specialist status, significant changes in the leadership of several departments, improved examination results and refurbishment of the school environment. Standards continue to rise, supported by improved data analysis which measures progress accurately and generates challenging targets for students. The headteacher is skilful at appointing and developing staff. One senior leader described her leadership style as 'a breath of fresh air' with her enthusiasm and receptiveness to ideas for development.

The governors bring a wealth of relevant expertise and experience to their deliberations. They receive presentations from staff and students so that they are aware of what is happening and know where improvements are needed. They are determined to improve accessibility for members of the school community with disabilities and also keenly promote equality of opportunity for all students. Governors enthusiastically support the school's focus on sustainability issues.

The issues generated by the previous inspection in 2001 have been tackled well. For example, the delegation of responsibilities to senior managers is clear and personal and social and health education is now good. The headteacher has established, at all levels, a culture of honest and robust evaluation of what the school does. Staff feel that their opinions and suggestions for improvements are valued, although students do not feel they are involved enough. Good relationships at all levels contribute to the happy atmosphere around the school.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

16 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Faversham, Kent ME13 7BQ

Thank you very much for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We had some very interesting discussions with many of you and wish there had been more time to talk to you all. You clearly enjoy life at school and appreciate that you are taught well, have excellent relationships with teachers and receive much helpful care and guidance. You behave well, work hard and are generous in raising money for charities.

We have described the school as good with several significant features. These include the impact of the specialist status, for example, the business and communications GCSE which you all take and the rising standards in mathematics. The school's focus on sustainability is another strength, seen in the work done by the Eco-group and the climate change conference organised for Year 10 last year. The curriculum is good and your school is well run.

The standards you achieve are high but there could be more high grades in some GCSE and GCE A level subjects and even harder work for some of you! We have asked the school to match teaching more closely to your different abilities, gifts and talents. You can help, too, by continuing to work hard to achieve the highest grades.

Although you are very aware that the area of the UK you live in does not reflect the population in many other parts of the country, we have suggested that the school does more to prepare you for living and working in multicultural Britain.

Acknowledging that the school council is fairly new, we also know that you want to have a stronger say in what goes on at school. Mrs Percy is keen to listen to your views and to involve you in future developments. We have urged the school to consult with you more about ways to improve school life and your learning.

We saw several revision lessons and realise that several of you will be well into your examinations when this letter arrives. We hope they go very well and that you all have successful and happy futures.

Yours Sincerely,

Clare Gillies Lead Inspector