

Gravesend Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118936
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291291
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Samantha Morgan-Price HMI

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	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1016
6th form	275
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Ralph
Headteacher	Geoffrey Wybar
Date of previous school inspection	14 October 2002
School address	Church Walk Gravesend DA12 2PR
Telephone number	01474 331893
Fax number	01474 331894

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Gravesend Grammar is a boys' school to the age of 16, with a mixed sixth form. The school is popular and oversubscribed. Approximately 80% of students are White British; 11.5% are Indian with very small numbers from other minority ethnic backgrounds. A lower than average percentage of students speak English as an additional language. Many other students are bilingual and do not speak English at home. The percentage eligible for free school meals is well below average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is well below average, as is the percentage of students with statements of special educational need. In 2003 the school was awarded specialist college status in mathematics and computing.

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. It is well led and managed by an innovative headteacher and a particularly strong senior team. Students' attainment on entry to the school is above average although it is not as high in English as in science and mathematics. Students make good progress through the school to achieve very high standards at GCSE. The school is focused on students' success. Students achieve well because of good teaching and learning, an effective curriculum as well as good care and support for their individual needs. However, the proportion of highest grades achieved by students at GCSE is not high enough.

Teaching provides a strong structure for learning, with careful questioning and varied strategies promoting the effective acquisition of knowledge and skills. Improvements in assessment practices are helping students understand where they are and what they need to do to improve.

Through the courses available and the accessibility of mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT) workshops, students have many opportunities to develop a range of skills that prepare them extremely well for their future economic well-being. Students' enjoyment of all the school offers is clear. Extra-curricular activities are varied and extensive, with large numbers of students involved. A wide range of trips and visits also enriches learning.

Students feel safe at school. Attendance is good and improving; they study hard and behave well. Their personal development is good. The school works extremely well with a range of partners to support the achievement and well-being of its students as well as providing excellent support for its partners.

The newly appointed learning managers are improving the quality of the school's work, although the skills of some heads of subject in monitoring and identifying improvements in their areas of responsibility are under-developed. Nevertheless, school self-evaluation is accurate, resulting in good improvement planning. The school gives good value for money. Progress made since the last inspection is good. The school has made improvements to its buildings which include new mathematics and computing workshops, but some poor accommodation still exists. Major accommodation improvements are planned to be completed in 2011. The school demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good in all respects. It provides students with two years of effective teaching combined with good academic and personal care, guidance and support. Standards are good and students make good progress. Students' progress is particularly good in mathematics and information communication technology (ICT) reflecting strengths in the school's specialist status. The school's focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to improve standards is having a good impact. However, the school recognises that further work needs to be done to enable students to achieve the highest grades in some examinations. Students readily take opportunities to support the school. Some, for example, mentor younger students in lower year groups. Leadership and management of the sixth form are effective and the leadership team has ensured that there is a good varied curriculum.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students reaching the highest grades at both GCSE and A level.

- Make monitoring procedures more consistent throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' achievement is good throughout the school. They enter the school with above average standards, although they are not as high in English as they are in mathematics and science. Students make good progress through the school and reach very high standards at GCSE level, with almost all achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities also make good progress.

Students now follow a condensed two year Key Stage 3 and therefore take their national tests a year earlier than usual. School analysis of the results and of other testing shows that boys make good progress in their first two years at school and that this continues in Year 9.

At GCSE level, recent examination results show that students reached high standards and made good progress in most subjects, but that there were a small number of subjects where progress was slower. The school has taken appropriate action to raise standards here including resolving some staffing difficulties. School tracking data show that these measures have had a positive impact on the rate of students' progress in these subjects. The school recognises that overall there is room for further improvement in the proportion of students reaching the very highest grades.

In the sixth form, students start their courses with broadly average standards. Results at A level in 2006 showed that standards were close to the national average, and that students made satisfactory progress. However, in AS level examinations students reached above average standards, made good progress and achieved well. School tracking data show that these students have continued to make good progress and are reaching higher standards than was the case a year ago.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good with some outstanding features. The school is an inclusive and highly supportive environment. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Bullying is dealt with swiftly and effectively, helping students to feel safe. They enjoy coming to school and develop good relationships with staff. Attendance is good and improving. Managers have put measures in place to improve the attendance of the few students who do not attend regularly. Students are very well aware of the importance of taking exercise and eating healthily, because the school provides an excellent range of opportunities for them to develop healthy lifestyles. They make an excellent contribution to the community through their various fund raising and community support activities. Peer mentors in the sixth form effectively support students in lower years. The work of the school council provides opportunities for students to contribute to the work of the school; however, a small minority of parents feel that students could be more involved in the running of the school. The business and enterprise curriculum as well as themed business challenge weeks enable students to gain excellent work related skills. The development of these personal and

social skills together with very good basic skills in numeracy and ICT contribute to excellent preparation for future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching in the school is good. The quality of planning is good and teachers know their subjects well. The range of learning activities used in lessons is increasing, and more thought is being given to developing students' own learning skills. Nevertheless, the school recognises that it has more to do to build on these aspects, especially in the sixth form and for the most able students.

Regular assessment using National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades is now used in all subjects. These assessments give students a good understanding of their current working levels and also of what they need to do next in order to improve. The approach to checking up on day-to-day class and homework is less consistent, and in some cases students are getting little feedback on their routine work.

There is some outstanding teaching, and there are imaginative plans to allow teachers to observe each other and learn from one another more easily.

Learning managers undertake regular lesson observations, as do subject managers. Much of this work is done well, with teachers receiving helpful feedback. Not all records of observations focus with sufficient precision on the progress students make in acquiring new skills, knowledge and understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school offers a good, broad and balanced curriculum which meets all statutory requirements. Students all follow a modern foreign language course to GCSE. In Key Stage 3, innovative developments are helping to raise standards. The transition to secondary school is made easier and less stressful for Year 7 students because they have the same teacher for some of their subjects, and make a more gradual change to specialist teaching. The move to a two-year Key Stage 3 has given teachers an opportunity to develop the curriculum in Year 9, bringing in some new topics and also helping students to acquire some of the broader learning skills which should help them as they progress through GCSE and on to A level. This work is well thought out and has made a promising start. However, it has not been in place long enough to have had an impact on standards at examination level.

The range of extra-curricular opportunities is outstanding. Students have excellent opportunities to take part in specialist ICT, sport, drama, music and in other clubs, including some that they themselves have requested. Participation rates are impressive, especially with the youngest boys, almost all of whom are involved in one or more activities.

In the sixth form the school offers a good range of A-level courses and the collaborative arrangements with the Gravesham consortium further extend the choice available. Planning to

extend vocational options is ongoing. Students benefit from opportunities in work related learning, but arrangements for work experience are underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support offered to students are good, with some outstanding features. The range of extra support for students, especially with preparation for examinations, is a very strong feature of the way the school works and teachers give a lot of time to this.

A key strength of the school is the support given to students who experience personal difficulties at some stage in their school career. Vulnerable students are identified quickly and supported either by mentoring, counselling or where appropriate by outside agencies. The school has a determined policy of not 'giving up' on students, whatever difficulties they may face, and does everything possible to help them achieve what they can.

Systems of academic guidance have recently been improved, and there is now a greater emphasis on the use of grades and levels in the regular assessment tasks. The school recognises that the monitoring of students' progress and the ways in which students are involved in setting both long and short term targets need improvement. There are well conceived plans to bring this about from September 2007 onwards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, governors and senior staff share a well-developed vision for the school's improvement. Through its work as a specialist college the school has developed excellent partnerships to improve the achievement of its students as well as learners within the community. The school improvement plan is accurately linked to the needs of its students and reflects the school's care for their progress and well-being. This is shown by the good overall achievement of students. Under the purposeful leadership of the headteacher, significant progress has been made in creating a good environment where the focus is on improving standards and teaching and learning. This process has been facilitated by the introduction of highly effective learning managers. The senior leadership team also demonstrates drive and enthusiasm for moving the school forward. They monitor and support the work of middle managers extremely well. However, monitoring of subject performance by heads of departments is inconsistent. Through its self-evaluation, the school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Governors are well informed and clearly understand the school's priorities, providing an appropriate level of challenge and support. The school manages its finances well. Resources are effectively deployed and issues regarding staff shortages in some subject areas have been effectively resolved. The school has used workforce reform very constructively and support staff play increasingly important roles in the school. However, some accommodation is not fit for purpose. The school is seeking to address this through its ambitious building plan which will replace a large proportion of its accommodation.

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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?	1	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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

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

8 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Gravesend Grammar School, Gravesend, DA12 2PR

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school and also for telling us what you thought about the school. We now know that you enjoy school and work hard.

We judged the school to be good. You achieve extremely high standards in your GCSEs. You make good progress which in the main is as a result of the good teaching and learning and effective support the school provides.

Your school is outstanding in preparing you for your future lives and in ensuring you all adopt healthy lifestyles. You also make an excellent contribution to your community. The headteacher leads and manages the school well. Managers have clear plans of how to bring about further improvement which include restoring your school buildings.

We did identify that there were two points that the school needs to pay particular attention to. We have asked the school to:

- Increase the proportion of highest grades at both GCSE and A level that you achieve.
- Ensure that managers check the work of their departments regularly in order that they know what actions are required to bring about further improvements.

Best wishes for the future

Samantha Morgan-Price HMI Lead inspector