



# Gillotts School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123240
<b>Local Authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	292623
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 March 2007
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	William Geoffrey Robson

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	893
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Nick Walden
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Catherine Brooker
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21 May 2001
<b>School address</b>	Gillotts Lane Henley-on-Thames RG9 1PS
<b>Telephone number</b>	01491 574315
<b>Fax number</b>	01491 410509

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Gillotts School is a specialist mathematics and computing school. It is an average sized secondary school but regularly receives twice the number of applications for places than it is able to provide. Just over half of its students come from local primary schools. Others are from neighbouring catchment areas and local authorities. Most students are White British and from socially and economically advantaged backgrounds but a significant number of students from minority ethnic groups were admitted in 2006. A small number of students are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is close to that found nationally.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Gillotts is a good school with some outstanding features. Parents rightly praise the headteacher's excellent leadership. With good support from an increasingly effective senior management team and dedicated teachers, she has enabled the school to reverse a worrying trend of declining standards. In particular, the introduction of an innovative, well managed house system has proved very effective. It has resulted in excellent guidance and support for students' academic and personal development. Until recently, the school was not setting sufficiently ambitious targets for students, even though it was meeting identified specialist school targets. This has now been rectified and more students are beginning to reach these more challenging targets. Standards are now well above average and students achieve well. They are very aware of what they need to do to improve further.

The school provides good value for money. However, management is not complacent and the development plan rightly identifies the need to consolidate and extend recent improvements in achievement. The school's self-evaluation is good but some subject leaders are less effective than others in using data to improve teaching and standards in their subjects.

Students have responded extremely positively to the new house system, which enables students of different ages to work together and help each other during daily tutor time. Partly as a result of this, relationships among students are exceptional and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. Younger students trust their older mentors and teachers and feel safe. All students clearly enjoy the opportunities the system provides for them to take responsibility. One parent stated, 'The school community has benefited enormously from the vertical tutor group system.' A good curriculum also helps students' personal and social development. Students pay good attention to information about the importance of safe, healthy lifestyles from a well organised programme of citizenship, personal and health education (CPHE). Their high levels of participation in physical education and sporting activities provide good evidence of this.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are particularly good at helping students to assess their own learning. Working relationships are excellent and students are keen to take responsibility for their own learning. Students from all groups make good progress. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive good support and also achieve well.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement further by ensuring that more students meet the challenging targets the school is now setting.
- Develop greater consistency among subject leaders in the use of self-evaluation, to gain further improvement in teaching and students' achievement.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment. Results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE have also been above average but fell significantly in 2004. There was some improvement in 2005, but Year 9 students made inadequate progress between Years 7 and 9. In particular, these students did not achieve as well as they should in mathematics and their progress in science was barely satisfactory. The senior management team has identified and

responded to this fall in standards by taking effective action to improve teaching and subject management. New subject leaders have set more challenging targets which students are beginning to achieve. In mathematics, standards are higher than the initial targets that were set for the school's specialist status, but could still be higher. There has been similar improvement in several other subjects. Results improved considerably in 2006 and present students are on track to do even better. Overall standards are now well above average and students are achieving well. Standards in information and communications technology (ICT) are high and far exceed specialist school targets. High attaining students achieve well and many gain qualifications at AS level or its equivalent. Many parents praise the work of the learning support department which helps students with learning difficulties and disabilities to make good progress. Students from minority ethnic groups also achieve well.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

The quality of students' personal development and well-being is outstanding. Students enjoy the good range of opportunities the school offers and their attendance is good. Their behaviour is excellent in lessons and around the school, including when they are not being directly supervised. Their leisure periods are civilised, sociable occasions enjoyed by all. Relationships among students and with adults are exceptionally good and do much to enhance the quality of school life. Students make an excellent contribution to the school community. During tutor time, they respond particularly well to the house system that encourages them to work together in different year groups. Older students act very responsibly as peer mentors and all have a firm understanding of their responsibility to the school and each other. Year 11 students, who have experienced the change from traditional form groups to mixed age, vertical tutor groups, say, 'The school has become a strong, cohesive community since the system changed.' Younger students say, 'We feel safe because we can ask older students for help.' Students also make an appreciable contribution to projects within the wider community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A particular strength is the quality of spiritual development, because of students' mature and thoughtful response to the good opportunities that they are given for this.

Students have a strong understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They make excellent use of good opportunities for physical activity and sport. They make sensible dietary choices and clearly enjoy healthy food. Very good standards of literacy, numeracy and ICT, coupled with mature communication and social skills, mean that students are well prepared to meet the challenges of life at work. However the rather brief allocation of time for work experience means that pupils do not have enough opportunity to experience fully the demands of the workplace.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. The school has made good progress on the issues raised by the last inspection. The monitoring of teaching is now more systematic and homework is set regularly. Students enjoy learning and lively, interesting lessons often motivate them to work hard. This is reflected in the increasingly rapid progress students are making during their time at school.

Working relationships between teachers and students are excellent and, in most lessons, enthusiastic, well-informed teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. The overwhelming majority of students work hard and they speak highly of their teachers. Skilful use of open-ended questioning encourages a mature level of whole class discussion which teachers manage well. ICT forms an integral part of many lessons and teachers use interactive whiteboards very well. Teachers support students with learning difficulties and disabilities well and help them to make good progress. In the best lessons, teachers' willingness to use different teaching styles means that students benefit from a variety of motivating activities. However, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. For example, too much insistence on whole class activities slows the pace of learning in some lessons.

The use of assessment information to track the progress of students against targets is excellent. Students have challenging targets and, through self, peer and teacher assessment, have an excellent understanding of what they need to do in order to achieve them. Its use to guide the planning of teaching and learning, whilst being good overall, is not always focused on ensuring that work matches the individual abilities of students.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides a good curriculum that meets students' needs well. The school has successfully addressed the issues in the previous report regarding provision for religious education, design and technology and ICT. All National Curriculum requirements are met. Good literacy and numeracy support helps students whose attainment on entry to the school is below average to make good progress.

The school provides a good range of opportunities for students in Years 10 and 11. However, the overall allocation of curriculum time is below that recommended for students of this age. Opportunities for gifted and talented students for early entry to GCSE, followed by more advanced AS courses, are excellent. In addition, links with local agencies help students to put work related learning into practice, although the single week of work experience for all Year 10 students is below average. The uptake of modern languages is good with more than 60% of students studying at least one modern foreign language. All students participate in ICT and religious education and most pursue these to GCSE or its equivalent.

The curriculum promotes safe and healthy lifestyles through a highly effective citizenship, personal and health education programme and two hours per week of physical education. Students appreciate the excellent range of enrichment activities, including many sports, music, drama and numerous clubs and societies. These are very popular and contribute much to students' enjoyment of school life and to their physical well-being. Students' positive attitudes and enjoyment of school are further illustrated by the large number who attend extra, optional lessons in a range of subjects after school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Considerable thought and planning have been put into the development of a robust system of support and guidance which places a clear emphasis on supporting both achievement and personal development. At the heart of this is a very well planned, innovative house system. It ensures that any concerns about individual students are identified and addressed at an early

stage. The school works in close co-operation with a wide range of outside agencies to offer comprehensive, targeted support for students. Students feel extremely well supported and are particularly appreciative of the fact that their views are valued and acted upon. They cited the refurbishment of toilets and, currently, a campaign to have healthier food in the canteen as examples of a successful student voice. Students are confident that their concerns are taken seriously by adults who will support them through their difficulties. Equally importantly, they also know that their fellow students feel a sense of responsibility for helping peers who are experiencing problems. This is one of the reasons why there is very little bullying in the school.

Because academic guidance is outstanding, students have excellent understanding of their own progress and what they need to do to improve. They feel that they are very well supported in taking a share of the responsibility for this significant area of their development. The school has rigorous arrangements to ensure the safety of its students. Overall, the quality of the care, guidance and support given to students is outstanding.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Students' good academic progress and first class personal development owe much to good leadership and management. The headteacher's leadership is outstanding. She is passionate about her vision that 'every child has talents we can develop'. This has led to the climate for learning being transformed into one in which learning is tailored to the needs of individual students. Her expectations for staff are high. Teachers told inspectors, 'We are ambitious for our students and are given the support we need in helping standards to rise'. As a result, a downward trend of achievement has been swiftly reversed. This, along with good improvement since the last inspection, means that the school has good capacity for further improvement.

The school makes good use of its self-evaluation. An increasingly effective senior management team works closely with staff and is having a strong impact on improving the performance of the school. The clear sense of direction is supported by a precise development plan to which all staff contribute. An eagle eye is cast on examination information which is used to set challenging targets for subject departments and individual students. Regular monitoring of teaching and quality assurance of subject departments is helping to share good practice. Good governance also impacts well on improvement. The governing body's recent strategic plan is exemplary and points the way to what is needed to make the school outstanding. Whilst the accommodation is used to best effect, much is outdated, energy inefficient and costly to maintain.

The strong sense of community, high quality care and pupils' first class personal development result from very good management from heads of houses. However, effectiveness and accountability in subject leadership is inconsistent. Whilst there are notable examples in some subjects which have already had a good impact on provision and standards, not all have raised their game to the same extent.

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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>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
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	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	2

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

The inspection team really enjoyed visiting your school recently and we would like to thank you for your warm welcome. You expressed your views extremely well. We agree with you that your school is a good place to learn. We were particularly impressed with how eager you are to take responsibility and how well you get on with each other. You help the house system to work very well by your willingness to work together and support each other. Our main finding is that the school provides you with a good quality of education and it has some outstanding features.

The best things about the school are that:

- you receive excellent care, guidance and support that help you to develop extremely well, personally and socially
- most of you make good progress with your work and achieve well
- your headteacher is an excellent leader and has good support from staff, who manage the school well
- the quality of teaching and learning is good.

To make your school even better we have asked staff to improve two main things:

- raise standards and achievement further by enabling more of you to meet the challenging targets that the school is now setting
- develop greater consistency in the way subject leaders use self-evaluation, to gain further improvement in teaching and your achievement.

Thank you again for your help. I hope you continue to work hard, do well and make the most of the good opportunities that the school provides for you.

Bill Robson

(Lead inspector)