



# The George Ward School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 126448  
**Local Authority** Wiltshire  
**Inspection number** 293562  
**Inspection dates** 8–9 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ted Wheatley

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 address</b>	Shurnhold
<b>School category</b>	Community		Melksham
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		SN12 8DQ
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01225 702771
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1221	<b>Fax number</b>	01225 700913
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	121		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Christine Deadman
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Stephen Clark
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 November 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	8–9 November 2006	293562

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school is larger than average and pupils' attainment on entry is below average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. Very few pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds and a small number is in the early stages of learning English language. Pupils come mainly from Melksham but also from the surrounding villages. School numbers have fallen in recent years although the numbers in the sixth form have stayed more or less constant. The school is a specialist technology college. A new headteacher was appointed in June 2006.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education. Standards are below average but have started to rise. Achievement is satisfactory. The underachievement by significant numbers of pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11, has improved. Leadership and management are satisfactory but are improving under the clear direction from the new headteacher and the new leadership team. This is having a positive impact on how effectively staff work, which in turn is leading to improvements in all aspects of the school's work. There is a high level of commitment by governors and all staff to continuing improvement and raising standards further.

The school has identified its weaknesses accurately and introduced strategies to deal with them. The main focus has been on improving teaching and learning so that pupils become more engaged in their own learning and their attitudes and behaviour improve. The full impact of this work has yet to be seen, but it has started. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory in most respects, but while their behaviour and attitudes have improved, they are not yet what they ought to be for a significant minority. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, although behaviour management strategies are still not consistently applied, so there is still disruption in some lessons that has a bad effect on learning. The curriculum is satisfactory, but, as the school has identified, it does not fully meet the needs of some pupils and this contributes to their poor attitudes and disruptive behaviour. Improvements have been introduced and in Year 10, where there are more vocational courses, pupils' attendance, attitudes and behaviour have particularly improved. The range of extra-curricular activities is good and there is a high level of participation. A renewed focus on the advantages of technology college status has led to better resources and staffing that support the school's drive to improve its curriculum and improve teaching and learning.

Bullying has been a recent concern of pupils and parents, but the school now has secure procedures to deal with this and other issues of pupils' safety. Pupils and parents recognise these improvements. The school pays attention to and acts on pupils' views (for instance to change the rewards system and to improve canteen food). Academic support and guidance are satisfactory but procedures to give pupils accurate information on how well they are making progress and what they need to do to improve are used inconsistently by teachers. The quality of care is also satisfactory.

Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in one aspect is inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress it has made in remedying the weakness in pupils' behaviour and attitudes. The school would receive two to five days notice of such a visit.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Standards are average by the end of Year 13 and have progressively improved in recent years. Students make satisfactory progress, as their GCSE results are average for students starting Advanced level GCE courses.

Students enjoy their time in school and appreciate the help and support they receive from teachers. There are clear systems for tracking students' progress but there are some inconsistencies between subjects in how the information is used to guide students so that they improve their performance, and to ensure that future teaching can be planned effectively.

Teaching is satisfactory overall. Where it is good, work is challenging and students plan their own studies, and this results in good or better progress being made. Where it is satisfactory, teachers control learning too much so that students do not think enough and plan their own study. Teachers and students are regularly consulted about developments and teachers are supported to improve their professional skills. Attendance is satisfactory but improved monitoring and the widening curricular provision are raising attendance levels.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. Recent planning indicates more vocational courses for students and improved procedures to monitor students' progress and provide sharper guidance on how to raise standards, but these measures have not yet gone far enough.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that procedures to deal with unacceptable attitudes and behaviour are consistently applied so that there is no disruption to pupils' learning.
- Provide a wider range of vocational courses to meet the needs of pupils and sixth form students.
- Improve the consistency with which academic advice and support are provided for pupils and students so that they know what their targets are and what they need to do to achieve them.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

In Years 7 to 9, standards are below average but have improved recently and achievement is now satisfactory. Improvement in standards has been best in mathematics and science and slower in English, where there had been no head of department until recently. Here, standards are starting to improve.

In Years 10 and 11, standards are below average and pupils' achievement is broadly satisfactory. Standards are rising, evident from significantly better GCSE results in 2006 than in 2005, but there are still pockets of underachievement. The school has

started to deal with this through focusing on making teaching more interesting and challenging and helping teachers to deal with behaviour problems consistently. While there has been improvement, the full impact has yet to be seen. Pupils with learning difficulties and the small number from minority ethnic groups make satisfactory progress.

Standards are broadly average in the sixth form and improving. Students make satisfactory progress. Past underperformance, largely as a result of staffing difficulties, has been dealt with.

Provision of laptop computers, funded through the specialist technology college status, has had a positive impact in helping pupils develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

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

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Personal development, including spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, is satisfactory. Attendance is a little below the national average but is improving. Parents indicate that pupils' attitudes to learning are increasingly positive. Pupils feel safe and free from bullying, and this is a recent improvement. However, behaviour is unsatisfactory overall; while the behaviour and attitudes of most pupils are good, the behaviour of a significant minority is poor and leads to some disruption of learning of other pupils, a concern expressed by pupils and parents. Behaviour is improving and the number of exclusions and detentions has declined significantly over the last year. The social development of vulnerable pupils is good and those with learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported.

Pupils develop healthy lifestyles through regular physical education, games and extra-curricular sports. However, the poor range of food in the canteen does not encourage pupils to make healthy diet choices. The school provides an effective forum for pupils' views and community concerns and they proudly report, 'We have a say in running the school'. Pupils make satisfactory progress in acquiring workplace skills.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Teaching and learning are satisfactory throughout the school, although lessons range from good to a small minority that are inadequate. As a result, pupils make satisfactory progress. Teaching is improving because the school has a good system to support teachers. In the most effective lessons, teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan challenging work although questions do not consistently probe pupils' thinking

or extend their understanding. Learning is best when pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve, although teachers' comments in pupils' books do not consistently give clear enough advice on how to do this.

Pupils enjoy lessons that offer a variety of tasks that keep them interested and engaged in their learning. Where this is not the case, pupils' behaviour deteriorates and teachers do not always resolve the situation because strategies to manage unacceptable behaviour are not consistently applied. Methods of checking on pupils' progress are well used in some subjects, such as in mathematics and design and technology, but this is not yet consistent across the school. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities are well identified and good support enables them to achieve satisfactorily, and sometimes well.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory and plans to improve it are good, particularly for Years 10 and 11. The improved curriculum in Year 10 has led to improved attendance and behaviour because courses are now more relevant to pupils' needs. The school recognises weaknesses in the curriculum and plans are well advanced to improve pupils' experience, particularly for lower attaining pupils, through vocational courses that will run through Years 10 and 11 by 2007. Specialist technology college status has led to improved provision for computers, widened links with other schools and increased activities that enrich the curriculum.

Arrangements for pupils' personal and social education and citizenship are satisfactory and lead to them having a better understanding of local and global issues. However, inconsistencies in the way in which citizenship topics are included in other subjects reduce the quality of provision.

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities including sports, music, drama, revision clubs, international visits and interest clubs. For example, one club is in the process of producing a cartoon book. Pupils are involved in a local group that sings at Bath Abbey. These activities are well supported.

The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory and enables most students to achieve satisfactorily at GCE Advanced level. Here too, there are not enough vocational opportunities, but the school has recognised this and is planning improvements to offer opportunities for a wider range of students.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Care for pupils is satisfactory and pupils feel their concerns are dealt with effectively. The school is a safe and secure environment throughout the day and during the wide range of evening school activities. The accommodation is maintained well, risk

assessments are thorough and child protection arrangements are robust. The pastoral system is effectively organised and good home contacts support vulnerable pupils. The school is well supported by external agencies such as the school nurse and police.

Academic support and guidance are satisfactory, although there are some inconsistencies in the confusing variety of guidance given to pupils on what levels they have reached and what they need to do to improve. Nevertheless, there is some good practice. For example, in design and technology pupils are challenged to produce evidence or reasons for the levels they think they have reached. Tutors have increased responsibility for the academic guidance of pupils and the school is developing a comprehensive system for monitoring pupils' progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

The new headteacher has good vision for the school's development and has identified the major areas where improvement is needed, taking the views of staff, governors, parents and pupils into account.

He is soundly supported by senior leaders and the governing body, who share his vision for firmly making the learning of each individual the focus for all that the school does. He has reorganised the responsibilities of the leadership team and introduced accountability at all levels so that staff now have a common sense of purpose. Management skills are improving and there is a strong focus on raising standards in all aspects of the school's provision. This has already resulted in an improvement in pupils' 2006 national examination and test performance.

Through the school's accurate self-evaluation, senior leaders have a good idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This has led to some improvements in pupils' behaviour around the school, but has yet to impinge fully on the development of more positive attitudes to learning and behaviour in all lessons. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored and good practice is shared to bring about overall improvement.

These improvements in the short time that the headteacher has been in post, together with the strategies in the school development plan, indicate that there is a satisfactory capacity for further improvement.



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## 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>	<b>16-19</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>	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	4	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3	3

<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.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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**

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. You made our time enjoyable and gave us a lot of information. We spoke to many of you, in meetings and around the school, and what you told us has helped us make our judgements.

The best things about your school are:

- Your achievement is improving.
- There is a wide range of out-of-school activities that many of you take part in.
- The school listens to what you think and uses your ideas in its improvement plans.
- The headteacher and his senior staff are giving very good guidance on how to improve the school. Governors and all staff are working very hard to make sure this happens and there are already improvements in your attitudes and behaviour, your attendance and the quality of teaching.
- The school has good systems to check how well it performs and it is well positioned to continue to improve.

We are suggesting to your school that governors and staff should now:

- Make sure that the school's rules to ensure behaviour is good are used in the same way by all teachers so that you can learn properly in lessons.
- Make sure that the subjects you study in school are closely matched to your future needs and interests.
- Make sure that the information you are given about how well you do in school, what you ought to be aiming for and how you can achieve this is done in similar ways in all subjects.

We noticed that some pupils do not always behave as well as they should. To help your school improve in the ways it is planning, we feel that you should support and encourage each other to have more positive attitudes to school and to behave in acceptable ways.