

Parkstone Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113903
Local Authority	Poole
Inspection number	298248
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Alan Marsh 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	12–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	1048
6th form	328
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cary Wicks
Headteacher	Anne Shinwell
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2000
School address	Sopers Lane Poole BH17 7EP
Telephone number	01202605605
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Parkstone Grammar School is a heavily oversubscribed selective grammar school for girls with specialist status for science. It is an average size school but has a large sixth form. The vast majority of students are White British. The large majority are materially advantaged with very few being entitled to free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'This school – it's like an adventure! There's just so much to get into.' This comment by a young student sums up how most girls see their experience of Parkstone Grammar. It is an outstanding school; it also has outstanding capacity to improve still further. Staff are fully committed to the nurturing of every girl and have created a stimulating, friendly community in which all students are valued and may thrive intellectually, emotionally and physically. Having been selected on the basis of their academic ability and potential they make excellent progress from when they enter the school and reach very high standards. Most teaching is good and some is outstanding; but students develop in a holistic way and much learning takes place beyond the formal curriculum. Much teaching could be improved still further by more assiduous internal observation and analysis of lessons, coupled with strategies to encourage some teachers to take more risks and develop more effective ways in which students, especially in Years 11 to 13, might learn from each other. The school is rigorously solicitous of students' all-round growth and welfare and takes nothing for granted. The intensities and caprices of adolescence are subtly ameliorated by watchful, caring staff who feed students' avid appetite for learning and achievement whilst ensuring that their academic ambitions and personal drive to succeed do not become all consuming or debilitating. Students respect and look out for each other and their philanthropy is very well nurtured beyond the confines of the school. Through an outstanding blend of challenging stimuli and sensitive support the school enables girls to develop a confident self-esteem tempered by humility and altruism. The headteacher and her team provide outstanding leadership. They set, monitor and evaluate the direction and priorities for the school in a comprehensive and sharply self-critical way, thus ensuring that it provides outstanding value for money. They work hard to maintain the school as an inclusive community that celebrates difference, and indeed in many ways it does; but the active promotion of diversity across the entire curriculum is relatively underdeveloped and more could be done to broaden students' cultural frames of reference.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. Very high standards and excellent progress are maintained. Students respond well to apportioned responsibility and make a significant contribution to the ethos and management of their school. Lessons are frequently inspirational; but some teaching is less effective than the best in challenging students' preconceptions and in stimulating minds and imaginations to go beyond the confines of the examined syllabi or their own immediate social context.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standard of more lessons to that of the best by enabling teachers to be more adventurous in how they stimulate learning.
- Develop further the explicit promotion of equality of opportunity and diversity through the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students reach exceptionally and consistently high standards at all stages of their formal assessment through the school. They are selected to enter the school in Year 8 with standards well above average; they make outstanding progress so that by the end of Year 9 their standards are exceptionally high.

This rate of progress continues through Years 10 and 11 and over the last five years very few students have failed to gain at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. They have very high aspirations and demand a lot of themselves. Most students study 10 or more subjects at GCSE and in 2005/06, 87% of examinations were passed at grades A*, A or B. Students who enter the school with lower attainment, or the very few who have specific learning difficulties or disabilities, thrive and make even better progress than their peers.

Achievement and standards in the sixth form are also exceptionally high. In 2005/06, the AS pass rate was 95%, with 61% gaining grades A or B; the A-level pass rate was 100%, with 70% gaining grades A or B.

The school monitors all students' progress diligently, assessing their development and planning their learning with them carefully to ensure that work and targets are set at levels that will challenge or support each individual student.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding. They rise enthusiastically to the school's high expectations of all aspects of their growth and conduct. Students develop very good language skills to create finely honed discourse in all elements of their work. They listen well to others, but can evaluate a weak argument effectively and have the confidence to challenge it intelligently and sensitively. As a result of the stimulation and guidance they all receive and the dedicated interventions given to those who need them their spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. Their cultural development is less emphatically delineated. Students contribute eagerly to the plentiful opportunities to take responsibility for aspects of day-to-day school life. Many of these have arisen through students' own initiatives.

Students greatly enjoy their education. Attendance and behaviour are exemplary and the school is a wholly cooperative, courteous and civil community of which all are justly proud. Under teachers' watchful care almost all students develop a proper sense of balance between work and play and they learn and live to the full, eschewing excessively narrow ambition and looking beyond themselves to make their mark. Students participate in the vast range of enrichment opportunities available, often involving sports and physical recreation. They also contribute enthusiastically to many charitable and fund raising activities. Excellent literacy, numeracy, self-reliance, teamworking skills and workplace experiences prepare them outstandingly well for higher education and employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Almost all lessons are characterised by teachers' expert subject knowledge and their passion to enthuse students with it. Lessons are meticulously planned and confidently taught. Learning is enhanced by the excellent relationships between teachers and students because the atmosphere in classrooms is one of co-operative enterprise and shared discovery.

A minority of lessons are outstanding. These are epitomised by teachers and students taking risks in their thinking and challenging each other in a spirit of iconoclastic enquiry. When this happens learning knows no limits. It is usually achieved by teachers skilfully encouraging students to react with each other, removing any barriers to what or how they might learn. This was well illustrated in a Year 9 music lesson where exciting creative work in groups enabled girls to build upon their earlier structured learning and explore their creative ideas in producing their own miniature musicals; the lesson was both fun and highly productive. In another example a teacher of a Year 12 geography group studying pressures on the urban green belt boldly redirected a lesson in response to comments and questions from students which revealed a number of preconceptions he needed to challenge. The ensuing discussion was lively and provocative. Not enough lessons have this spirit of adventure.

Teachers are increasingly making imaginative use of learning technology and information about students' progress to make their teaching more effective for all.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding, with opportunities for learning enhanced very considerably by the rich range of extra-curricular activities. Students participate in these extensively. Sports and music are prominent but there is also excellent provision of additional classes in many subject areas to widen the curriculum and support students' work.

Opportunities to accelerate particularly able students' progress are limited, particularly by their entry into Year 8 rather than Year 7, but the school compensates by ensuring that the curriculum is very broad and studied in depth. The curriculum from Years 10 to 13 is predominantly academic. Nevertheless, a wide range of subjects is organised very flexibly to enable virtually all girls to study their preferred options. Excellent provision for personal, social and health education, citizenship and careers education equips students very effectively for life beyond school. These strengths notwithstanding, girls' exposure to the perspectives and attitudes of cultures, classes and gender other than their own is limited and the school's active redressing of these imbalances is relatively underdeveloped.

The school has used its specialist science status very well to extend links with local industry. Regular reviews of the curriculum ensure its responsiveness to changing circumstances: an example is the recent assessment of the most effective ways of providing opportunities for all girls who wish to do so to achieve separate qualifications in all three sciences at GCSE.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The school maintains a very caring and supportive environment which successfully fosters an inclusive culture. By the nature of the selective process they have undergone, students' aspirations when they join the school are very high, placing unusual challenge and strain on many individuals. The school responds sensitively to this and has developed a wide range of referral methods to identify and meet students' needs. Supported individuals and groups make outstanding progress, testifying to the success of internal and outside interventions provided as a consequence of this analysis. Students feel physically and psychologically safe in school, knowing that there are various sources of help whenever it is needed. Systems to enable students to support each other are exemplary.

Guidance about options at all stages is very good. Students value the open and informative advice they receive which enables them to pursue interests and aptitudes in the context of future higher education or career aspirations. They are informed about alternatives to sixth form education at the school; most choose to stay. Students appreciate the excellent academic guidance they receive, through assessment and marking, which helps them to reach their very high standards.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school is outstandingly led and managed. The headteacher and her senior and middle management teams work very effectively together to create an environment in which the whole person is valued throughout the school. There is a sedulous focus on enabling students to reach the highest academic standards but all forms of effort and achievement are celebrated. The school knows its strengths and priorities for improvement very well. Astute self-criticism is inveterate. It accurately assessed its overall effectiveness as outstanding, although it underestimated the very high quality of some aspects of its work. Heads of years and subjects are given considerable autonomy and encouraged to take initiative. Central systems such as those for tracking and monitoring students are constantly reviewed and refinements sought in order to increase girls' awareness and understanding of their own learning. There are well established links with the neighbouring boys' grammar school, with other schools abroad, with local employers and with other agencies to promote students' all-round development and well-being. Students already make significant contributions to the running of their own school and there are a variety of ways in which the school tries to ensure that they are able to have their voices heard.

The lesson observation programme is thorough and accurate, but lacks the level of insightful analysis necessary to help some teachers take more creative risks. The school promulgates an inclusive ethos but does not do all it might to compensate for the absence in lessons of the opinions or perspectives of boys; and despite many external links and generally wide horizons the school is still only partially successful in expanding students' cultural frames of reference.

The school is outstandingly well supported and thoroughly scrutinised by knowledgeable governors who embrace their responsibilities enthusiastically and to excellent effect.

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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>	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?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

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?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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

We enjoyed visiting your school recently to inspect it. Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for talking to us so frankly. We have now written our report and hope some of you will want to read it; but this letter is addressed specifically to you and sums up what we think of Parkstone Grammar School.

We think your school is outstanding with excellent potential to become even better. This is a tribute to the leadership of Mrs Shinwell, her deputies, and to the dedication and passion of your teachers; but it is also a testament to your own avid appetite to learn and experience new ideas. It is because you all work so well together that most of you reach very high standards in your assessments. You told us that the less high achieving students are equally valued in the school community and we found this to be so; Parkstone develops the whole person. We are also impressed at how well you look out for each other, and at the generous, selfless way you give time and effort to the benefit of others.

You are given and you take a lot of responsibility in your school, and the staff are keen for you to contribute even more to how the school is run. Indeed, one of the two ways in which we think your school could be improved is for you to learn more from each other in some lessons, rather than just from your teachers. You would all benefit from questioning, challenging and exploring even more daringly. There are no rules to how you must think and no limits to how you learn. The other improvement we are asking the school to make is in helping you understand and know more about other cultures and social groups, both within this country and abroad. Again, you can contribute to this process by keeping your eyes, ears and minds open to everything around you and feeding your curiosity.

I hope you continue to get as much as you can out of your time at Parkstone.