

Slough Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110104
Local Authority	Slough
Inspection number	310210
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Ann Berger

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	1221
6th form	461
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs A Best
Headteacher	Mrs M Lenton
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Lascelles Road Slough SL3 7PR
Telephone number	01753 522892
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Entry is by a competitive examination and generally standards are well above average on entry at year 7. The percentage of pupils whose first language is other than English is about 50%, which is well above average. Standards on entry in English are lower than in all other subjects. The school is in phase 2 as a Specialist Language College and leads the Primary Languages Strategy for the area. An additional specialism of Science began in 2007. Key Stage 3 is completed in two years and the Middle Years Programme of the International Baccalaureate (IB) is being piloted in years 7,8 and 9.

Standards on entry to the Sixth Form are broadly average, because 55% students are admitted from other schools. They can choose from A levels, Applied A levels, IB or BTEC First Business programme.

The school is a fully accredited Employment Based ITT provider and leads The Slough Partnership. It is also a Training School.

In addition Slough Grammar is a Leading Edge School and an accredited British Council International School with links in China, Pakistan, India, France, Spain, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Poland, Germany, Cyprus, Sweden and South Africa.

The school has a Sixth Form partnership with Churchmead School; students from Churchmead transfer to Slough Grammar School.

The school provides for a higher than average number of students with physical disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Exceptionally high expectations, knowledgeable and skilful staff, and excellent leadership produce an outstanding educational experience for the pupils. The headteacher ensures the school's vision is put into practice and empowers her senior team and others with responsibilities and key roles to develop and innovate within their areas. This creative and outgoing team always ensures the students' best interests drive initiatives. As one pupil commented when asked what his school was like, 'Pupil orientated - staff believe we are the most important part of the school'.

The students enter the school with well above average standards, make excellent progress through their time in school and complete Year 11 with standards that are exceptionally high. This rate of progress is further accelerated in the sixth form. The students coming in at 16 who have achieved average results in their previous schools make especially rapid progress. These pupils rise to a significant increase in expectations. For example, a student coming from another local school into the 6th form, achieved a B in mathematics at GCSE and is now on target to achieve the highest grades in A level. Many students make these gains in their achievements. Targets, which are usually met, show very high levels of ambition for all students.

The exceptional progress made by the pupils is attributable to the outstanding teaching and innovative range of choices, including the International Baccalaureate (IB) and BTEC courses alongside the more traditional A level programme. The curriculum is equally carefully geared to individual needs for the younger students. The additional time created by the two-year Key Stage 3 is used to very good effect to extend the opportunities for pupils in Years 9 to 11. Very good regard is paid to the specific needs of the pupils. Critical Thinking and the Middle Years IB have been introduced with an emphasis on oracy skills and this is beginning to pay off as, this year for the first time, mock GCSE results indicate that English results are no longer lagging behind other subjects.

Students receive regular and detailed feedback on their performance and what is needed for improvement, although there are inconsistencies in a few subjects in implementing the school's marking policies.

Teachers use a wide range of active teaching styles and collaborative learning is emphasised in many classes. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection as a result partly of the very positive impact of the Training School. Through the opportunities for mentoring, coaching and observation teachers have improved their own practice. This brings about a sense of community, in which all are determined to make the most of their learning opportunities, both students and staff.

The school grapples with the varying expectations of parents from diverse communities. The headteacher manages this very well, keeping the learning of the pupils at the centre of decisions. Nevertheless, these differing views were reflected in the responses to the parent questionnaires. In particular, a substantial minority of parents expressed the view that their children were not sufficiently consulted about the school. Inspectors found no evidence to this effect. In fact the views of the students have resulted in significant changes in practice, for example, in the decision to inject greater levels of challenge into Years 7, 8 and 9. The establishment of the parents' forum has been successful in improving relationships between parents and the school though the school has recognised that even more can be done in this area.

A particular strength is the harmonious cohesive community with excellent relationships between staff and students. Any tensions within the local community are left outside the door and good racial harmony leads to a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. The diverse role models in the staff team enable cultural differences to be tackled directly. Great emphasis is placed on debating issues related to race relations and discrimination in religious education, critical thinking and philosophy lessons to very good effect.

The innovative curriculum has been central to driving up standards. The school's specialist status in languages and now science is at the heart of the school's creative response to national initiatives, community projects and subject development. Students are encouraged to broaden their horizons through the truly exceptional range of out- of-hours activities which range from Sanskrit to Salsa.

Great care is taken to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve as well as they can. They make outstanding progress due to the very careful planning and support provided.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is a vibrant learning community which is at the heart of the school. Provision for students is outstanding. By Year 13, students achieve exceptionally well from their starting points at the end of Year 11. Checks on current students' progress indicate continuing improvement because of the high priority given to ensuring they meet their challenging targets.

The overwhelming majority of Year 11 students move on to the sixth form, remain to complete their courses and proceed to university. They know exactly what is expected of them and how to improve their work.

There is a strong emphasis on supervised study and this together with the high level of personal care contributes very effectively to success in the sixth form. Students receive very good advice about future courses and work opportunities. They are guided well in their university and job applications. The sixth form leadership team is a very effective 'student voice' and organises a number of charitable and social events. Students enjoy amazing opportunities for enrichment.

Students take on significant leadership roles willingly in the school and provide good support for younger students. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. The mature way they are treated fosters students' independence and initiative.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further explore ways of seeking the views of parents and pupils.
- Ensure consistency in marking in the few lessons where the school policies are not fully implemented.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The standards achieved in all areas are particularly impressive. Worthy of special note is the progress made during Years 9, 10 and 11 and examination results in mathematics. Strategies to raise oral skills through critical thinking have resulted in excellent achievement in English. This has led to a very positive impact on other areas where achievement was less strong and

96% of Year 11 students reached five higher grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The positive benefits of specialist language and science status is reflected in the very high standards achieved in these subjects. Specialist targets in both these areas have been exceeded by very wide margins. Students identified by the school as having special educational needs, including those with physical difficulties make outstanding progress. Their provision is very well managed. Teachers and support staff discuss individual pupils thoroughly and plan very well to meet their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The behaviour of the students is exemplary and is marked by maturity and a commitment to hard work. Attendance is excellent and students enjoy school. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good with a particular strength in the way students develop a reflective response to their work. They are warmly appreciative of their understanding of many cultures and their harmonious relationships within school which they regard as a benefit which will endure in later life. Students show very good understanding of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and make sensible choices. They feel very safe in school, know they are looked after well and show very good awareness of how to work safely. Students make a very good contribution to the school and much wider community through involvement with, for example, the school council, the peer mentoring system and links with a number of schools abroad. Development of workplace skills is outstanding. The emphasis on collaborative working ensures that students develop effective team work skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding teaching provided by staff, along with highly motivated learners, leads to an exciting learning atmosphere. Students said that teachers do a great deal to make lessons interesting and provide work that is challenging. Expectations are very high in lessons and student attitudes to work are exemplary. The school has used Training School status to very good effect to recruit the best of the new teachers it trains and this has ensured a constant flow of innovative fresh ideas which were evident in many of the lessons observed by inspectors. Students are self-motivated and work extremely well independently.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and meets the needs and aspirations of students well. In Years 7 to 9, the school has energetically embraced national initiatives and has developed imaginative and bold strategies which enable students to follow programmes tailored to their individual needs.

Students testify to the impact of the language specialism, evident in the many extension activities such as the international links with China, Cyprus, India, Malta, Norway and much of Europe. Students can access up to twelve language courses. They also experience innovative focus days and joint curriculum projects with other departments. The languages department leads the delivery and support of languages teaching in many local schools and runs adult education courses for an international local employer.

Students have access to exciting work experience opportunities and the well-developed citizenship programme contributes much to their mature and confident approach to school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school works hard to identify the diverse needs of all students and knows them very well. There are very effective systems for the early identification of students who are under-achieving and excellent support of students with emerging personal problems. This is enhanced by the very good links with outside agencies which the school fosters. Excellent links with a range of professional agencies support those students who have medical concerns, or those who have learning difficulties and disabilities, so that they make the best possible progress. The school has robust systems to safeguard students. Careers guidance is excellent and the students report extensive help with planning for their future pathways.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

This success could not have been achieved without the exceptional drive, enthusiasm and commitment of the headteacher. Her willingness to embrace change has ensured the school is both outward and forward looking. She has not achieved this alone and the senior team complement each other very well. Together they have established systems and procedures which focus on raising standards and improving teaching. Noteworthy are the arrangements for self-review which are exceptional. Everyone is held rigorously to account and this process is followed up with clear agreed plans for improvements. Leadership roles are taken seriously. Governors are an integral part of the school and the chair is very effective in her role as critical friend to the headteacher. Issues are debated and solutions found. Resources are deployed very well. Particularly impressive is the complex timetable which puts the students' choices at the top of the agenda.

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

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

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	

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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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?	1	1
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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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

12 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Slough Grammar School, Slough, SL3 7PR

We very much enjoyed our visit to your outstanding school. I would urge you all to read the report in full as it explains in more detail why we thought so highly of the work you do. I will give you a short summary in this letter.

We could see how good your school was by the very high standards you achieve. Well done to you all! It is due both to the skills and dedication of your excellent teachers and your own hard work and commitment.

We were particularly impressed by the range of opportunities you can participate in, the exceptionally high expectations, the fantastic leadership of the headteacher and senior staff, the calm and harmonious relationships and the very good attention paid to your care and support.

Some of you, and a number of parents, told us that you would like to be consulted more about your views. The school already has good plans to conduct a wider survey of your views and they are right to do this. They are also working to make sure that your work is always marked to the highest standard as we saw a few books which were not. Mainly, however, the staff are very clear with you about what you need to do to improve your work and it is excellent to see that you take careful note of these comments.

Congratulations to you all, you are right to be proud of what you achieve.

Ann Berger

Lead Inspector