

Torquay Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 113523 |
| Local Authority | Torbay |
| Inspection number | 311305 |
| Inspection dates | 18–19 September 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | David Townsend HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Grammar (selective) |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Girls |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 852 |
| Sixth form | 252 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Anne White |
| Headteacher | Nicholas Smith |
| Date of previous school inspection | 31 January 2005 |
| School address | 30 Shiphay Lane Torquay TQ2 7DY |
| Telephone number | 01803 613215 |
| Fax number | 01803 616724 |

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|--------------------------|----------------------|
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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

Torquay Girls' Grammar School is a heavily oversubscribed selective school. It was awarded specialist status in humanities in September 2004. Students are predominantly White British with just under 10% from a range of other ethnic groups. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities or use English as an additional language. The school has a high level of stability in its student population. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. There have been a number of changes to personnel in key roles in the last 18 months. The governing body reorganised following the retirement of the previous headteacher. They appointed a new headteacher and deputy headteacher, who took up their posts in the autumn term in 2007, and a new director of sixth form is due to join the school soon. The school has benefited from a recently completed music and drama suite and sixth form centre.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Torquay Girls' Grammar School is a good and improving school where students achieve high standards and develop excellent personal skills. As one parent put it aptly, 'The school helps the girls believe in themselves.'

Standards reached by students are well above those found nationally and students achieve well in their learning throughout the main school and the sixth form. There remains some variation across subjects and, in some, too few students gain the A and A* grades of which they are capable. The quality of teaching is good overall. However, in some lessons, insufficient attention is given to providing challenge for those who have the ability to reach the highest examination grades.

The outstanding curriculum on offer is playing a key role in ensuring the girls leave school equipped for success in adult life. Their attitudes to learning and behaviour are exemplary and the rate of attendance is well above average. The school's specialist status in humanities makes a strong contribution to school life and outcomes for students; there exists an impressive array of enrichment opportunities through an excellent range of partnerships with local organisations,.

There are high levels of pastoral care for all students, who feel very safe and well supported in school. Staff value each student as an individual. The school tracks their academic progress closely and appropriate targets are set. However, because systems for assessment and marking remain uneven across the school, these targets are not used consistently. Therefore, some students are less clear about how well they are achieving and what they need to do to move towards the next level.

Leadership and management are good overall. The senior leadership team and governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. Challenging targets are set at whole school level and translated well into actions for improvement at department level. Teaching and learning are regularly evaluated but there has not been a sharp enough focus on the impact of teaching on students' learning and progress, especially that of the most able. Parents report very favourably on the levels of pastoral care and the academic standards although a number expressed concerns about how well the school communicated with them. The school is aware of this and is in the process of redesigning its approaches.

The school has successfully tackled the key issue for improvement from its last inspection. The considerable investment in expert personnel, hardware and software has had a beneficial effect on the use of technology as a teaching and learning tool. Subject standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are also rising steadily. Governors and leaders have also presided over marked improvements to the school's accommodation, notably the new arts and sixth form centres. The new senior leadership team have taken decisive action to tackle identified weaknesses and so improved outcomes for students. The school provides good value for money and demonstrates good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry into the sixth form is broader than that into the main school, with a third of students entering Year 12 from other schools. All settle well and work together harmoniously, including boys from the neighbouring school. Attainment is exceptionally high. Achievement

is good. Students enjoy an outstanding curriculum, through which they develop wider learning and leadership skills across an excellent range of activities, including enrichment opportunities.

Students speak maturely and eloquently about their enjoyment of school life and appreciate their many opportunities to excel. They commend the excellent personal care and sensitive support they receive from staff, especially the outgoing head of sixth form, whose guidance and support is greatly valued. Teaching and learning are good with outstanding elements seen in some lessons. Most students are excellent, confident learners who contribute exceptionally well to the learning process.

Leadership and management are good, with the current well planned handover providing smooth continuity in support and guidance. Recent improvements made to assessment processes mean that robust information is being used to set challenging individual targets, so all students now benefit from knowing more clearly what expectations are and how they can achieve better. These systems are new, though. While there is no secure tracking of past progress, staff quickly identify any students at risk of underachieving and put in place measures to put individuals back on track.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good or better lessons, particularly by increasing the levels of challenge for the most able students.
- Sharpen systems for assessment, marking and feedback so that students are clearer on what they need to do to improve their work.
- Monitor and evaluate more closely the impact of teaching on students' progress, especially for the most able students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards achieved by the girls at the end of Year 11 are exceptionally and consistently high over time for all students. Achievement in Years 7 to 11 is good. This is due to a culture of raised expectations from the new senior leaders, good teaching, closer monitoring of their progress, effective mentoring for those at risk of underperforming in examinations and greater accountability for achievement and standards by subject leaders. Students enter the school with standards that are well above national averages. By the time they leave the school, their GCSE and GCE A-level results are exceptionally high in relation to national figures. However, there is variation in students' achievement across subjects. In some, too few students gain the A and A* grades of which they are capable. The school is aware of the issue and senior managers are working with individual departments and staff to improve achievement at the higher grades. All other groups of students achieve equally well, including the small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards in the sixth form are exceptionally high and achievement is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students thoroughly enjoy school and this is reflected in their exemplary behaviour, excellent attendance and positive attitudes to learning. Students feel very safe at school and know to whom they would turn were any problems to arise. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The excellent citizenship studies course for Year 8 and Year 9

students helps them explore issues facing local society in depth. They develop their spiritual and cultural awareness particularly well through the specialist subjects, including religious education and English, dance and drama. Students contribute impressively to the well-being of others within their own school and the wider community. They particularly value opportunities to raise funds for charities both at home and abroad and they talk highly of the whole school sponsored walk. The student voice is active in aiding school improvement, for example, in helping to devise the school's new behaviour code.

The high rate of participation in sporting activities helps students to lead a healthy lifestyle and the students are very committed to eating and drinking healthily. Students are exceptionally well mannered and articulate. Their self-esteem and confidence grow as they progress through the school, which enhances their future development in the workplace. They leave school with high standards of literacy, numeracy and, increasingly, ICT. The proportion of students who continue their education beyond Year 11 is exceptionally high.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, resulting in high standards, although there is some variability. Staff have good subject knowledge and give clear explanations. In all lessons, students are very motivated to learn and behave very well in class. Relationships between the teaching staff and students are very positive. Teachers use interactive whiteboard technology well to help make learning objectives clear to the class at the outset of lessons.

In the better lessons seen, teachers offered engaging activities and a range of techniques to the students to encourage independent learning and the development of critical thinking. However, in some lessons, there is insufficient challenge to enable a greater proportion of students to gain the very high grades in their GCSE examinations. In these sessions, teachers talk too long, the pace slows and students are passive learners. Across departments, the use of assessment and marking and feedback to help all teachers provide a close match between the work set and all students' needs remains underdeveloped. In some subjects there is effective use of approaches to help students assess their own and others' learning, but this is not widespread. Teaching and learning are consistently good in the sixth form.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is broad and balanced, all statutory requirements are met and students get many opportunities to study in more depth. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, for which take-up by students is high. The choice includes sports, the arts, languages and a wide range of clubs and societies. The specialist humanities status has made an outstanding contribution to the curriculum by providing real life contexts for learning through cross-curricular trips and visits and by extending choices within GCSE options. This has played a key part in helping secure excellent gains in students' personal development, in particular their understanding of communities at home and abroad. This was evident at a recent 'Celebration' evening, when students of all ages gave effective presentations on issues ranging from genocide to globalisation. Leaders are continually improving the curriculum and its match to the needs of all learners by offering students personalised pathways for their studies. Alongside A-level study in the sixth form, the school is piloting the British

Baccalaureate to help students prepare for university study and it is consulting and assisting in the delivery of the media diploma at a neighbouring school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is very strong. Students say that they feel very safe and supported in school; staff value them as individuals, build very positive relationships and promote their self-esteem and confidence. Effective systems are in place for implementing health and safety procedures and good strategies are in place for promoting learners' social and economic well-being. The school's mentoring system places value on developing a caring ethos and the school works very well with outside agencies to provide a good level of support for each pupil. Procedures for safeguarding children are well established and statutory checks are in place.

Systems to ensure the early identification of students at risk of underachieving in their studies are now fully set up. Procedures to track each student's academic progress and set appropriate targets are developing well, especially in English, mathematics and science and in the sixth form. However, their use in raising achievement is inconsistent across subjects and not all students can say what their targets and levels of attainment are or what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides effective leadership and is ably supported by a dedicated senior leadership team. He has established a positive vision and ethos of collaborative working. Across the school, there is a strong commitment to the pastoral care of students.

Together with his new leadership team, he has been swift to gather and evaluate data on pupils' achievement. This has enabled the school to set more challenging targets for raising achievement, which are now informed by an accurate analysis of past progress, especially in Years 10 and 11. Early gains have been realised, including improved achievement in English, and further, gradual increases in standards at Key Stage 4. Agreed targets for specialist subjects have also been met this year.

The recent training and developing accountability of middle leaders are starting to have impact. Performance management objectives are used effectively to ensure whole school priorities for improvement are translated into specific departmental targets. The evolving self-evaluation processes have enabled the senior leadership team and governors to have a clear understanding of the school's current performance and future priorities. There is a regular cycle of subject reviews. Lesson observations provide a good indication of the quality of teaching and learning but are sometimes overgenerous in assessing the progress being made by higher ability students. The school's three-year strategic plan focuses on the correct priorities for the school's development. However, measures for evaluating the plan's impact at each stage are not related closely enough to improved outcomes for students.

The specialist school programme has been instrumental in helping the school make an effective contribution to promoting community cohesion. In particular, it has helped ensure a raft of curricular opportunities that do much to promote students' understanding of local society, what life is like for different people within Torbay and the issues facing communities across

the globe. Through the programme, the school has also led planning discussions for the 14-19 vocational diploma in media with a group of neighbouring schools.

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 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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 |
| 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 | 2 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good are 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 | |
| The extent to which 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 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? | 2 | 1 |

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 2 | |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 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 | |

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

20 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Torquay Girls' Grammar School, Torquay, TQ2 7DY

Thank you for making us feel most welcome when we visited your school and taking the time to share your perspectives with us during our time there. Along with many of your parents, most of you told us how much you enjoy school and how good you think your school is. We are very pleased to be able to tell you that we have found that Torquay Girls' Grammar School provides a good education for you. We also agree with the majority of you who believe there are some outstanding aspects, including the curriculum on offer in both the main school and the sixth form.

The main strengths are:

- your attitude to learning, your exemplary behaviour around school and the way you treat each other and adults with respect
- the high standards you attain at all key stages
- your overall personal development and well-being as you become young adults in the school
- the outstanding curriculum and exemplary extra-curricular opportunities
- the good quality of teaching in both the main school and the sixth form
- the strong commitment of all staff to your pastoral care
- the very good relationships between you and the staff
- the improvements made to facilities for computing, the arts and the sixth form accommodation since the last inspection
- the way the school is led by senior staff, and the commitment of the whole staff team.

To make your school even better we have recommended that it:

- ensures that teachers focus on providing sufficient challenge in all lessons to enable the most able of you to achieve higher grades in your GCSE and A-level examinations
- develops ways of giving you clearer advice on the levels at which you are working and what you need to do to improve further
- checks, when lessons are observed, that students of all abilities, and especially the most able, are making good progress.

We wish you well for your continuing success at Torquay Girls' Grammar School and in your future careers.

David Townsend HMI