

Grays Convent High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115239
Local Authority	THURROCK LA
Inspection number	311882
Inspection date	13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Glynis Bradley-Peat

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	615
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sister Margaret O'Reilly
Headteacher	Mr Philip Kyndt
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	College Avenue Grays Essex RM17 5UX
Telephone number	01375 376173
Fax number	01375 394724

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

The Inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

- Are more able girls sufficiently challenged to reach the highest grades?
- What are leaders and managers doing to ensure maximum impact of the school's specialist status?
- What are the school's strengths and is it outstanding?

Evidence was gathered from the analysis of school documentation, observation of lessons, conversations with learners and discussions with teachers and senior staff. Other aspects of the school's work were not inspected in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Grays Convent High School is a very popular, heavily over-subscribed, smaller than average secondary school. The proportion of girls with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The percentage of girls from minority ethnic backgrounds is just above average. A small percentage speak English as an additional language. The proportion eligible to free school meals is low. The school is a specialist language college and has been awarded the Sports Mark Award, RoQA award for Careers Education, Healthy Schools Award and Leading Aspect Award for 'contributing to pupil achievement within the five outcomes of every child matters through quality pastoral care, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and Citizenship.' Attainment on entry is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Well done - Grays Convent High School is an excellent school and we are so lucky that our daughter was given the chance to achieve her full potential.' This is the view of the majority of parents who praise the school highly for its work. It is also the view of the inspector. Grays Convent is an outstanding and highly effective school. The calm, excellent leadership of the headteacher ensures that leaders and managers at all levels share the school's vision and contribute to its positive ethos. A key factor in the school's highly successful record of accomplishment is teamwork. Everyone works together to ensure the best possible chance of success for all the students. The hardworking staff are totally committed to the school and are all excellent role models for the students. They work very hard and show pride in their achievements. This is evident when students say, 'It's a lot of hard work, but it's a good place to be.'

Standards at the end of both Years 9 and 11 are significantly above average and pupils' achievement is outstanding, particularly in Key Stage 3. Progress of this year's Year 9 and Year 11 students is excellent and currently they are on track to meet their challenging targets, which indicate that standards will rise for the fourth year in succession. GCSE 5 A* - C results are significantly above average as are the results including English and mathematics. Almost a quarter are at the highest grades, A* - A. However, the school is never complacent and is always focusing on ways to maximise performance at this level. For example, it monitors the level of challenge for more able pupils in their lessons and effectively tracks their progress through the excellent use of data. This ensures that these students achieve as well as they possibly can. The school inspires students to reach their full potential and therefore no groups of students underachieve.

Why do students achieve so very well? One key reason is the outstanding teaching they receive. Relationships in classrooms are excellent and are characterised by respect and high expectations of behaviour. Teachers take great pride in their work and always want their students to do as well as possible. Lessons observed during the inspection offered pupils a variety of different activities, which engaged them in their learning very well. Skilful questioning encourages students to think hard and ensures that teachers understand where girls need extra support or challenge. In an exciting science lesson girls were held spellbound by their teacher who demonstrated the power of static electricity by 'levitating' paper using a 'wand.' Well organised paired and group work ensures that students have the chance to learn independently and express their own ideas. This contributes to their outstanding personal development and well being. Interactive whiteboards are currently being installed but are not yet used to their full potential. The school has already recognised this and has organised more training sessions for those staff who need them.

Students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent because of the strong Christian ethos and community spirit adopted by both staff and students. Smiling faces and excellent relationships observed both in and out of classrooms illustrate students' great enjoyment of school life. Behaviour is exemplary. Students feel safe in school and know how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. They talked about maintaining a balanced diet and one said, 'It's about a balance, as long as you don't eat ten bags of crisps a day!' Attendance is good. The school council is becoming increasingly effective and ensures that it puts forward its views. Students say that they feel their views are listened to and they have had influence on some decisions made by the school. They unanimously say that there is no bullying, but if there were

they would know what to do, and who to go to. Consequently, they feel happy and safe in their school. Students contribute extensively to the wider community and participate in many fund raising activities. They proudly told the inspector about a fashion show that they had organised which raised money for their twin school in Tanzania. A high level of basic skills equips students well for the future and there are excellent links with the outside community, particularly some local businesses and other schools.

Considering the small size of the school, the curriculum is excellent and offers an improving range of courses, which meets the needs of its girls. Although the curriculum is already outstanding, the school realises that it needs to continue to develop its vocational approach. It is looking at additional ways of providing further flexibility for a small number of pupils. For example, Level 1 Qualifications, short courses and the ASDAN Certification of Personal Effectiveness. Opportunities provided in the taught curriculum and in extra curricular activities promote investigational approaches, create new ideas and enable students to demonstrate leadership skills and solve problems. Students are given a multitude of opportunities to fulfil their potential. Extra curricular activities are many, varied and attended well, for example, Latin, salsa, aerobics, sport, music, drama and a plethora of others. Students say, 'There are plenty of them!' They also told the inspector about all the visits and the visitors to the school they enjoy, and how it helps them to learn. Language College Status has a tremendously positive impact on the curriculum. It permeates all aspects of the school's work. As a result the students are provided with a wide range of opportunities to travel and to participate in different projects. A variety of languages is available for students to engage in, such as French, German, Italian, Spanish and Latin. Students have visited Paris, Barcelona, Belgium and Toledo to name just a few. In Year 8 students start bilingual education in geography and art. The National Centre for Languages has taken an interest in this. In one instance, students drew a replica of Picasso's 'the Guernica' after being taught in French about the historical context.

The provision for care, guidance and support is outstanding with academic guidance being a real strength. Parents praise the school highly for the care and support it provides for their daughters. In the words of one, 'I cannot thank the school enough for all their support and commitment to my daughter. The head of year has worked tirelessly on her behalf.' The students themselves say, 'Teachers are really approachable.' Excellent guidance is provided for careers and life after Years 9 and 11. This is praised highly by the girls. 'Teachers are very helpful when we choose our options.' Heads of year have adapted to their new roles well and track and analyse student performance effectively. Support organised for those girls in danger of underachieving is excellent. Girls know their targets well and say, 'We know what we are aiming for' and 'It's nice to see your grades improve.' Marking of books is regular and comments help students to improve their work. The school ensures that students are safe in school and that all adults are checked carefully. Safeguarding is robust. Outstanding leadership and management, including governance, ensure that there is a constant focus on students' achievement. The girls develop into highly confident and capable young women. Middle managers are extremely competent and monitoring across subjects and at whole school level is rigorous. Self evaluation is very effective if somewhat modest. Governors have a clear understanding of school improvement and take their role of critical friend seriously. They hold the school robustly to account for its performance. There is an excellent capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the breadth of the curriculum in order to offer more choice of vocational subjects.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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
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
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

14 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Grays Convent High School, Grays, RM17 5UX

Thank you for taking part in the recent inspection of your school by talking to me about your work, your life in school and all you do. I had a very enjoyable day and found you to be highly courteous and very helpful.

Your school is outstanding and it is good to see that you are very proud of this. The majority of your parents agree. Your headteacher and his team do a super job and ensure that you all meet your challenging targets. You enjoy attending and you achieve significantly above average standards because of the excellent teaching you receive. Your teachers are very hardworking and want the best for you. They are very good at their job. Another reason for your achievement is that you are extremely well cared for and all members of the school community have your personal development at heart. I was impressed by the way you take on responsibility and are confident in your own abilities without being immodest. This is a very good personal quality to have and is highly commendable. Many of you take part in extra activities organised by the school and thoroughly enjoy them. These include trips and participation in special projects in languages. You have many opportunities to participate in various other activities. Many of you take part in sport and play instruments.

Even in an outstanding school like yours, there is always something to be done. I have asked your school to ensure that the curriculum offers even more choice of vocational subjects.

I wish you every success at Grays Convent.

Best wishes

Glynis Bradley-Peat

Lead inspector