

Invicta Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118792
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313092
Inspection date	1 November 2007
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1269
6th form	384
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Judi Taylor
Headteacher	Michael Liddicoat
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2003
School address	Huntsman Lane Maidstone ME14 5DR
Telephone number	01622 755856
Fax number	01622 678584

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The school was visited for one day. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues in detail: standards and achievement in the sixth form, the monitoring of students' progress and the school's business and enterprise specialism. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum and planning documents; observation of the school at work; interviews with staff and students; and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Invicta Grammar is a selective school for girls with a specialism in business and enterprise. The school admits a small number of boys in the sixth form. The school is in a federation with a non-selective secondary school and the two schools share the same governing body and executive headteacher. The school has a wide catchment area and draws students from over 60 primary schools located in Maidstone and the surrounding area. Students come from the top 25% of those taking the Kent Local Authority selection tests. About 85% of students are White British. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has gained the British Council's International Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Invicta Grammar is a good school with several outstanding features and has good capacity to bring about further improvement. It is successful in meeting its aim of enabling its students to achieve well and become lifelong, enterprising, independent learners who are able to take and assume responsibility confidently.

Students enter the school with prior attainment that is well above average. They achieve well in the first five years of school and attain examination results by the end of Year 11 that are very high when compared to national figures. Examination results in the sixth form are above average, reflecting satisfactory achievement in relation to students' prior attainment. Students in Years 7 to 11 make good progress towards meeting challenging targets and there is no evidence of underachievement by any particular group of students. Students achieve well because teaching is good and because they are provided with an excellent curriculum and outstanding care, guidance and support.

Students' personal development is outstanding in all respects. The overwhelming majority of students really enjoy their education, have excellent attitudes to learning and feel that the school provides a very safe and caring environment. Incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare and are dealt with effectively when they arise. Attendance is very high and behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Students develop an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives and know where to go to receive help and advice. Their health education is supported through strong programmes of personal and physical education and high quality advice provided by the school's student health manager. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. All students take a GCSE course in religious education and their understanding of different cultures is strongly promoted through the school's many international links. The school's business and enterprise specialism is a major influence in providing opportunities for students to contribute to the local and wider community. These include raising in excess of £10,000 annually for their chosen charities, assisting at the Citizens Advice Bureau, helping at a local women's refuge and working with a bank to support personal finance education in primary schools. The 'student voice' is very active in trying to bring about improvements in the school and a Young Chamber has recently been established. Students' involvement in enterprise activities, together with a thorough programme of careers education and guidance, helps them develop excellent skills for future employment and adult life.

The majority of teaching is good and some is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and students are set appropriately challenging work. Most lessons include a range of activities that interest and engage students actively in learning, but this is not always the case and in some lessons teachers spend too much time talking, resulting in students becoming too passive. The school has a good programme in place to identify strengths and weaknesses in teaching and to provide support where necessary.

Students are provided with an outstanding curriculum both in the main school and in the sixth form. Students are offered a very wide choice of subjects and the curriculum as far as possible is tailored to meet their individual needs. Since 2005, students have completed Key Stage 3 a year early. This enables students to take GCSEs in Year 10 and to go on to GCE AS level courses in Year 11 or to take new GCSEs. It also provides additional time for enrichment activities and the development of a strong programme of work-related learning. The full impact of these

changes will not be seen until 2008 but the indications are that they are starting to raise standards and achievement even further and contribute towards students' personal development. Students are provided with opportunities to take part in a very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, and take-up is good.

The school is well led and managed. Senior managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, based on a rigorous analysis of data and other evidence, including lesson observations and surveys of the views of parents and students. Good progress has been made in the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection. More effective systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress have been introduced and the information from this has helped managers to intervene earlier when students are underperforming. The leadership and management of subjects has been improved, although there is still some variation in the quality of self-evaluation and strategic planning to bring about improvement. Good progress has been made in achieving the school's targets, including those for its business and enterprise specialism. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the school, are highly effective in meeting their statutory requirements and provide excellent support, as well as an appropriate level of challenge. The school makes good use of its resources and has met the criteria for the Financial Management Standard in Schools. The additional funds for the specialism have been used effectively, for example, to improve the accommodation and provision of information and communication technology.

The school works effectively in partnership with other schools and agencies to support the education and well-being of its own students and the local community. The great majority of parents are very supportive of the work of the school and feel it is providing a good quality of education and care, but a substantial proportion feel that insufficient account is taken of their views and suggestions and those of their children. Parents of Year 7 students are particularly complimentary about the help their daughters received in making the transfer from primary schools, and many parents praised the support given to their children when they encountered academic or personal difficulties.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form provides a good education and has several outstanding features. A high proportion of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form and they are joined by students from other schools. Students enter the sixth form with above-average prior attainment and attain above-average examination results. The great majority of students complete their courses successfully and over 80% go on to university, including Oxbridge. Achievement is satisfactory but there is considerable variation between subjects. Managers have identified areas where some students are not achieving as well as they should and have taken action. This has included increasing teaching time and introducing more rigorous systems for monitoring students' progress. There is evidence that these measures are starting to bring about improvement, but underachievement remains in some subjects and managers are monitoring the work of these subjects more closely and providing additional support where necessary. Teaching is good, although students are sometimes too passive and the learning outcomes they are expected to achieve are not always made sufficiently clear. The care, guidance and support for students are excellent and their personal development is outstanding. Students make a major contribution to the life of the school, for example, through mentoring younger students, and to the wider community, including supporting projects in developing countries. The management and leadership of the sixth form have been strengthened recently and are now good. The new head

of sixth form has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the current provision and is well aware of what needs to be done to bring about further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure there is at least good achievement across all subjects in the sixth form.
- Ensure lessons are as interesting as possible and fully engage students in learning.
- Ensure sufficient account is taken of the views of parents and students and their suggestions when making changes.

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?	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	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?	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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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	

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

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for your assistance during the recent inspection of your school. The following is a summary of our findings.

We think that Invicta Grammar is a good school and has several outstanding features. You make good progress in your work and achieve well. This is because you are taught well, are provided with an excellent curriculum and receive outstanding care, guidance and support. The great majority of you really enjoy school and have excellent attitudes to learning. We feel that your personal development is outstanding in all respects. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary and you enjoy very good relationships with each other and your teachers. You demonstrate high levels of confidence and a willingness to take on responsibility. You have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Many of you make a very valuable contribution to the life of the school and local community. We were very impressed by the work you do to raise money for your chosen charities and the support you provide for projects in developing countries. We think you are very well prepared for further education, employment and adult life. Your 'student voice' is very active and has been influential in bringing about improvements in the school. You are provided with an excellent curriculum, including a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. We feel the school is well led and managed. The extra funds the school receives for its business and enterprise specialism are being used effectively, for example, to improve accommodation and resources for information and communication technology and to support work in subjects and 'focus' days.

- We have suggested two improvements to make your school even better.
- There needs to be higher achievement in some GCE A level subjects.
- Some of your lessons could be more interesting and involve you more actively.
- A substantial number of you feel that insufficient account is taken of your views and your suggestions and we have asked the school to look into this.

We hope you will play your part in helping your school to improve further and wish you every success in the future.