

Walderslade Girls' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118814
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	313099
Inspection date	17 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	924
6th form	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Smith
Headteacher	Pamela Conibeer
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2003
School address	Bradfields Avenue Walderslade Chatham ME5 0LE
Telephone number	01634 861596
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of the school's provision in contributing to improving standards and pupils' achievement further; the effectiveness of systems to track and assess pupils' progress; the effectiveness of middle leaders in contributing to school improvement. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, scrutiny of pupils' work and teachers' planning, discussions with pupils, staff and the chair of governors, the views of parents and a scrutiny of the school's documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors 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

The school is similar in size to other secondary schools. The school has far fewer higher attaining pupils than usual because of the selective system of education within the local authority. Pupils' starting points on entry to the school are well below average and a higher proportion than average has learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds and there are small numbers from a range of minority ethnic heritages, mainly White/Black Caribbean, Indian and Black African. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school has a joint sixth form with the neighbouring boys' school. The school has gained a number of awards, including Artsmark, Basic Skills Quality Mark, Healthy Schools, Excellence in Mentoring, Investors in Careers Quality Mark and the Inclusive Schools Quality Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that seeks to do the very best for its pupils. Staff provide pupils with excellent levels of personal support and guidance, which the pupils value highly. As a result, attitudes to school and learning, and the contribution pupils make to the school and wider community, are excellent. Pupils are proud of their school and becoming a school prefect in Year 11 is a highly regarded and keenly sought-after position.

From their well below average starting points in Year 7, pupils make good progress between Years 7 to 11 and achieve well. This is the result of good teaching, pupils' positive attitudes to learning and the careful monitoring of their progress over time. This means that pupils in danger of underachieving are identified early and are given appropriate support. In addition, the school organises an extensive programme of support sessions in all subjects at lunchtime and after school. These include booster classes and coursework, revision, homework and 'drop-in' sessions, which are targeted at specific years or particular groups of pupils. A good range of other enrichment and extra-curricular activities complement these opportunities and enhance the pupils' personal development well. The curriculum as a whole meets pupils' needs and aspirations effectively and prepares them well for their future career pathways. This includes pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, who make good progress because of the support they receive.

Standards by Year 11 are broadly average. This is reflected in the school's GCSE examination results in 2007, which were in line with the national average. The results showed a considerable jump from those in the previous year, especially in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A* to C. When the results for English and mathematics are included, the school's results on this measure increased significantly in 2007, although remaining below the national average. Almost every pupil gained at least five GCSE pass grades in 2007. Pupils did better in English than they did in mathematics, but standards in both subjects are rising. The school's data suggest an improvement this year in the English results. Pupils do less well in science and modern foreign languages than in some of their other subjects, a situation which the school is tackling firmly.

Over the past three years, the national tests results in Year 9 have not shown the same rate of improvement as the school's GCSE examination results and were slightly lower in 2007 than in 2006. This was particularly so in English. In all three subjects, the results were well below average. The school's data show that the less able and the more able pupils did not do as well as other groups. This year group is the least able group in the school and some pupils lack commitment to their work. The school is taking action to improve standards by Year 9 through changes to the organisation of teaching groups and the curriculum, and extending the skills of staff, particularly less experienced teachers. These changes have not yet been in place long enough to reverse the recent decline and lead to higher standards.

Pupils are polite and their attitudes to one another, and to staff and visitors, are positive and respectful. They have a clear understanding of, and respond extremely well to, the school's high expectations of their behaviour. Relationships between pupils themselves and with staff are good and help to establish a calm and orderly atmosphere. Most pupils enjoy school, which is reflected in their good levels of attendance. Pupils say they feel safe and that any instances of bullying are sorted out immediately. However, a small number of parents expressed concern that staff do not tackle bullying, including the behaviour of some pupils, rigorously enough,

but there was no evidence of this during the inspection. On the contrary, staff raise issues of bullying quite explicitly, as occurred, for example, in the two assemblies held on the day of the inspection. Pupils comment that the work of the peer mentors and mediators, who receive training for their roles, are effective and have brought about improvements in relationships and friendships between pupils.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is enhanced by the wide range of opportunities the school provides for them, especially in extending their citizenship skills through elections to the school council and formal interviews for the role of prefect. Pupils make a very strong contribution to the school and wider community as prefects and membership of the school council, as well as through peer mentoring, fund raising for charities and working with local primary schools. A small number of pupils have gained external awards for their work in the community. The school council has been influential in bringing about improvements in the school and pupils are confident that their voice is listened to. Pupils have a good understanding of the need to lead a healthy lifestyle, but not all take up the healthy options provided for them at lunchtime. Pupils are prepared well for their future lives, especially through work-related learning and work experience, citizenship lessons, good careers education and guidance and developing team-working and problem-solving skills. Pupils make good progress because of the predominantly good quality of the teaching and the help and support they receive from staff. Teachers' concern for their pupils is reflected in the pupils' high levels of confidence that staff will support them if they have any difficulties with their work. In the main, teachers manage their classes well so that lessons are productive and make good use of time. Much of the teaching is challenging. However, planning does not always identify clearly enough what pupils are to learn in the lesson or ensure that the work fully meets the range of abilities in the class, especially the most and least able. Pupils are set challenging targets and their longer-term progress is checked regularly to ensure that they remain on course to meet their targets. The assessment of their work on a day-to-day basis is not as thorough or as consistent, and the information is not used well enough to inform lesson planning. Although there are good examples of marking in some subjects, it is inconsistent. Marking does not always give pupils enough information about how well they are doing or how they can improve it to reach the next level or grade.

The headteacher has a real concern for the welfare of the pupils and in ensuring that they have every possible opportunity to succeed. She provides a clear focus and sense of direction to the school's development and receives good support from her senior colleagues. Senior staff have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The school improvement plan shows that they are tackling the right issues but the timescales and criteria for checking the school's success are not sharp enough. Systems for holding staff to account for what they do, for example through the annual departmental audits, are robust. They are complemented by good arrangements for the professional development of staff, especially less experienced staff. Most middle leaders provide good leadership in their areas of responsibility, and contribute well to school improvement. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities well, and governors are fully involved in the work of the school. Most parents are supportive of the school but a small minority do not feel that the school listens well enough to their views or those of the pupils. The school works effectively with a wide range of providers, including other schools in the area, to enhance the opportunities available for its pupils. The good progress made by the school since its last inspection shows that it has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The joint sixth form effectively meets the needs of the students. The increasing number of students from both schools who are choosing to stay on in the sixth form and the steadily improving examination results are testament to this. Standards are close to the national average, although not consistently in all subjects. The results in vocational subjects are slightly better than in A-level subjects. Based on their GCSE performance, most students make satisfactory progress. In the past, some students embarked on A-level courses that were not wholly suited to their needs. As a result, despite the good teaching, they have not done as well as they might. Senior leaders in both schools have recognised this and students are now provided with much clearer guidance about the minimum entry requirements for different courses. A broad curriculum meets students' needs and aspirations well and results in high retention rates. Students are able to select from a wide range of academic and vocational courses, both in the sixth form and through the arrangements with other schools. Although students follow a programme that focuses on aspects of their social development, there are insufficient opportunities within the curriculum to enhance their personal development and ensure that they are fully prepared for their future lives.

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and their attitudes to work are positive. They make a good contribution to the life of the school through, for example, acting as 'study buddies' to younger students. Students participate in a wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities. Pending a permanent appointment, the interim arrangements for leading and managing the sixth form are working well. Recently introduced systems for rigorously tracking students' progress are effective and ensure that appropriate support and guidance are provided at an early stage. Students value the support they receive from staff.

What the school should do to improve further

- Have higher expectations of more able pupils in Years 7 to 9 to raise standards further in English, mathematics and science.
- Use assessment, including marking, more effectively to inform planning and give clearer guidance to pupils on what they need to do to improve their work.

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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	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	3	3
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
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	2	

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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	
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 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	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

18 January 2008

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of Walderslade Girls' School, Chatham, ME5 0LE

Thank you for the friendly and polite way in which you welcomed us to your school recently. Our discussions with members of the school council and students from the sixth form helped us considerably in finding out about the work of the school. This letter is to tell you about our findings but we hope that you will take the opportunity to read the full report as well.

The school provides you with a good education and prepares you well for your future lives. The good teaching and the excellent levels of support that you receive from staff help you to make good progress in Years 7 to 11 and satisfactory progress in Years 12 and 13. You are set challenging targets and staff check your progress well as you move through the school. As a result, standards are broadly average by Year 11 and close to the average by Year 13. However, not all pupils do as well in the national tests in English, mathematics and science in Year 9 as they might.

You are very well behaved, and polite and respectful to one another and to staff and visitors. In particular, we noticed how well you listened and responded in the assemblies that we observed. We also noted the pride you have in your school and your positive attitudes to learning. You make an excellent contribution to the school and to the wider community in a number of ways, for example through membership of the school council, acting as prefects and peer mentors, as well as raising money for charities and working with primary schools. The school provides you with plenty of opportunities to develop as young citizens to ensure that you are well prepared for the future.

Senior staff lead and manage the school well and have a good understanding of what the school needs to do to improve further. Although your school is good, it could become even better. We have identified two areas for improvement.

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 by challenging the more able pupils further.
- Mark and assess your work more effectively on a day-to-day basis and use this information to plan work and give you more help in how you can improve it.

You can help by always working hard and doing your very best.

Yours sincerely

Mrs J Greenfield Lead inspector