

Borden Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118837
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313112
Inspection dates	14–15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Robin Gaff

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	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	784
Sixth form	192
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Edmund Doubleday
Headteacher	Harold Vafeas
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2003
School address	Avenue of Remembrance Sittingbourne ME10 4DB
Telephone number	01795 424192
Fax number	01795 424026

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Borden Grammar is a smaller than average school. It admits boys to the main school, and a small number of girls to the sixth form. The school became a specialist college for sports and languages in September 2006. It was recently awarded Healthy School status. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and of students with a statement of special educational needs are well below the national average. The great majority of students are of White British heritage. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The sixth form works in partnership with two other local schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Borden Grammar is a good school. Standards at GCSE, and at A-level and AS-level, have risen significantly since the last inspection. Students make good progress, both in their studies and in their personal development. This includes the small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities who receive support appropriate to their needs. One Year 13 student said, 'I think Borden Grammar is a welcoming, yet challenging environment.' The mother of a Year 12 student commented that she had been 'delighted and totally impressed with his care and the teaching at the school which has helped shape him into the young man he is today'. School leaders and the governing body are firmly focused on raising standards. They have a strong track record in bringing this about, demonstrating a good capacity for further improvement. The school's specialist status is having a positive impact in a number of ways. Sports clubs and inter-school competitions are well supported by students, who also make a good contribution to sport in local primary schools. Students have good opportunities to study modern foreign languages in the main school and in the sixth form, and they achieve well in this area. The school's curriculum now meets statutory requirements and has been developed so that it now provides a good match to students' interests and abilities.

There has been a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning in the school through improvements in teaching resources, such as interactive whiteboards. This has been enhanced by well-planned professional development for teachers, and better monitoring and support by senior leaders. Teachers now have a clear understanding of what effective teaching is like, and teaching is good in all key stages. Lessons are well planned and teachers use resources effectively so that students work hard and are interested in what they are doing. In a few lessons, teachers do not do enough to involve the students, and this promotes passivity and dependence on the teacher rather than encouraging students to develop as independent learners. The quality of marking overall is good, but it is inconsistent. In some cases, teachers miss opportunities for using their marking to give students helpful advice on how to improve.

Students' personal development is good. They enjoy coming to school, and this is demonstrated by their attendance, which is well above the national average. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good, and parents comment on how well boys from Borden behave in public. Students feel proud of their school, help at school events, and are keen to represent the school in competitions. The school council gives them a good opportunity to have a say in decisions, although not all students feel that their views are taken into account. Students receive good care, guidance and support. The school works well with local schools to ensure that students make a smooth transition from primary school. They receive careful and well-tailored advice and guidance about their options for GCSE, post-16 study and employment, and benefit from the productive links which the school has established with local colleges and with universities. The school regularly monitors and reports on students' progress to parents, who generally feel well informed about their sons' academic and personal development.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Sixth form leaders are passionate about enabling students to achieve the best they can and to develop as individuals. They have a clear vision for the future, and have already put in place measures that have led to a significant rise in standards, and an improvement in the working atmosphere in the sixth form. Standards attained by students in the sixth form are above

average at AS-level and A-level. Students achieve particularly well in history and geography and less well in business studies and economics. They make good progress in relation to their starting points. This enables them to gain qualifications, which give them good opportunities and options for further study and employment.

Students say they enjoy their sixth form experience, and this is confirmed by high retention rates. They make a positive contribution to the school community as prefects and mentors. They feel that their voice is listened to, and can point to instances where the school has acted upon their suggestions for improvement, including aspects of teaching and learning. Teachers use their expertise in their subjects well, and establish good relations with their students, who are particularly appreciative of the extra help teachers, are prepared to give them. In some lessons, teachers spend too long on explanations, and do not give students enough opportunities for independent learning. The school offers a wide range of A-level and AS-level courses, including those that students can access at other local institutions. The school makes effective use of its links with parents and with organizations such as social services to provide good quality care for its students. They are well informed about the choices they have for the future, and benefit from close and supportive academic guidance. Students do not always receive sufficiently detailed written advice on how to improve the standard of their work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching to the level of the best found in the school by giving students more opportunities for independent learning in lessons.
- Ensure that all students receive sufficiently detailed information and advice that will enable them to improve the quality of their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the school with above average standards of attainment, and they make good progress in both key stages. There has been a significant improvement in the levels they reach in national tests at the end of Year 9. The overwhelming majority of students gain five GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including mathematics and English. This includes some students with relatively modest prior attainment, particularly in English, when they leave primary school. Students who perform at the national average in Key Stage 2 achieve above expectations by the end of Key Stage 4. Although standards dipped in 2007, provisional results in 2008 are higher, and GCSE grades have shown a rising trend in recent years. Attainment at GCSE is particularly strong in mathematics, history, geography and modern foreign languages, and relatively weaker in science, and design and technology.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They benefit from good opportunities to discuss moral and social issues in personal, social and health education and citizenship, and have a good understanding of concepts of fairness and right and wrong. This is borne out by parents' comments that the school helps students develop both manners and morals. Students are gaining a good understanding of the richness and diversity of multi-cultural Britain and the wider, international community. They improve their leadership skills and their ability to work in teams through their participation in sporting and other activities. The many residential trips develop their ability to live and work with others. In some subjects, however,

students are seldom asked to work as a group or to solve problems as a team. The school has worked hard to promote healthy lifestyles. Students now take more exercise, but their preferred foods are still among the least healthy. Although bullying has been much reduced, there is still some evidence of it in the school and some of the younger students do not always feel safe because of this. Students contribute well to the school community and willingly take on responsibilities. They regularly collect money for local and national charities. They benefit from good careers advice and a range of enterprise and work-related projects. Students acquire good skills in mathematics, communication and information and communication technology (ICT), which provide them with a good basis for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is improving rapidly. It is effectively monitored: good and outstanding teaching is celebrated and is beginning to be more widely disseminated. Students make good progress in lessons. They are confident enough to volunteer answers, take part in discussions, and ask for help if they need it. Teachers show a strong command of their subjects, and plan clear learning objectives. Many of them use probing questions and give helpful feedback to enable students to know what they have to do to improve and obtain higher grades, particularly in science and English. This does not happen consistently in all subjects. In a Year 10 history lesson, the teacher made good use of paired work, question and answer and peer assessment for examination preparation, as well as demonstrating good modeling of answers. In other less effective lessons, activities are not sufficiently challenging and time is not used effectively. As a result, the pace is too slow, and students do not make as much progress as they should.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school now meets statutory requirements for the curriculum in all areas. The extended Key Stage 4 curriculum in science has enabled the school to ensure that all students have good opportunities to gain a broad knowledge and understanding of the sciences. Citizenship, which was identified as a weakness in the last inspection, is now a strength. Students gain a good understanding of what it means to be a citizen, and of their rights and responsibilities in their own and the global community. The school is aware that it needs to develop design and technology to ensure that all students have access to a broader range of subject areas in this field. International visits and exchanges, together with a good range of well-attended sporting, cultural and artistic activities, contribute to enhancing students' personal development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school works well with a range of outside agencies to support vulnerable students. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are treated as individuals, and are well supported in class and during breaks. The school recognised three years ago that bullying was a problem and has been working hard to create an environment where such behaviour is not tolerated. Parents support the view that this has had considerable, but not yet complete success. All the correct safeguarding and safety procedures are in place. The school's close attention to checking absentees is exemplary. Exclusions have risen but this is as a result of the school's new rewards

and sanctions policy, which has succeeded in improving students' behaviour. There is some variation between subjects in the quality of support offered to students who are falling behind, because insufficient use is made of assessment information to help them improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Under the strong, wise and supportive leadership of the headteacher, senior leaders have created a sense of teamwork, and established a clear vision for the school's development. They know their school well, and have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses.

Self-evaluation at all levels is proving to be a useful tool in helping to bring about improvement, and middle leaders are committed to achieving the school's priorities. The school provides good value for money, as demonstrated by students' achievement and standards, but also by the greatly improved range of facilities it offers for sport and private study. The school promotes community cohesion well, within both the school and the local community, for example, through the sports college, and in the wider international community through the links, it has established with a school in Zambia. Governors make a good contribution to moving the school forward. They are knowledgeable about the school. They understand and are prepared to use their role as critical friends to challenge school leaders where appropriate. School leaders know that, in order to improve standards still further, they still face the challenge of raising the quality of teaching and learning to the level of the best, and of making the use of assessment more effective.

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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	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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 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

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**

16 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Borden Grammar School, Sittingbourne ME10 4DB

On behalf of all the inspectors who recently visited your school, I would like to thank you very much for the way you contributed to the inspection. We very much enjoyed meeting you and hearing what you had to say about the school. I am writing to tell you about our findings and what you can do to help improve the school even more.

Borden Grammar is a good school where students achieve good results. You told us you were proud of your school, and about how much it had improved. Your attendance is excellent – keep it up! You behave well, and you enjoy your lessons, and the many sporting activities the school offers. You know about the importance of exercise and healthy eating, but some of you do not always choose the healthy options in the canteen. A few of you are worried about bullying: the school is working very hard to deal with this, and you must not be afraid to share your concerns with members of staff. We were very impressed by how many of you volunteered to help with the school's Open Evening.

You benefit from good teaching. Your teachers work hard to help you make good progress in lessons, and you respond well by being prepared to answer questions, and ask for help if you need it. There are ways in which the school can be even better and we have asked the school to ensure that some teachers increase the pace of learning, by giving you more chances to work independently. We also want them to give you more detailed advice about how to make your work even better.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors all want the school to improve even more, and you can help them with this, by keeping up your high standards of work, behaviour and attendance.

We all wish you all the very best for the future!

Yours sincerely,

Robin Gaff, Lead inspector