

Wilmington Grammar School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118875
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313128
Inspection dates	19–20 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Samantha Morgan-Price HMI

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	621
6th form	247
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roy Carlo
Headteacher	Fiona Cottam
Date of previous school inspection	10 December 2001
School address	Common Lane Wilmington Dartford DA2 7DA
Telephone number	01322 223090
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Age group	11-18
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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

Wilmington Grammar School for Boys has seen an increase in student intake but remains smaller than the average for secondary schools. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low. The school became an engineering college in September 2004. The school has now put in place a two-year Key Stage 3 programme which started in September 2007. The governing body has approved the admission of girls into the sixth form; this became effective in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This school provides a good standard of education. The headteacher provides very strong leadership and a clear vision for the future. Parents overwhelmingly agree that the school also provides good care and support. One parent wrote, 'My two eldest sons have been well supported and I know that my youngest son, just starting out in Year 7, will receive the same level of commitment'.

Achievement and standards are good. Students' attainment on entry to the school is well above average. Students make good progress so that at the end of Year 11, they achieve exceptionally high standards. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported to make good progress and they achieve well.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. They know how to be healthy and stay safe. They clearly enjoy their education, have positive attitudes to learning and their behaviour is very good. Their attendance at school is outstanding. An active school council gives students a strong voice in the life and work of the school. Students contribute enthusiastically to community events and learn skills to help them prepare well for their future lives. Moral, social and cultural development is good overall, but students do not have enough opportunities to develop spiritually.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have high expectations of their students and most plan work very well to meet their needs. The good curriculum, which is further enhanced through the school's engineering college status, provides a variety of enrichment opportunities to stimulate students' learning. Care, guidance and support are good.

The good leadership and management of this school have resulted in the good education, high standards and strong personal development of its students. Along with an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses, leaders have a strong determination to tackle those matters raised in the school's self-evaluation. The role of governors in monitoring the performance of the school is not yet fully developed. There have been improvements in most of the key areas since the last inspection and leaders at all levels are working together to make sure that this success continues, demonstrating a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory in most respects. It provides students with two years of good teaching combined with effective personal care and support. However, past policies on subject choice and the numbers of subjects taken have held back levels of achievement. Under the direction of the headteacher, leaders and managers are now sharply focused on improving the quality of guidance so that achievement and standards improve. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Students' personal development is good. They demonstrate good behaviour and a mutual respect for each other. They readily take opportunities to support the school. Some, for example, mentor younger students within the school and are active within the sixth form council. There is a good curriculum strengthened by the additional engineering options now available.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in the sixth form by providing more individualised learning programmes.

- Develop the monitoring role of governors with regard to achievement and standards in the school and fulfilling statutory requirements.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enter the school with standards that are well above the national average, but not as high as in many other grammar schools. Around two fifths of the students begin their career with results in English which are about average. Students make good progress through Key Stage 3 and reach exceptionally high standards in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 9.

In 2005 and 2006, students' progress on to GCSE, whilst satisfactory, was not as rapid, although overall results remained very high in comparison to national averages. The 2007 examination results were an improvement on the previous year's, and students made good progress. The figure of 97% of boys achieving five A*–C grades including English and mathematics is a noteworthy achievement and is exceptionally high in comparison to the national average. School tracking and monitoring evidence shows that students in the current Year 11 are making good progress overall. The school recognises that there is scope for further improvement in the proportion of students reaching the highest GCSE grades.

In the sixth form, pass rates are generally good, especially in 2006 when it was 100% at A level. However, the proportion of students reaching the higher A and B grades is typically below the national average, sometimes significantly. The overall picture is of broadly average standards compared to national averages. In both 2006 and 2007, students' progress towards their target grades was uneven and, in a number of courses, students did not get close enough to their target grades. This is the main reason why inspectors judge achievement to be satisfactory rather than good, which was how the school graded it in its self-evaluation.

The school has recognised the need to raise achievement in the sixth form and has already put in place better induction and guidance arrangements for students starting courses this year. However, the current policy on the number of examination courses which students are expected to follow (five AS subjects in Year 12 and four subjects to A level in Year 13 for the great majority) is not sufficiently flexible to cater for individual students' needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good as are the contributions made by students to their school. They enjoy coming to school, and behave well. This results in exemplary attendance and good achievement. Students' contributions to the community are good, as demonstrated by an effective school council and prefect system. Students have a sensitive and moral attitude to the plight of others and have organised various fund-raising activities to help the less fortunate. Activities have included 'operation Christmas shoe box', Children in Need and CancerCare. Students' moral, social and cultural development is good. However, there are too few opportunities to improve their spiritual development in either the assembly or tutorial time.

Students understand the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles and many participate in extra-curricular activities that enable them to keep healthy. A high level of basic skills, effective university advice and guidance, and a work experience programme result in young people who are ready for the next stage of their lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, although there are some inconsistencies. Most lessons are carefully planned to include a good variety of tasks with clear learning objectives set to meet the needs of the students. As a result, in most lessons students know what is expected of them, work productively and enjoy their work. In some lessons, where teaching is only satisfactory, work is not matched closely enough to students' needs, the teaching style is too didactic and there is an over reliance on the use of text books. In these weaker lessons, students are too passive and become bored. Opportunities for students to share views and to evaluate their learning were often missed. In general, however, teaching is lively and challenges students to think independently and develop their ideas. Teachers manage their classes well and relationships are generally very good so that students feel confident to challenge and question their teachers, thereby creating a highly productive learning environment. In most cases, students' work is carefully marked and they are given good information about how to improve, but there is inconsistency in the way teachers set, mark and monitor the completion of homework.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is imaginative, adaptable and responsive to students' needs. As a result, students' achievements are good. The school provides a good range of GCSE courses. Specialist status has broadened GCSE options with the introduction of the double-award applied engineering course. The curriculum is kept under constant review and has been revised regularly to respond to the changing needs of the students. At Key Stage 3, for example, an accelerated programme of study has been introduced to allow the National Curriculum in the core subjects of science, mathematics and English to be covered in two years rather than three. This is to allow work of GCSE standard to be started in Year 9 in these subjects. In other subjects, the school has plans to move to a more skills based approach. Years 7 and 8 students benefit from an imaginative enrichment programme that broadens the curriculum to include Mandarin and problem solving. The school provides well for the development of students' basic skills. Students say they thoroughly enjoy taking part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities and have the opportunity to suggest other activities. The school is part of a sixth-form consortium and is able to offer students an impressive range of post-16 options with over 40 A-level subjects and 10 GCSE level courses. All students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form receive helpful careers advice and the work experience placements arranged for all students in Years 10 and 12 help to broaden students' awareness of the world of work.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school provides a strong, caring and supportive environment where students feel safe, develop their personal qualities well and make good progress. The required procedures for health and safety and for child protection are in place. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. All students have targets set in all subjects and their progress is monitored regularly. This enables the school to identify students who are at risk of underachieving so that suitable support can be provided. Assessment practices within departments are inconsistent. Although students are aware of their levels or target grades, they do not always know by what criteria their work will be assessed. The data on their prior attainment are not routinely used by all teachers in their planning and teaching. Students who enter the sixth form receive appropriate guidance for subject combination choices but the school's policy of all students following five subjects at AS level and continuing with four at A level is too inflexible and not appropriate for all students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The new headteacher provides very good leadership with a clear focus on improving achievement and raising standards, especially at higher levels and grades. Together with members of the senior team, middle managers and staff, she has identified the school's key strengths and weaknesses particularly well. As a result, staff share her vision and the school improvement plan sets clear priorities for development, although the impact that these actions will have on standards has yet to be fully measured. Annual audits of departments have been introduced to check the provision in subjects so that, increasingly, subject leaders, assisted by their line managers, monitor their departments well. This has resulted in good arrangements to ensure accountability between senior and middle managers while at the same time effective support is provided where development is needed. The rigour of self-evaluation has also been improved through the use of data to track the progress of each learner at regular intervals. This enables the school to take action at an early stage to improve the achievement of students. As a result of all of this work, standards at GCSE and at A level rose in 2007. The leadership of the sixth form is satisfactory, but there is still scope for improvement in matching programmes to individual students' needs and in raising achievement further.

Governors linked with particular departments made systematic visits in 2005/06 which helped to keep them informed about the work of the school, but these visits did not take place in 2006/07. Governors are now being made more aware of the school's need to improve aspects of achievement but they do not have a sharp enough focus on achievement to hold the school to account on all aspects of its work. Governors are not carrying out a small number of statutory duties such as monitoring that the school provides a daily act of collective worship.

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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	3
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	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	3	
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	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 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	3

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	3
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	3
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	3	
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

21 September 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Wilmington Grammar School for Boys, Wilmington, DA2 7DA

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking to some of you and hearing your views. We now know that you enjoy attending school and that you work very hard. The inspection team was particularly impressed with the confident and articulate responses to our questions.

We judged your school to be good in most respects. You achieve high standards in Year 9 examinations and GCSEs. You make good progress at these stages for many reasons. There is good teaching and learning and the curriculum is good. However, inspectors judged that the standards you achieve in the sixth form as well as the progress you make were satisfactory, as some students were not given the best guidance to ensure they achieved high standards.

Whilst at school, you have good opportunities to develop as individuals as well as developing relationships with your peers and teachers. You are motivated to learn and contribute well to your lessons. Your attendance is outstanding. The school provides you with effective support and advice. The school also prepares you well for your future lives.

The headteacher leads and manages the school well. Your managers and teachers have made great improvements in your success at GCSE. Managers have clear plans of how they want to improve the work of the school to make it even better and know precisely how they will achieve this.

The inspection team did recognise that there were two points that the school needs to address. Therefore, we have asked the school to:

- Improve the achievement made by students in the sixth form by ensuring that they are given individualised programmes of study that are more closely matched to their ability.
- Governors need to look more closely at the performance of the school. They should also ensure that all their statutory duties are undertaken, especially in respect of ensuring you have opportunities for collective worship.

We hope that you enjoy the rest of your time in school and continue to work hard.

Good luck for the future

Samantha Morgan-Price HMI Lead inspector

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