

Cranbrook School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118888
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313136
Inspection date	22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	750
6th form	315
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robin Holliday
Headteacher	Angela Daly
Date of previous school inspection	17 March 2003
School address	Waterloo Road Cranbrook TN17 3JD
Telephone number	01580 711800
Fax number	01580 713972

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of the school's provision on standards and achievement; the impact of its science specialism on the wider curriculum; the effectiveness of the systems to track and assess students' progress. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, scrutiny of students' work and teachers' planning, discussions with students, staff and a governor, 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 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

The school is smaller than the average secondary school but has a large sixth form. As a selective school, students' attainment on entry in Year 9 is well above average. Very few students are eligible for free school meals. Most students are of White British heritage, with the remainder coming from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school became a specialist science college and a training school in 2004, and its Healthy Schools award was revalidated in 2007. The school has collaborative arrangements for some sixth form subjects with another secondary school in the area.

About 40% of the students are boarders, but this aspect of the school's work was not reviewed during this inspection. The school received its Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in January 2005.

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 has several outstanding features. Standards are exceptionally high overall and have been consistently so for several years. Students value the opportunities that the school gives them and they develop into confident, articulate young people who are extremely well prepared for their future lives. A strong sense of community pervades the school and a notable feature is the high quality of relationships between students themselves and with their teachers. Students are enthusiastic about the school and their attitudes to learning are extremely positive, although some of the teaching does not always engage or challenge them enough. These positive attributes are reflected in students' very high levels of attendance, very good behaviour and their regular participation in a wide range of enrichment and other extra-curricular activities. Students say they feel safe in the school and that very little bullying occurs. Their awareness of the need to keep safe and lead healthy life styles is excellent. Their personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are of a high order because of the extensive range of opportunities provided for them and the way they take responsibility and contribute to the school as a whole and to the wider community.

Standards are exceptionally high, as shown by the results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE and A-level examinations. In the national tests, the results have been very high for the past five years. In 2007, they were particularly high in mathematics, with most students gaining at least the higher Level 7 and two-fifths gaining a Level 8. The results in English and science, which is the school's specialist subject, were broadly similar to those in 2006. In the GCSE examinations, the results have been exceptionally high for several years, and for the past two years nearly all students gained five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics. The performance of students in their best eight subjects in 2007 was similar to that in 2006 but there was a significant increase in their overall average points score. In the sixth form, the A-level results in 2007 were well above average, with almost all students gaining at least a pass. Just over three-fifths of the grades attained were at the highest level of A or B.

Most students make good progress from their well above average levels of attainment on entry to the school because of their extremely positive attitudes to learning and the good quality of much of the teaching. They are set reasonably challenging targets for their GCSE and A-level examinations and most students are aware of what these are. The school met its own statutory targets in 2007 but did not quite meet its specialist school targets. Boys do not do as well as girls, especially in GCSE examinations, although the boys' performance remains well above average. The school recognises this discrepancy and senior staff are taking appropriate action to tackle the imbalance. Although students do very well overall in most subjects, there is some variation between subject performance at both GCSE and A-level examinations, especially in the proportions of students attaining the highest levels. Some of the most able students are capable of reaching higher standards than they currently do. Because of these subject variations and the differential performance of boys and girls, students' achievement is good overall rather than exceptional.

Most students are eager to learn. They respond positively in lessons, especially when the activities are interesting, the teaching challenges them, and they have the opportunity to be actively involved. This was exemplified in an excellent science lesson on forces. In this lesson, the focus on parachutes to explore forces and drag, together with the teacher's imaginative

use of the interactive whiteboard and his sharply focused questioning, captivated the whole class and led to first-rate learning. There is much good and some excellent teaching in the school, with teachers using their high levels of subject knowledge to prepare students well for their GCSE and A-level examinations. Most teachers plan their lessons adequately but do not always set out clearly enough what students are expected to know, do and understand by the end of the lesson and do not routinely identify how the most able students are to be challenged further. In a few lessons, teaching is too governed by explanations or contributions by the teacher, with the result that students have insufficient opportunity to contribute their ideas or to develop their skills of working independently. The school's specialist science status and its training school status are beginning to have a positive impact on broadening the range of strategies that teachers use to improve the quality of teaching and learning, but not all teachers have taken on board some of the recommendations of the national strategies, especially in involving students more actively in their own learning.

Led by the school's specialist area of science, much progress has been made recently in implementing a system of regular assessments to check students' progress, which is monitored by senior and middle leaders to identify students at risk of falling behind in their work. These students, who speak very positively about the value of this support, are given additional help during the enrichment period to enable them to catch up. Although there is a whole-school assessment policy, too much variation exists across subjects in how these assessments are recorded and in their usefulness to students to help them know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. In some subjects, students are able to record their understanding of what they are learning, although not all complete these sheets systematically. Not enough is done on a day-to-day basis to assess students' learning in lessons and to use this knowledge to plan subsequent work. However, the marking of students' work is generally informative and helpful.

Staff have a real regard for the welfare of their students and the pastoral care, guidance and support they provide are excellent. Students are confident that they can talk to their tutor or another member of staff if they have any personal or academic concerns or use the confidential 'listening' service provided by some sixth form students. The school meets all safeguarding and child protection requirements and it has remedied the health and safety issue identified during the last inspection. The school prepares students extremely well for entry into higher education, to which the vast majority will transfer. Students recognise this, but some comment that they would like more effective guidance if they have other pathways they wish to follow and before choosing their sixth form subjects. The curriculum supports students' needs and aspirations extremely well. The introduction of an enrichment period each week and 'themed' weeks and other activities have helped to widen the curriculum and provide additional opportunities to enhance students' learning. The impact of the school's specialist area on the wider curriculum is beginning to show results and science is working with several subjects to share and extend best practice. The extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities, together with work-related learning and an extensive programme of visits, enrich students' experiences and add considerably to their personal development.

Senior staff lead and manage the school well. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and the school improvement plan shows that they are tackling the right issues. In most respects, their self-evaluation is accurate. Much of the school's inclusive ethos and the opportunities and achievements enjoyed by students are in large measure as a result of the leadership of senior staff. Good progress has been made in tackling the issues identified in the last inspection report although the effective use of assessment information

has taken longer to implement than might have been expected and remains a key priority for the school. Most middle leaders provide good leadership in their areas of responsibility and are keen to improve the quality of provision for the benefit of the students. Their effectiveness is reduced, however, because of the variations in practice that exist and the lack of robust systems for holding them to account for what they do. This means that on some key areas, such as assessment, there is a lack of a consistent whole-school approach. Although most parents are supportive of the school and what it offers to their children, a significant minority do not consider that the school takes enough account of their views or communicates well enough with them, and several express concerns that weaknesses in some teaching, some of long standing, have not been tackled firmly enough. The school recognises that it is unable to monitor the range and extent of any parental concerns because they are not recorded centrally. The governing body provides the school with excellent support and fulfils its responsibilities extremely well. The progress made by the school more recently shows that it has good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form meets the needs and aspirations of the students well. Most students make good progress in the sixth form to reach well above average standards. The good and sometimes outstanding teaching enables them to achieve well. To broaden the mainly academic curriculum in the sixth form, students are able to follow applied A-level courses through the school's links with another secondary school. Students speak highly of the balance between their academic work and the wide range of other activities they take part in that enable them to develop their personal skills and interests and assume a wider range of responsibilities within the school. Many students undertake roles as school prefects, act as confidential 'listeners' to other students who may have problems, belong to the students' and house councils, and participate in a range of extra-curricular activities. As a result, they make an excellent contribution to the life of the school and are well respected by the younger students. Students receive excellent pastoral support and guidance from staff and their work and progress are assessed and monitored well. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure a more consistent approach to assessing students' work and progress, and make better use of assessment to inform planning and teaching.
- Implement more rigorous systems for holding staff to account for what they do.

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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	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	1

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	
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	1	
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?	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?	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

23 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Cranbrook School, Cranbrook, TN17 3JD

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I very much enjoyed my discussions with you and your comments helped me considerably in finding out about the work of the school. This letter is to give you a summary of my conclusions but I hope that you will all take the opportunity to read the full report.

The school provides you with a good education and has several outstanding features. You attain exceptionally high standards in your work and make good progress through the good quality of much of the teaching. At times, some really outstanding teaching enables you to do extremely well as it grabs your interest and attention. I saw this happen in one very challenging science lesson. The curriculum, including the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities, provides you with outstanding opportunities to extend your skills and wider interests.

Your attitudes to the school are exemplary and you work hard, even when some of the teaching does not involve you actively enough. Relationships between you and with your teachers are very positive and there is a strong feeling of mutual respect. You say that you feel safe and you are always able to turn to a member of staff or to the confidential 'listening' service provided by some sixth form students if you have any worries. Your personal development and well-being are excellent. Many of you make a good contribution to the school as a whole and to the wider community, and show considerable willingness to take on additional responsibilities. As a result, you are developing into confident young people who are extremely well prepared for your future lives and careers.

Senior staff lead and manage the school well and have a good understanding what the school needs to do to improve further. Although your school is good, it could become even better and I have identified two areas for improvement. I have asked staff to assess your work and progress in a more consistent way and to use this knowledge more effectively to inform their planning and teaching. In addition, I have asked senior leaders to ensure that staff are held more accountable for what they do so that there is greater consistency across the school. You can help by always working as hard as you can and continuing to support the school in all that it does.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Greenfield Lead inspector

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Mrs Joan Greenfield
Lead inspector