

# The Folkestone School for Girls

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118909
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	313144
<b>Inspection date</b>	18 March 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patricia Metham HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Grammar (selective)
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Girls
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1055
6th form	236
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Sarah Thorne
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tracy Luke
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9 February 2004
<b>School address</b>	Coolinge Lane Folkestone CT20 3RB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01303 251125
<b>Fax number</b>	01303 221422

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<b>Age group</b>	11–18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards; teaching and learning; leadership and management; and the impact on the school itself and on the community of the school's specialist mathematics, computing and training school status. Evidence was gained from lesson observations, from discussions with leaders and students and from evaluation of a range of documentation, including parents' responses to the inspection questionnaire. 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. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Attainment on entry to Folkestone School for Girls is higher than the national average but below the average for most grammar schools. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. Most students are of White British heritage. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average and most relate to behavioural, social and emotional issues. The school liaises with a local boys' grammar school to extend the range of sixth form courses available to students in both schools. In January 2008, at the instigation of the Department for Children, Schools and Families, a partnership was formed between Folkestone School for Girls and Marsh Academy as part of a three-year pilot scheme. There is an executive principal with responsibility for both establishments. Folkestone School for Girls and Marsh Academy each has a head of school. Folkestone School for Girls is popular and oversubscribed. It gained specialist status for mathematics and computing in 2003 and as a training school in April 2007. It has the Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools awards and Investor in People accreditation.

## 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. It is working purposefully through a process of evolution from its traditional grammar school foundation into a new role as a community hub for mathematics and computing and for professional development in teaching and learning. The governing body acts very effectively as an authoritative critical friend and sets clear strategic direction: 'We consider ourselves leaders rather than followers. We want to accustom our students to the idea of lifelong progress.' The executive principal and her senior leadership team radiate an almost tangible energy and sense of purpose. While keeping the school's established strengths firmly in view, they are evaluating and developing every aspect of the school's life in response to changing expectations nationally of what education should encompass. Senior and middle managers are tackling, with some success, current unevenness in the quality of teaching and in the progress made by sixth formers. Students speak of the school with affection and pride. As a Year 10 student remarked, 'It feels special to come here.'

Standards attained throughout the school are far above national averages. Students have consistently achieved exceptionally high results in the national tests generally taken at the end of Year 9, which has encouraged the school to condense the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 into two years. Students now take these national tests at the end of Year 8 and then benefit from extended or accelerated study in Years 9 to 11. In 2007 100% of students achieved five or more GCSE subjects at A\* to C, including English and mathematics. Although students are selected primarily on academic merit, many gain places on appeal and standards on entry to Year 7 are wider than for most selective schools, so these results represent outstanding progress across Years 7 to 11. Most students stay on into the sixth form to follow AS- and A-level courses that equip them well for university entrance. Compared with national averages, results here are very high; in 2007 there was a 98% pass rate at A level with 60% A to B grades.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar rates of progress to others in their year groups. That all groups of students do equally well shows the effectiveness of the school's very fine network of pastoral support and academic guidance that ranges from anger management to individual tutoring. Lesson planning, assessment and target setting generally, but not yet consistently, match the full range of students' abilities and ambitions. When, occasionally, teaching lacks pace and challenge, highly motivated students drive their own progress forward and this is why achievement is outstanding even though the teaching is good rather than outstanding overall. The senior leadership team is using further training and targeted support to disseminate best practice in teaching across all departments. The school provides an imaginative programme of extension activities for the most academically able and for those with particular talents. Any student needing additional support is quickly identified and a personal programme is developed in consultation with her, her parents or carers and her tutor. There is excellent use of external agencies whenever appropriate. Safeguarding procedures are robust.

One student spoke for many when she put the 'happy feeling around school' at the top of her list of 'good things' about the school. Although a small minority of parents expressed concerns about the attitude of a few older students, behaviour observed in and out of lessons was excellent. Students say that bullying is not an issue. Support systems are accessible and reliable and there is a culture of courteous mutual respect. A parent wrote enthusiastically about her daughter's experience on joining the school: 'She is in a very happy learning group where all the girls look out for each other and she is no longer afraid to show what she is capable of.'

Attendance rates are good. Students respond willingly to opportunities to take on responsibility, for example as buddies, prefects and mentors. There is no shortage of volunteers to work with local children as part of the school's outreach programme for mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT).

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Assemblies and tutor times reinforce values presented through the curriculum and explored through activities such as debating, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and the Community Sports award. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and many take advantage of the well-balanced menus on offer in the school's canteen. Sports clubs and activities such as dance are very popular and many students walk or cycle to school. High levels of skill in literacy, numeracy and ICT, complemented by problem solving, teamwork and experience of work-related learning, ensure that students are very well prepared for life beyond school.

The quality of teaching is good overall but uneven. Not all teaching challenges students across the ability range. The best demonstrates high expectations, confident and enthusiastic subject knowledge, competence in a range of modern techniques including ICT, and a culture of reflection and continuing professional development. Senior leaders and heads of departments monitor teaching and learning closely and intervene when they identify areas of relative weakness, such as a didactic approach that limits students' scope for independent enquiry and higher order thinking. Specialist status as a training school is being most effectively exploited to develop a range of courses and resources for in-school and community use. Students are very keen to do well and respond with intelligence and enthusiasm to opportunities for active and independent learning.

The curriculum is evolving very well to develop key skills and a cross-curricular approach while maintaining academic strengths. Specialist status in mathematics and computing has driven initiatives such as acceleration through Years 7 and 8 and additional options in Years 9 to 11. The school is currently exploring the possibilities of a substantial 'internship' at the end of Year 11, to give students extended experience of opportunities and requirements in industry, commerce and the professions. Additional options come through collaboration with other schools. An outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities complements mainstream areas of learning as well as broadening students' experiences.

The senior leadership's pursuit of professional excellence is evident everywhere, through systematic monitoring, well-judged investment in resources and the readiness to seize every opportunity to establish the school as a centre for excellence. Specialist status is helping to drive this continuing development. Self-evaluation at all levels of management is accurate and penetrating, reflecting rigorous monitoring and analysis. Actions are well targeted and have had a good and in some cases outstanding impact in bringing about improvement. As a result, the school is demonstrating an outstanding capacity for improvement. Nevertheless, challenges remain. There are initiatives still in the planning stage or too recent for their full impact to be quantifiable and the quality of teaching remains uneven. As the executive principal observed, 'We are improving in all areas but know there is so much more that we can achieve.'

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

This is a good, well-managed sixth form, benefiting from its collaboration with a boys' grammar school and opportunities for students to gain additional experience through community projects. Care, guidance and support are outstanding, as students made clear in discussion. One student

commented that, 'If you have an interest or talent they will pick it up and develop it with you.' Others observed that, 'They make you work hard to achieve' and 'I'm more mature because I've been given responsibility and I've become more confident'. These comments show how well the students see the school as supporting them and meeting their needs.

Attainment at AS and A level is very high in comparison with national averages, although in 2007 not all students reached their target grades at the end of Year 12 and a few missed their Year 13 targets. Closely monitored interventions by subject leaders and tutors, following analysis of these results, are having a positive effect on achievement. Progress is generally stronger in Year 13 than Year 12, reflecting students' greater maturity, decisions based on their Year 12 experience and well-targeted support. Sixth form lessons are characterised by the good relationships between students and teachers, clear explanations of what students need to do to progress and encouragement for them to become independent learners. As in the rest of the school, there is unevenness in the quality and impact of teaching, which effective performance management is addressing. About 90% of students go on to higher education each year. They value the careers guidance they receive and feel well prepared for life at university.

Students' personal development is outstanding. They are confident, articulate and purposeful, keen to achieve, quick to accept responsibility and aware of the need to balance academic, social and personal priorities. They are excellent role models for younger students and highly effective ambassadors for the school when they undertake work in the community, for example supporting mathematics and ICT teaching in local primary schools.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that best practice in teaching and learning is consistently and securely embedded and supports all learners effectively.
- Through rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning, ensure that sixth form students consistently meet their targets.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).

## 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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

### Achievement and standards

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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	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	

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

21 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Folkestone School for Girls, Folkestone, CT20 3RB

When we visited your school recently to see how well it is doing, you made our task much easier and hugely enjoyable by the cheerful and courteous way you answered our questions, showed us your work and shared your thoughts with us.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to let you know what we found your school does particularly well and how its current strengths can be enhanced. It is a good school with a good sixth form. As some of you explained to us, amongst its outstanding strengths are its friendliness and the well-judged care, guidance and support your teachers and learning mentors give you. It was good to hear that you feel safe and are confident that any difficulties will be quickly and sensitively resolved. You are articulate and self-possessed, and willingly take on responsibility for each other and work with children and adults in the wider community. Helped by good teaching, you make excellent progress in the main school and good progress in the sixth form. The standards you achieve are exceptionally high compared with most students nationally. The governors, leaders and managers of your school have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are taking steps to establish Folkestone School for Girls as a local centre of innovation and expertise in education.

So that you all fulfil your considerable potential, we have suggested that those responsible for monitoring and improving the impact of teaching on your learning should ensure that all lessons are as effective as the best and that all of you in the sixth form meet your targets.

I wish you and your school continuing success.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham Her Majesty's Inspector

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Her Majesty's Inspector