

Hillview School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118922
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313151
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Anne Duffy HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1207
6th form	261
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Godfrey Horne Mbe
Headteacher	Stephen Bovey
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2003
School address	Brionne Gardens Tonbridge TN9 2HE
Telephone number	01732 352793
Fax number	01732 368718

Age group	11-18
Inspection dates	30–31 January 2008
Inspection number	313151

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Hillview School for Girls is a larger than average performing arts specialist school which serves pupils from generally above average socio-economic households within an area that contains some selective schools. It holds a second specialism in vocational education and since September 2006 it has collaborated with a neighbouring school for post-16 provision. The school holds Artsmark Gold, Healthy Schools Award, Clean Food Award and has Investor in People status. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds and the percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average although inclusion is broadening year by year. Attainment on entry overall is broadly in line with the national average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hillview School for Girls is a good and improving school with some outstanding features. It fulfils well its stated aim to 'develop active learners with strong independent thinking and problem-solving skills; enterprising and confident young women who can meet the challenges of the 21st century'. This statement now applies equally to the young men who join the school in the sixth form. The school's work in promoting equal opportunities to support learning is good and has greatly benefited from its status as a specialist school for performing arts. The school's second specialism of vocational education is also making a major contribution to raising standards and achievement through the provision of better resources and improvements to the curriculum. The school works extremely effectively with primary schools, post-16 providers, local businesses and external support agencies to support students' personal and social development. The good achievement of students is due to predominantly effective teaching and the high quality individual support they receive. Improvements to the curriculum, particularly in the provision of vocational education, are also playing a significant part in raising achievement through meeting the learning needs and career aspirations of students. Students achieve particularly well in areas of performing arts but there has been underachievement in some other subjects. While most teaching is good, motivating and exciting students' interest in learning, a small proportion is not as good and fails to engage students sufficiently. In these lessons, students lose interest and this sometimes results in misbehaviour. Students enjoy coming to school and are proud of it. They feel that it is safe and friendly and that teachers and other staff are caring and supportive. Personal development and well-being are positively promoted through the school's learning communities and mentor groups which include students from each year group. Year 7 students and those new to the sixth form told inspectors that they had settled in very easily. Students have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Substantial numbers are involved in helping to run activities in school and in the local community. Many older students exercise responsibility, for example through providing support for younger members of their mentor groups. Students are well prepared for further education, training and employment. The headteacher, senior leaders and governors provide clear direction and manage the school effectively. They have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, are ambitious in their planning and have demonstrated that they are fully capable of bringing about improvement. As one student says, 'Because times are changing, schools have to change'. The school is well placed to become even better in the future.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Provision in the sixth form is good. Most students progress from Year 11 into the sixth form, where they are joined by students from other schools in the area. A wide range of courses is available, including vocational as well as AS- and A-level subjects, and reflects the school's specialism in the performing arts well. Advice to students joining the sixth form is extensive, and personalised; students themselves confirm that they are satisfied with the guidance that they are given. Sixth form students are supported by good and sometimes exceptionally good teaching and, apart from a dip in some subjects in 2007, standards have risen steadily since 2004. As a result of very good guidance, achievement by students on vocational courses is often excellent. Personal development is very good and students provide strong role models for younger members of their mentor groups. The sixth form provides an excellent environment

in which students can learn and where they can develop into young adults, ready to continue to further study or to enter into the world of work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Take action to ensure that standards are consistently high across all subjects.
- Make full use of the best teaching to ensure that all pupils' learning experiences are challenging and enable them to achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Overall, achievement is good and standards are above average. In the past two years, the school has undergone a period of difficulty with staffing in key areas which, coupled with the move to a two year Key Stage 3, caused standards and achievement to vary across subjects and key stages. However, the proportion of students attaining five or more A*-C passes in GCSE, or equivalent qualifications, is well above the national average, including when English and mathematics are taken into account. Up to date tracking and predictive data for 2008 indicate that students are on track to achieve well in mathematics and science and that the renewed stability in English teaching is having a positive effect. The school sets appropriately ambitious targets and is making good progress towards meeting them. This includes the challenging targets associated with the school's specialist designation for the performing arts, which is making a significant contribution to raising standards and is impacting well on students' attitudes to learning. The school has made a good start in addressing the needs of more able students whom it has identified as potentially underachieving in the past year. Very good support enables students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to achieve well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Social, cultural and moral education has an important and valued impact on students' development. Students enjoy being in school and would recommend it wholeheartedly to others. They take part enthusiastically in the range of performing arts, sport and other curricular and extra-curricular activities. They have more limited opportunities to develop spiritual awareness but demonstrate that they are able to consider others' views and beliefs. Behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school. The rate of attendance was average in 2006/7 but appropriate action has been taken to improve it with evident impact in this school year. There is a low and falling level of exclusions. Students make significant contributions to the community, often through the school's specialism in the performing arts. They respond very positively to the school's active promotion of safe and healthy lifestyles, including the well-structured and appropriate lessons on sex education, drugs and alcohol abuse. They make healthy choices from the well balanced lunch menus and demonstrate an excellent awareness of healthy lifestyles. Relationships between students and with staff are open and supportive. Those students involved in the 'student voice' initiative are engaged in several projects concerning academic aspects, for example in developing diploma courses. In response to encouragement to evaluate teaching they make constructive suggestions. Students are trained as mentors to help other learners

and those new to the school value the guidance and friendship of older students. They are very ready to succeed in their ambitions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Lesson planning is detailed with timed activities, including starters and plenaries, and clear lesson objectives. In the most effective lessons, students make rapid progress because activities are varied and brisk. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure, and students are challenged to explain their thinking and give reasons. In the majority of lessons teachers have good knowledge of the differing needs of their students, which translates into provision that is tailored well to their specific learning needs and enables more rapid progress and greater independence. In a minority of lessons, progress is limited due to insufficiently challenging work which, together with a lack of pace, sometimes leads to students losing concentration or exhibiting more distracting behaviour. The review sessions at the end of each lesson are generally well used to assess understanding of the lesson objectives or to reinforce knowledge and skills, and are most effective when sufficient time is allowed for this. Assessment is used effectively in lessons when teachers seek feedback from students on their level of understanding and then follow this up with targeted support, or students engage in peer assessment. Students know their targets and understand how well they are doing. Marking varies in quality but best practice includes constructive comments indicating what students need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum provides excellent breadth and balance and more than meets statutory requirements. In the creation of an extensive curriculum the school is aware of the need to maintain and develop provision for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The decision to move to a three-year Key Stage 4 and condensed Key Stage 3 has been inspired by a revised secondary curriculum with increased flexibility. The extended Key Stage 4 offers increased time and opportunities for more students to take full courses at GCSE in some subjects. In addition, the school has identified a group of vulnerable students in Year 7 whose needs are being addressed through a skills-based competency curriculum. Through this, a proportion of the curriculum is taught by fewer teachers and provides a smoother transition as students move from primary school. In anticipation of the introduction of diplomas in creative and media and in society, health and development, the school is developing functional skills with a particular focus this year on literacy, although the impact of this is yet to be realised. The school makes extensive enrichment provision through a wide range of lunchtime, after-school and week-end clubs and activities, contributing greatly to students' enjoyment and achievement

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students and parents value the caring ethos of the school. The recently introduced learning communities and vertical mentoring groups give role models to younger girls and responsibilities to older students, and have extended the breadth of support systems. Targeted advice across the school is fairly consistent and generally students know how well they are doing and how they may improve in all subjects. All students, including those who may be vulnerable, receive strong and effective help. Counselling and peer mentoring are available for anyone going through a difficult emotional or personal time and the school uses external agencies very well. The required procedures for health and safety and child protection are fully in place. Careers and further education advice is good and is well integrated with the personal development curriculum. This includes citizenship, which has been successfully embedded within the school, a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Most students move on from the main school to the sixth form and respond well to the personal guidance on careers and future studies. They trust their school and describe how its willingness to take risks affects their own self-confidence: 'They are always thinking of how to involve everyone, nothing is ever done by half'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The senior leadership team have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and their complementary mix of relevant experience and expertise provides the headteacher with strong support. Senior leaders are rightly focusing on raising standards through developing effective leadership at every level, and subject leaders are making better use of data from assessment and the evidence they gather from lesson observations to bring about improvement. The impact of this is beginning to be evident in standards and achievement for all learners. The school sets challenging targets and successfully meets those related to specialist school status. The two specialisms have served students well by providing an appropriate curriculum that is extensively enriched by the performing arts and the development of vocational subjects. Collaborative partnerships are outstandingly effective, extending the curriculum opportunities for all, including the more vulnerable students, raising aspirations and promoting community cohesion. The school canvasses the views of parents through questionnaires and is in the process of developing methods of improved communication, although a few parents feel that this is still not good enough. The school is at the forefront of the development of the 'student voice' and a key feature of the leadership of the school is the extent to which their opinions are valued and used to influence decision making. Governors are well informed and bring a range of valuable expertise to their work. They are dedicated and proud of the school, providing effective challenge and keen support for its future development. Together with senior leaders they deploy the budget wisely, and the school gives good value for money.

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.

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
---	----------------	-------

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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
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	

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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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?	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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

- 03 February 2008 Dear Students Inspection of Hillview School for Girls, Tonbridge TN9 2HE
Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our visit, particularly the chance to meet and talk to so many of you. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found. You are rightly proud of your school and we agree with you that it is good; some parts, such as the curriculum, are very good indeed. Many of you told us how it gives you opportunities to succeed in your personal and social development as well as in your learning. Your enjoyment is evident in your generally good behaviour and many of you make the most of the range of clubs and activities that are on offer. We were impressed by how many of you take on responsibility, particularly as you move into the sixth form. You feel your school is a safe place and you know that if you have a problem there is someone you can talk to. We agree with you that everyone is treated with respect and can see that the school is well led and managed. We have asked your school to improve things in two areas:
 - make sure that you do equally well in every one of your subjects
 - use the best elements of teaching to ensure that all lessons are challenging and enable you to make the best possible progress. I hope that you will all try your best and wish you well for the future. Anne Duffy Her Majesty's Inspector

03 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Hillview School for Girls, Tonbridge TN9 2HE

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We really enjoyed our visit, particularly the chance to meet and talk to so many of you. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

You are rightly proud of your school and we agree with you that it is good; some parts, such as the curriculum, are very good indeed. Many of you told us how it gives you opportunities to succeed in your personal and social development as well as in your learning. Your enjoyment is evident in your generally good behaviour and many of you make the most of the range of clubs and activities that are on offer. We were impressed by how many of you take on responsibility, particularly as you move into the sixth form.

You feel your school is a safe place and you know that if you have a problem there is someone you can talk to. We agree with you that everyone is treated with respect and can see that the school is well led and managed.

We have asked your school to improve things in two areas:

- make sure that you do equally well in every one of your subjects
- use the best elements of teaching to ensure that all lessons are challenging and enable you to make the best possible progress.

I hope that you will all try your best and wish you well for the future.

Anne Duffy
Her Majesty's Inspector