

Chatham House Grammar School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118934
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313157
Inspection date	4 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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	813
6th form	262
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Turp
Headteacher	John Mathews
Date of previous school inspection	16 September 2003
School address	Chatham Street Ramsgate CT11 7PS
Telephone number	01843 591075
Fax number	01843 851907

Age group	11-18
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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:

analysis of progress in all years

the effectiveness of middle managers

the development of students' spirituality

improvements in information and communication technology (ICT) in the last eighteen months, and

the overall effectiveness of the sixth form.

Evidence was gathered from details of current standards and achievement, examination of students' work and school documents, observation of lessons and extra-curricular activities, analysis of parents' questionnaires, discussions with staff, including the headteacher and senior members of staff, and discussions with students. 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 average, with almost one third of students in the growing sixth form. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average and only one student has a statement of special educational need. The percentage of students from ethnic minority backgrounds is well below average but increasing. Few students speak English as a second language. Boys come from over 30 primary schools so the school's catchment area is large. The intake is not typical of grammar schools, with students coming from a wider range of social backgrounds than is normally the case. In September 2004 the school achieved specialist status in science, mathematics and ICT. The school was awarded Healthy School Status in 2004 and 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

After seven years at this outstandingly effective school, boys not only achieve high academic success but they also mature into thoughtful and considerate young adults who face their futures confidently. Many perform at a high level in sports, music and drama, as well as in their examinations. Girls who join the school in the sixth form do equally well. As one ex-student writes on the school's website, 'Chatham House offers something to everyone, wrapped up in a friendly, healthy atmosphere'. Students are exceptionally happy at school and refer to the excellent relationships they have with teachers as being a key factor.

The well-above-average standards on entry are not as high as in many selective schools. Three out of ten students now have below the expected ability range for grammar schools, particularly in English. Falling rolls in primary schools and complex issues regarding the future of the school, which is now assured, led to the school lowering its admissions criteria in recent years.

Nevertheless, standards have gone up; they are well above national averages by the end of Year 11 and in many subjects in the sixth form.

Achievement has also improved in recent years and it is now outstanding, particularly in Years 7 to 9. In 2007, almost four out of five students attained far above the expected level for their age in mathematics at the end of Year 9. In this subject and science, another specialism, students attain a high percentage of GCSE A*/A grades; 83% in biology, for example. At least 50% A/B grades were attained in A level mathematics and the sciences in 2007; further mathematics is a popular A level subject.

In 2007, nine out of ten students attained a GCSE qualification in ICT, the school's third specialism. Results in A level computing studies are improving. In 2007, students achieved excellent A level results in biology, English literature, history and religious studies. Students' achievement in the sixth form is good overall but progress in a few subjects, particularly sociology, could be better. The school knows exactly where there are relative weaknesses and puts all the right support systems in place.

Knowing what generates success, the school is flexible about when students take Year 9 tests, GCSEs and AS examinations. Early GCSE entry in English, mathematics and science has been successful, with students moving on to higher levels or taking extra subjects such as statistics. Taking GCSE English language early in Year 11 generated significantly improved English literature results in 2007.

A growing use of interactive whiteboards has improved learning significantly. In a history lesson on the suffragettes, for example, events were moved about on the whiteboard to reflect students' thoughts on how likely the activities were to help women achieve the vote. A Virtual Learning Environment is developing very well. This makes it easy for students to study at home, for example, using tests to support a Year 11 science revision lesson.

Teaching and learning are excellent in the main school. Students are quite clear that it is teachers' enthusiasm, expertise and knowledge of their subjects and the wider world, that help them to learn so well. Parents refer to the 'staff's dedication' and the 'exemplary' standard of teaching. Lessons move fast, with learning often handed over to the students and teachers subtly guiding them in the background. Lively displays in the classrooms, teachers' energetic delivery of work, respectful banter and students' hard work and concentration all contribute to make many lessons fun. Only on rare occasions do a few students, usually in Year 11, not behave well enough to make the best progress.

The curriculum is excellent, with an unusual breadth for a grammar school. Vocational courses and business-related subjects are offered in Years 10 and 11 as well as in the sixth form. Working with its partner girls' grammar school, the choice of subjects has grown to include, for example, media studies, psychology and leisure and tourism. For a very few students, work-related learning is supported with some off-site days at other institutions. All sixth form students take a general studies course which includes consideration of many global, moral and ethical issues.

Students' preparation for the world of work is good through citizenship sessions within the personal, social and health education programme, a study day on business in Year 9, and work experience and an Enterprise week in Year 10. Students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are excellent. Since the first year it entered the Maths in Motion competition, the school has reached the county or national finals. The same is true for the Greenpower (car design) and the Young Consumer of the Year competitions. Such stimulating activities enrich students' awareness of the real world.

The school welcomes students' and parents' comments on school life. The Healthy School Committee has suggested several ideas that have been introduced, such as bike racks to encourage cycling and closed-circuit television. Most students lead healthy lives and participate in the numerous sporting activities and fixtures, many at county level. A parent describes the extra-curricular activities as 'exceptional'. A breakfast service is popular with students, some of whom have long journeys to school.

The school has done much to ensure that students, particularly younger ones, feel safe at all times. The school's excellent work on training Year 9 boys to act as mentors to Year 7 has been recognised by a local authority Try Angle Award. The two-tier house system (Years 7 and 8 are separate from Years 9 to 13) supports younger students well and all of them, whatever their level of performance, have opportunities to enter competitions or join in musical performances.

Parents are very pleased with how the school imparts strong moral and social values. They particularly appreciate the excellent pastoral care which starts before Year 7. Students' well-being and happiness is a top priority for all staff. The rare incidents of bullying or racism are tackled firmly, usually with a fixed-period exclusion, reflecting the school's zero-tolerance approach.

Having been an issue in the past, students' spiritual development is now excellent, with a very strong religious education department. Some of the well-planned assemblies take place in the local church. Students are encouraged to appreciate the world beyond the classroom through links with overseas schools, trips abroad and in the United Kingdom for whole-year groups, respect for the students' different faiths and consideration of different cultures in several subjects. Performing rhythms on African drums is very popular in music.

There are recycling bins in some classrooms and the school council contributed to the decision to turn off the school's computers at night. Nevertheless, students' consideration of the school's environment and sustainability is an underdeveloped area and this, and other issues within the local community, would benefit from consideration.

As well as sharing its all-weather pitches with the local community, the school's physical education department runs a summer school and many events for primary- aged children. The school shares its expertise widely. Specialist and other subject teachers give much support to local primary, secondary and special schools. Older students help primary school pupils to enter the Goblin Greenpower challenge.

The school trains graduate teachers successfully, generating greater stability and strength in the teaching force. These graduates comment on how, amongst the staff, there is a 'chemistry'

of enjoying teaching which is picked up by the boys. A member of the science department has received training to observe lessons and spread good practice. The growth of technologies to make teaching stimulating is directly linked to the school's specialisms.

After many years of excellent leadership and guidance, the headteacher leads a school that is very well prepared to improve further. The school has tackled issues from previous inspections and subject visits well and evaluates its work realistically and methodically. Teachers use data effectively to spot underachievement quickly and to give students challenging targets. Safeguarding procedures are meticulous and child protection procedures are robust.

The senior leadership team can celebrate that results have improved overall and in subjects that were underperforming a few years ago. Practically all heads of department lead their subjects well. Each year, for example, they focus on key issues from the school's long-term plans. It is good that senior positions have been created, such as a Director of Business and Vocational Education, to push forward key priorities. A parent rightly describes the school's management as 'second to none'.

A good governing body takes its responsibilities seriously and ensures that the relatively low income is used wisely. The school gives excellent value for money and financial systems are excellent. Governors have links to subjects but some of them find it difficult to get into school during the day. Governors are supportive and fully involved in deliberations about the school's future. Although much appreciated by many students, the old buildings present enormous problems as they are difficult to adapt to modern technologies, although the school uses every inch of space imaginatively.

An unusual claim to fame is the school having close to the highest number of state school entries in Who's Who. Whether this contributes to the students' high aspirations or not, they are undoubtedly keen to do well in their futures lives and to get the most out of everything that the school offers. This includes a careful balance of traditional values extending back over 200 years, combined with modern approaches to teaching and learning. Parents refer to their sons 'being motivated and excited by education' within 'an exceptional ethos'. This encapsulates why the school serves its students so well.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

A significant outcome resulting from the high standards and good achievement in the sixth form is that nearly all students choose to go to university, and most get into their first choice. For many, they are the first generation in their families to go on to higher education. Every year a few students get into Oxbridge colleges but the school is equally proud of those who take vocational qualifications and gain higher education places. The school has received a national award for being the 'best selective state school for boys taking vocational double A levels'. About one quarter of students read subjects linked to the school's specialisms.

Leadership and management of the sixth form continue to be excellent, with a high profile given to it in the senior leadership team. Students receive the best possible guidance for their higher education and futures, with efficient organisation of university applications and excellent support for those who join the sixth form from other schools. Students play an important part in the whole school, many taking on positions of responsibility, and practically all of them act as good role models to younger students and primary school pupils.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in the few sixth form subjects where students' progress could be better.
- Involve all students, particularly those on the school council, in consideration of the school's environment and sustainability, including reflection on this and other issues in the local community.

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
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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?	1	1
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 ¹ 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	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	1	
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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	IE 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

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.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
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

5 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Chatham House Grammar School for Boys, Ramsgate CT11 7PS

Thank you very much for being so welcoming when I visited your school. I am sorry I did not have time to meet more of you but I much enjoyed talking to many of you and hearing your thoughts on the school. You are confident that you attend an outstanding school and I agree with you. Chatham House is giving you all an excellent start in life and it is wonderful that so many of you go on to university, including those of you who join the sixth form from other schools. The standards you achieve are very high and the progress you make in Years 7 to 11 is excellent.

When I discussed teaching and learning with you, it was striking how many of you described your teachers as enthusiastic and caring. You clearly appreciate how hard they work for you and that they want all of you to succeed. You respond by working hard and behaving very well in practically all your lessons. In the questionnaires, your parents used many complimentary adjectives about all aspects of the school. They, and you, are right to use the word 'outstanding' to describe the care and guidance you receive, the curriculum you have and your personal development and well-being. You seem to enjoy school life very much, particularly the extra-curricular activities and the house system.

Your school council is active and effective and its members are keen to consider the school's environment and sustainability more. It would be a good step forward for all of you to consider this and other issues in the local community. I have suggested this as one area that the school could develop in the future. The other area for the school to work on is to make sure that sixth formers achieve their best in all subjects – progress could be better in a few of them.

Thank you for making my day at Chatham House so interesting and rewarding. I hope you all have happy and successful futures and, perhaps, make it into Who's Who to join the many students who have in the past!

Clare Gillies Additional Inspector