

South Wilts Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126507
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	315576
Inspection date	11 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Tom Winskill 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	Girls
Number on roll	
School	959
6th form	332
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Atkins
Headteacher	Frances Stratton
Date of previous school inspection	22 September 2003
School address	Stratford Road Salisbury SP1 3JJ
Telephone number	01722 323326
Fax number	01722 320703

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, with a particular focus on the effectiveness of self-evaluation, teaching and guidance; and the impact of improved management and teaching on provision in the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons; discussions with students, school leaders and teachers; parents' views; and an analysis of school and local authority data. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors 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

This average sized growing school accepts students from 57 primary schools, mainly in Salisbury and south Wiltshire but also from Dorset and west Hampshire. Students' attainment on entry is well above average. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is very low, as is the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The vast majority of the girls are from White British backgrounds. The sixth form is run collaboratively with a nearby boys' grammar school and accepts students from other schools. The school has had mathematics and computing specialist status since 2003. It has recently been awarded International School status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school in all respects. It is held in high regard by the vast majority of its students and their parents and rightly so. One parent accurately commented, 'South Wilts is a wonderful school. The children are happy, hard working and respectful. The staff certainly want the best from the children and will not accept second best'. 'Second best' is not in the lexicon of this school, where excellence pervades all aspects of its work.

Parental expectations of the school are understandably high. One, who reflects the aspirations of many, stated that 'I expected excellence and to date my expectations have been more than satisfied'. Standards are exceptionally high and well above national averages, as shown by A-level results, GCSE results and national test results at Key Stage 3. For example, in 2006 and 2007 over 70% of the GCSE grades achieved were A or A*. The majority of these students also gained high grades in GCSE statistics at the end of Year 10. At Key Stage 3, standards in English, mathematics and science are always well above average. The school's specialist status is making a strong contribution to raising standards. For example the proportion of students at Key Stage 3 reaching Level 8 in mathematics, increased from 44% in 2005 to 55% in 2007, with almost all students gaining at least a Level 7. In addition, an impressive 90% of the current Year 11 achieved grades A* or A in GCSE ICT at the end of Year 10.

Achievement overall is outstanding and compares well with other selective schools nationally. The school brings the best out of these able girls, who enjoy their learning in this challenging and supportive environment. Girls make outstanding progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress in Key Stage 4. A local authority analysis of school data shows that students make at least good progress in all GCSE subjects except English. However, the school is in discussion with the examination board regarding inexplicable fluctuations in standards, albeit always well above average, in English and English Literature in the last three years. In Key Stage 3, almost all students achieve challenging targets and exceed the levels predicted by their attainment at the end of Key Stage 2. In Key Stage 4 most meet, or are very close to, their challenging targets. The great majority gain higher GCSE grades than predictions based on Key Stage 3 results but a small minority do not. The school intervenes when students are not on track, but these interventions are not always sharp enough to enable some students in Key Stage 4 to make good progress in all subjects.

One of many positive comments made by parents stated, 'We have only praise for the school whose teaching is of such high calibre'. High-quality teaching focuses on students' learning and progress in the classroom and, together with the girls' superb motivation, ensures they make outstanding progress. Teachers conduct lessons at a good pace with a high level of intellectual challenge underpinned by excellent subject knowledge. They have high expectations of students, and teaching and learning take place in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Planning takes account of students' prior attainment very effectively. A wide range of teaching and learning activities meets the needs of almost all the students. As a result, they are completely involved and engrossed in their work, whether it is a design project in art, working in groups to produce a Tudor newspaper in history or wrestling mentally with challenging algebra problems in mathematics. Teaching successfully encourages the girls to think deeply for themselves about the subject matter but also on a wide variety of issues. Homework is set regularly although a small minority of parents who responded in the questionnaire feel that there is too much homework and too much emphasis on examination results.

Parents appreciate the excellent care, guidance and support provided. Having commended the school's academic success and its range of additional activities, one parent concluded that 'the most important aspect is the school's pastoral care and the attention to developing the children's and young adults' attitudes to life, making good choices and achieving their potential'. Students' attitudes and behaviour are first class, as are relationships between all members of the school community. This is a safe place where students thrive and develop into highly articulate and self-assured young women who are exceedingly well prepared for their future lives.

The academic curriculum meets the needs of the vast majority of students. A great strength of the curriculum is the high level of participation in a wide range of activities beyond the classroom, including sport. One of several jewels in this particular crown is music. In addition to the well above average uptake for GCSE music, almost half the school population is involved in musical activities. This makes a major contribution to the students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In addition, the students' outstanding contribution to the local community is greatly enhanced through their participation in local musical events. Students have a strong influence over many aspects of school life on which they are consulted, although not all. For example, students' views on teaching and learning form a part of the excellent subject review process and have helped improve their opportunities to lead healthy lifestyles.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership underpins much of the success of the school. The students are reaping the benefits of her passionately held belief that high-quality teaching and learning lie at the heart of school improvement. School leaders at all levels share her vision. They have a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and are doing so by ensuring the key focus of lessons is the progress students make. Professional development activities focus on improving teaching and learning. The school ensures that best practice is shared and disseminated effectively, supported by rigorous performance management procedures which ensure expectations are high. The school has an acute understanding of its many strengths and its few weaknesses and takes highly successful action to bring about improvement. Staff and governors share the headteacher's positive approach to overcoming barriers and her relentless quest for improvement. As a result, the school has successfully tackled most of the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. The school has made significant improvements in accommodation. There is still much to do, however, as many classrooms in the older areas of the school are too small.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards in the sixth form are well above average, as shown by both AS- and A-level results. In the last two years, achievement has improved significantly and is now outstanding. In many ways, the factors leading to this improvement encapsulate the school's determination to provide the highest quality education and care. School leaders identified achievement in the sixth form as an important area for improvement, then identified specific detailed aspects of provision where improvements would help to raise achievement and standards. The school drew information from a range of sources, including: the local authority review of collaborative arrangements; a sixth form review; detailed analysis of examination results; student shadowing to identify barriers to learning; and analysis of the quality of teaching. Consequently, the quality of sixth form teaching improved as a result of a specific focus on what makes an outstanding lesson. This led to significant improvements in several subjects where achievement was too low. Students now make at least good progress in almost all advanced level subjects. Monitoring

and tracking of students' progress by teachers and tutors is now sharper so that potential underachievement is identified and tackled early and more effectively.

Sixth form lessons typically feature challenging questions and a variety of activities including role play and student presentations. Students exhibit the sheer enjoyment of working with other like-minded young people in a very stimulating environment. One student commented simply, 'I love the atmosphere'. Guidance and support are excellent because of the highly effective partnership between students, teachers, pastoral staff and parents. Students meet regularly with their tutor for individual support and guidance and have access to a counsellor. Whilst currently good, steps are in place to further improve students' attendance. Students relish the opportunities for personal development. For example, many are academic mentors and support students in Key Stage 4 with their studies.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure strategies to enable individual students to improve in individual subjects in Key Stage 4 are implemented more rigorously to enable them to make good progress.

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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?	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	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

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

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	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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	

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

On 11 October 2007, my colleague and I carried out an inspection of your school. I am writing to inform you of our findings. The school is outstanding in every respect. Standards are exceptionally high, as shown by your A-level, GCSE and Key Stage 3 test results which are always much higher than national averages. Progress overall is outstanding because of the excellent teaching and your superb motivation. Students make excellent progress at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good rather than outstanding as a few students do not quite reach the challenging targets the school sets.

We enjoyed meeting you in discussion groups and in lessons. You and your parents think very highly of the school even though some parents think there is too much homework. You make the most of the many activities the school provides. Your behaviour is excellent and the school helps you develop into confident, articulate, well-qualified young women. Your excellent headteacher and her highly capable staff are achieving the right balance between challenging you to do your best and making sure you are well cared for and safe. I hope you are proud of your school and the wonderful contribution you make to its success.

- The school is always striving to improve further, and to this end we have identified one thing to work on:
- Make sure everyone has enough guidance and help in each subject in Key Stage 4 to enable them to do their best.

Best wishes and good luck with all your many activities this year.

12 October 2007



Dear Students

Inspection of South Wilts Grammar School for Girls, Salisbury, SP1 3JJ

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The school is always striving to improve further, and to this end we have identified one thing to work on:

- Make sure everyone has enough guidance and help in each subject in Key Stage 4 to enable them to do their best.

Best wishes and good luck with all your many activities this year.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Winskill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

Tom Winskill
Her Majesty's Inspector