

Urmston Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106369
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	324384
Inspection dates	5–6 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall 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 (total)	889
Sixth form	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr E May
Headteacher	Mr M Spinks
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Newton Road Urmston Manchester Lancashire M41 5UG
Telephone number	0161 748 2875
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Urmston Grammar is a mixed selective school. The number of students in Years 7 to 11 is smaller than average and there is a relatively large sixth form. The school serves an economically advantaged area and students are drawn from an average of 32 primary schools. Very few students are eligible for free school meals. There are very few students in the school with a statement of special educational need and the percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average. A below average proportion are from minority ethnic groups and very few speak English as an additional language. Specialist science college status was awarded in 2004 and the school was designated a specialist languages college in 2008.

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 which provides very good value for money. It has a warm and friendly atmosphere within which students thrive and achieve highly. The ethos of tolerance and encouragement, achievement and success is enthusiastically promoted by all staff and proudly esteemed by students. Provision is enhanced by the school's specialist science status and more recent specialist languages designation. Students benefit from a broad curriculum offering additional specialist science courses and languages and achieve highly in these subjects. In addition, they gain from a wide range of enrichment activities including themed weeks, creativity projects, sport, music and drama activity and trips at home and abroad.

Students' achievement is outstanding: they build on their high levels of attainment on entry to the school to achieve exceptionally and consistently high standards at GCSE. Their personal development is exceptional and their behaviour is exemplary. Students are considerate and encouraging of each other and confidently participate in all aspects of school life. Their enjoyment is apparent in their excellent attendance and punctuality to lessons. Students are able to achieve such high standards because they are highly motivated and work hard, teaching is predominantly good and the care, guidance and support they are given is outstanding. A key component of the success of the school is the fact that teachers know the students very well and strive to help each individual achieve their best. They provide extra support to those who need it outside lessons and build students' confidence in lessons. Students are generally aware of their personal targets, levels and grades but not all of them are entirely clear about how they can improve their work and move to the next level in all subjects. This is because the very good quality of assessment in some faculties is not yet secured in all subjects.

The quality of provision is underpinned by outstanding leadership and management. The senior leadership team provides clear direction to secure further improvement. They are supported by a highly committed and able staff who have a strong allegiance to the school. Governors also provide outstanding support and challenge to the leadership team. There is exemplary practice in self-evaluation in some faculties and in the sixth form. The most effective models use detailed student progress tracking and analysis to set challenging targets for individual students. They use information from lesson observation and analysis of students' performance to provide clear action points for improvement. However, these highly effective approaches are not fully developed across the whole school. Teachers' professional development is effectively linked to their individual needs and the whole school priorities.

The school is well thought of in the local community and has good links with parents and outside agencies, including universities and community based organisations. The vast majority of parents are extremely positive about the school. 'My son is very happy, his education is of a very high standard thanks to the support and nurturing he receives from his teachers' is a typical comment. The school is well resourced, finances are well managed and the school provides very good value for money. It has excellent capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The outstanding leadership of the sixth form has led to a significant improvement in the progress students make. As a result, provisional results indicate that achievement in 2008 was outstanding. Standards are above average with some variations in subject performance. Students' progress

is particularly good in environmental science, mathematics, sociology, French and physics. Retention rates are high and the vast majority of students go on to continue their studies at university. Students confirm that the curriculum choices provided meet their needs and career aspirations well.

Recent improvements in the use of academic data are enabling the school to evaluate sixth form performance more accurately and rigorously and this is contributing to improved progress. The school's focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is having a good impact, although, as the school recognises, further work needs to be done to enable students to achieve the highest grades in some subjects. Students' personal development is outstanding. They flourish with the high level of care and guidance to become mature, reflective young adults. Those joining the sixth form from other schools comment particularly favourably on the welcome they received and the high quality arrangements for their induction.

Students enjoy the sixth form and play an enthusiastic part in the school community and beyond. They offer guidance and support to younger students and act as excellent role models, for instance, through their work as form prefects.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the outstanding monitoring and self-evaluation approaches are extended to all subjects.
- Ensure that all students know specifically what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards throughout the school are consistently very high and achievement is outstanding. Students enter the school with standards that are significantly above average and throughout their school careers they continue to attain results that are much higher than those found nationally. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 has been consistently above the national average. Provisional results indicate that in 2008, the challenging targets set for 14-year-old students by the school for Levels 5 and 6 were met in English, mathematics and science. There have consistently been very high standards of attainment in GCSEs. In 2008, provisional results tell of all 16-year-old students achieving at least five GCSEs at grade A* to C, including English and mathematics, and the school's statutory targets were met in full.

All groups of students make at least good and often outstanding progress through Key Stages 3 and 4, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Girls do outperform boys but the gap in attainment is half the national average. Almost all subjects and courses perform well. Where this is not the case, action is being taken to tackle weaknesses and this is having good effect.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding and their behaviour is exemplary. Their mature attitudes and consideration toward each other are evident in all that they do. Students are highly motivated, work hard and enthusiastically participate in all aspects of school life. They achieve highly and take pride in their work and success. Their enjoyment is apparent in their excellent attendance and punctuality to lessons. An excellent range of enrichment activities

and effective personal, social and citizenship education helps to promote students' self-awareness and knowledge of the world. Good spiritual and cultural, and outstanding moral and social development create an ethos of tolerance and inclusion.

Students understand how to live a healthy and safe lifestyle and adopt healthy eating practices in school. They feel safe in the school. Bullying is extremely rare and students say it is effectively dealt with should it occur. Younger students greatly value the buddy and mentor systems in place and those new to the school feel welcomed and well supported. Students explained that they are able to influence decision making through the well established council. There is a high level of involvement in the local community through charitable work and in community based organisations. Students are well equipped to ensure their future economic well-being through the promotion of enterprise skills, increased opportunities for work related learning and their high level skills in English and mathematics.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is predominantly good and there is some outstanding practice. Teachers plan lessons well, using their knowledge of the students and their very good subject knowledge, to promote enjoyment and achievement. Classes are managed effectively and the excellent behaviour and attitudes of students enables learning to progress at a good pace. Where teaching is at its best, very effective questioning and tasks tailored to the needs of individual students challenge their thinking and enable them all to make very good progress. In less effective lessons the very able are not sufficiently challenged because activities are not so well matched to their needs. In some instances lesson planning does not use progress and tracking data to its best effect to maximise student learning. Students are generally aware of their personal targets, levels and grades, but not all of them are entirely clear about how they can improve their work and move to the next level in all subjects. This is because the quality of marking and assessment is variable between teachers and departments. Where it is good, students are very clear about what they are doing well and what they need to do to reach the next level in their studies.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which meets national requirements and contributes very well to students' personal development and well-being. Specialist status is having a positive impact on the breadth and diversity of the curriculum throughout the school. Students enjoy a balanced curriculum including separate sciences, two modern foreign languages and a wide choice of GCSE courses through an open option scheme. The personal, social, health, citizenship and emotional programmes ensure excellent economic, health and environmental awareness. The school has taken effective steps to improve students' work-related skills through, for example, enterprise activities and work experience.

There is a high level of participation in the wide range of extra-curricular provision which includes sport, music, drama and many science-related clubs and activities. Students enjoy gathering in the Caf, Scientifique to listen to talks and hold discussions. They also benefit from frequent residential visits both at home and abroad.

The school is in the early stages of a full review of the curriculum and is looking at ways to increase the opportunities for independent study in the sixth form.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for students are outstanding. Students and staff are rightly proud of the warm, friendly and welcoming ethos of the school. Staff are fully committed to the care of their students and the school has a highly effective welfare system. As a consequence, all students, including the most vulnerable, feel secure and extremely well supported. There are secure arrangements to ensure the safety of students, including robust child protection systems.

Transition arrangements are effective. Year 7 students settle well and there are good induction arrangements in place to support students joining the sixth form. Staff know the students very well and strive to help each individual achieve the best they can. Students speak highly of their teachers, saying that they are, 'always willing to help you and take time after school to explain something that you do not understand.' Students receive good advice and guidance for their future careers.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding. The headteacher and senior leadership team provide clear direction to sustain and improve the high levels of students' achievement and promote their care. They are supported by a highly committed and able staff who have a strong allegiance to the school. Self-evaluation is accurate and improvement planning is informed by faculty reviews. There is exemplary practice in self-evaluation in some faculties and by the leader of the sixth form but these highly effective approaches are not fully developed across the whole school. The most effective models use student progress tracking to set challenging targets for individual students and take account of students' views. They also use information from lesson observations and analysis of students' performance to provide clear action points for improvement within the faculty. There are good systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching, including a well established performance management system and peer observation and support. Teachers' professional development is effectively linked to their individual needs and the whole school priorities.

The school effectively promotes community cohesion. The school community itself is warm and welcoming and an ethos of tolerance and encouragement pervades. The school is well thought of in the local community and has good links with parents and outside agencies. Governors provide outstanding support and challenge under the leadership of an experienced chair and through a well established system of committees. They are well informed of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school is well resourced, finances are well managed and the school provides very good value for money.

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which 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 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

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	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**

Thank you for your warm welcome and well considered responses to inspectors when we inspected your school recently. We have judged Urmston Grammar to be an outstanding school. We observed that you work extremely hard and are highly motivated to do well in your studies. You are right to be proud of the very high standards you attain in tests and examinations and of your personal achievements and successes. Your attendance and behaviour are exemplary. We were most impressed by your encouraging and supportive attitudes toward one another and your enthusiastic participation in all aspects of school life. You told us that you enjoy the many enrichment activities and benefit from the broad curriculum and opportunities to study specialist science courses.

We judged teaching to be mostly good and saw some excellent practice. Teachers provide you with outstanding care, guidance and support which we know you appreciate and value. Provision in the school is underpinned by outstanding leadership and management.

We have asked your teachers and school leaders to address two areas for improvement.

- Ensure that the outstanding monitoring and self-evaluation approaches are extended to all faculties.
- Ensure that you all know what you need to do to improve the quality of your work.

I hope you will read the full inspection report. It is accessible from the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

We wish you very success in your future careers and a happy and fulfilled life.