

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112967
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	325729
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Bob Roberts

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1375
Sixth form	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Cliff Lewer
Headteacher	Dr A .R. Wilkes
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
School address	The Green Road Ashbourne Derbyshire DE6 1EP
Telephone number	01335 343685
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by a team of five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School is larger than average and is a popular, over-subscribed school serving the town of Ashbourne and the surrounding rural area. Its intake covers the whole ability range. The proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals, with English as an additional language, and from minority ethnic backgrounds, are well below national averages. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is well above the national average. The school has an Enhanced Resources Base for such pupils and is also a specialist technology school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Overall effectiveness is good and this judgement agrees with the school's own view. It enjoys a deservedly high reputation in the area. There was a very good response to the parent questionnaires that were used as part of the inspection and the overwhelming majority were strongly in support of the school. There is a determination to improve academic standards whilst at the same time being totally committed to the principles of inclusion. The school's care and support for those pupils with severe learning difficulties and disabilities is outstanding.

The personal development of pupils is good. Attendance is above average and pupils enjoy school. Their behaviour is good; the number of exclusions from school is low. Their attitudes to learning are very positive. The reasons for this are clear. They feel safe, appreciate the good care and support they receive and they enjoy the wide range of opportunities open to them. Through their participation in PE and sport many are leading healthy lifestyles. There are opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community of the school and to the wider world such as through efforts to raise money for charity. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of the diversity of British culture. By doing well in examinations and through activities such as the Enterprise Weeks pupils are being very effectively prepared for the next stage of their lives. Achievement is good. Pupils arrive at the school with broadly average attainment, make good progress and achieve high standards. The school has been remarkably consistent in achieving high standards over the years. Since it became a specialist technology school, there have been many improvements. The development has brought added resources and facilities. These have broadened opportunities for pupils, contributed to the development of an outstanding curriculum and helped to improve the teaching by means of enhanced computer technology. The school has met or exceeded most of its targets as a technology school.

Leadership and management are good. The headmaster has shown a personal commitment and drive to improve the school that has been very effective. There is a strong team of leaders and managers at all levels. An exceptional range of partnership arrangements contribute to the progress and welfare of pupils, from links with other local schools, to work alongside support agencies, and international contacts. The governing body makes a satisfactory contribution to the school although it does not scrutinise and challenge effectively enough. There are other aspects of the school's work that may be further improved. The quality of teaching is highly effective and functional, but not all of it inspires pupils in the way the best lessons do. The school is highly committed to the welfare of its pupils, but a small number of clerical and administrative aspects of the child protection arrangements need to be reviewed. Overall the school offers good value for money and has a good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form which is very well led and managed. Standards in 2007 were well above average and improved further in 2008. A high proportion of pupils achieved the higher grades A and B. Achievement compared with pupils' attainment on entry to the sixth form is outstanding. Although standards vary from subject to subject in most subjects they are well above average. The school has recognised that standards in some subjects, whilst still being at least average, are not as good as in others. The school has taken appropriate steps to make improvements as shown in the 2008 results. Teaching is outstanding overall and there

are very good opportunities for independent learning and for self or peer assessment. The curriculum is well matched to the needs and aspirations of pupils. There is a wide range of academic subjects, and a developing range of vocational opportunities. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements for religious education and citizenship in Year 12. The use of assessment to track progress against targets is good. Care and guidance are good overall. Although attendance is well monitored, arrangements for ensuring that all pupils sign in or sign out are insufficiently rigorous. The advice provided to pupils and the support they receive are excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school meets current requirements for child protection arrangements and procedures
- Develop the engagement and knowledge of governors so that they can more effectively challenge and support the school
- Further improve the quality of teaching by developing ways of sharing the best practice across the school
- Develop pupils' understanding of Britain as a diverse society within their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Levels of attainment on entry to the school are rising although overall they remain broadly comparable to the national average. The pupils make excellent progress during Years 7–9 and in the national tests at the end of Year 9 the standards they reach are consistently good and in some respects outstanding. The standards they reach at GCSE are high and are well above what might be expected from their starting points. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more good passes at GCSE in 2007 was 72% compared to the national average of 60%. What is notable about the school's performance in recent years is its consistency, from year to year, across subject areas, and between boys and girls. Girls achieve slightly better than boys overall, although by a narrower margin than nationally. The relatively large number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress and achieve well. Since becoming a specialist technology college, the school has met or exceeded almost all of its targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are polite to adults and to each other. They respect the environment and property. They reflect maturely on their actions and those of others and a clear understanding of right and wrong underpins their good behaviour. Occasionally pupils become restless in lessons when the teaching is less stimulating. In groups, they co-operate well, are keen to help each other and readily share apparatus. Pupils' understanding of the diversity of British culture is satisfactory overall but there are few opportunities for this to be developed within the curriculum and it is a relative weakness.

Pupils feel very safe in school knowing the rare cases of bullying are effectively and rapidly dealt with. They know how to keep themselves safe, for example when using the Internet. Most try to maintain a healthy lifestyle by having a good diet and by taking plenty of exercise in physical education lessons and in sports clubs. Pupils enjoy most aspects of school, especially the many clubs and social events and this is reflected in their above average attendance. During

the inspection pupils especially liked lessons that involved them actively, such as those where they conducted experiments and did research.

Pupils readily accept responsibility as helpers or as members of the year and school council. However, they do not feel that the school council is effective or meets often enough to get their views across to adults. Pupils enthusiastically join in local events, such as Arts Festivals and generously collect for national and international charities. Positive attitudes and high standards prepare pupils well for the next stage of education and future work. Younger pupils' understanding of career pathways is less well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The inspection team agreed with the school's judgement that teaching and learning in the school as a whole are good. Inspectors saw no inadequate lessons and a small number of outstanding ones. Relationships in the classroom are very good and pupils demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. Planning is good and lessons are managed well. Teachers are strongly focussed on steering pupils towards meeting examination assessment criteria. The pace of learning is brisk and pupils benefit from frequent opportunities to work collaboratively. Teachers make good use of a variety of assessment techniques. The school's specialist technology status has helped to develop the effective use of modern computer equipment in the classrooms and many teachers take full advantage of it. The best lessons were those in which pupils were allowed and encouraged to express themselves, such as in a dance lesson, or to engage in highly active tasks, such as the global trade game seen being used very effectively in geography. In the less effective lessons, teachers talked at pupils for too long and the work was dry. The best practice seen in some classrooms is not sufficiently shared across the school in order to improve further the overall standard. The use of teaching assistants is variable in quality, although the work of those staff supporting pupils with the most challenging difficulties is highly effective at enabling them to engage and progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school had judged its curriculum as good but inspectors took the view that it is outstanding. It provides opportunities for all pupils, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties, to enjoy their learning and progress well. Technology school status has helped the development of the curriculum over the last three years. There is a wide range of vocational and work-based courses such as construction, engineering and child care. Pupils with learning difficulties benefit from special intervention programmes and the opportunity to gain accreditation where appropriate. The school takes pains to fit its curriculum to the preferences and choices that pupils make. Beyond the classroom, there is an exceptional range of opportunities for enrichment, including arts events, outdoor activities, sporting opportunities and activities relating to engineering, maths and technology.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils very well to provide high-quality pastoral care. Pupils are very confident that they can approach a member of staff with a problem knowing

their concerns will be quickly and effectively resolved. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive sensitive support that enables them to make similar good progress to their peers. Their work is carefully planned and regularly reviewed to ensure it fully meets their needs. The school is highly effective in its provision for pupils with the most challenging difficulties. High levels of staff training ensure these pupils are fully integrated into lessons so that they can take full advantage of all that the school offers. While the school is completely committed to its pupils' welfare, and safeguarding procedures were generally sound, the inspection came across clerical and administrative shortcomings in child protection arrangements. The school is rapidly reviewing these arrangements. Academic guidance is good. Pupils agree and discuss targets at regular review meetings with their tutors and they have a clear understanding of what they need to do to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management at all levels are good. The current headmaster has led the school strongly and successfully for some time. He has established an ethos that is focussed on high achievement for all pupils, whatever their abilities, backgrounds or challenges. There is no complacency, but a restlessness to improve further. Since the last inspection, the excellence of the sixth form has been sustained and standards in the main school have been on a generally upward trend.

Other leaders and managers support the headmaster well. It is a stable community, a school that benefits from teachers and managers staying for a long time but wanting to succeed in their roles. Planning and evaluation systems are well established and rigorous. Challenging targets are part of the culture of the school. The school knows itself well and underperformance is quickly addressed. Heads of department feel accountable, but within a framework that allows them to exercise leadership and initiative. Recent changes and developments in the structure of the senior management team have brought an increasing focus on learning and teaching. This initiative has the potential to improve further the already good teaching, so that more lessons become like the best.

The implementation of the specialist technology development is a major strength of the leadership and management. It has led to significant whole-school improvements, in provision and in outcomes for pupils, as well as growth in the partnership arrangements with the local community, and other school and providers. There are exceptionally strong links with industry that bring real benefits to pupils. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion: it occupies a respected place within the local community and develops pupils' awareness of national and global issues well, especially through the excellence and popularity of subjects such as geography. The commitment to equality of opportunity is outstanding. The school works exceptionally hard to include all its pupils and provide appropriately for their welfare and development. Governors make a satisfactory contribution but are insufficiently informed about strengths and weaknesses to challenge and question the school effectively.

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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?	2	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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?	2	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	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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**

22 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, The Green Road, Ashbourne, Derbyshire DE6 1EP

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection.

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School is a good school. It has a fine tradition and high standards, yet strives to improve further. You make good progress in your subjects and consequently the standards you reach are high. The climate of the school is clearly one in which you feel secure and flourish. Your personal development is good. You benefit enormously from the high volume and range of activities and events going on at the school. Being a technology specialist school has led to wide-ranging improvements in terms of equipment and facilities and in the range of opportunities open to you. It has helped to improve standards. Your attendance and your behaviour are good, and many of you make a substantial contribution to the school and to the local community.

The headmaster is leading the school firmly and clearly. He is very well supported by the senior leadership team and the school's heads of department. All the staff show a commitment to your progress and welfare, and you are clearly aware of this. The overwhelming majority of your parents who responded to the questionnaire used as part of the inspection were very positive in their views of the school.

There are ways in which the school could improve further. Teaching is good but we think more of it should be inspiring. Your awareness of Britain as a diverse, multicultural society needs development. The governors of the school need to know more about its workings so that they can make more of a contribution. It is clear that the school puts your care and welfare at the top of its priorities but it does need to review and update some of its arrangements. The school is aware of this and is taking prompt action.

I wish you all well for the future.

Bob Roberts

Lead inspector