

Gillingham School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113882
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	325905
Inspection date	30 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Daniel Burton HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1772
Sixth form	415
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janet Robson
Headteacher	Manlio Lenarduzzi
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2006
School address	Hardings Lane Gillingham SP8 4QP
Telephone number	01747 822222
Fax number	01747 825263

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, the personal development and well-being of students, the quality of provision and the effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form. Inspectors met with staff, governors and students, observed parts of lessons, and scrutinised school documentation and the parental questionnaires. 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 large school is heavily oversubscribed. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and only a very small number speak English as an additional language. There are a small number of children in public care. The proportion of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. The range of learning difficulties includes students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, as well as those with physical disabilities. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school holds the Sportsmark Gold and Healthy Schools awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school richly deserves its excellent reputation in the local and wider community. Since the last inspection, the school has continued to build on its strong track record by further enhancing the quality of its provision to ensure the best possible outcomes for its students. Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the sixth form is now outstanding. The overwhelming majority of parents are fulsome in their praise for the school. One, typifying the views of many others, wrote, 'Choosing Gillingham School was the best decision I could ever have made for my child.' Another commented, 'My children are receiving an excellent education and I am proud to be associated with Gillingham School.' Excellent leadership and management at all levels demonstrate that the school has outstanding capacity to improve still further.

Gillingham students are delightful and a credit to their school. They behave impeccably in lessons and around the school and exhibit respect for each other and their teachers at every turn. Students report that they enjoy school enormously as a result of the excellent relationships they have with their teachers and each other and the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, as demonstrated by their mature and thoughtful responses in discussions with inspectors, their keen sense of right and wrong, and their commitment to valuing and supporting each other. The school council is an influential body and has proved instrumental in driving improvement through, for example, its work to help improve the range of healthy meal options in the school canteen. This commitment to healthy lifestyles is shared across the school community and is further demonstrated by the high take-up of extra-curricular sporting activities. Students fully exploit opportunities to make a positive contribution to their community through their work, for example as junior sports leaders, tutor group captains, and through community service. Their outstanding personal development overall makes a very significant contribution to the academic progress they make in lessons and ensures that they leave school well equipped for higher education or employment. The attendance of a small percentage of students has been too low, however, but school monitoring systems provide clear evidence that recent measures to improve attendance are now proving effective.

Attainment in the school is exceptionally high. Although students enter the school with standards which are broadly average, their results in public examinations at the end of each key stage are excellent, and represent outstanding progress overall. Since the last inspection, exceptional attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science has been sustained, with improvements in English results leading to even higher standards overall. Standards at Key Stage 4, a traditional strength of the school, dipped in 2008, though remained above national averages. This was because a small minority of students with complex behavioural needs did not attain the high standards of the rest of the cohort, resulting in lower attainment overall. However, provision to maximise the attainment of these students through, for example, work-related learning, ensured that all students gained at least one qualification, representing exceptional achievement for some. The school's rigorous monitoring provides strong evidence, based on validated modular test results, that current Year 11 students are set to surpass the exceptionally high standards seen in previous years, with high proportions of students making outstanding progress. The achievement of students with a range of different learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the rest of the school, as is the achievement of the small number of children in public care. Finely tuned support ensures that all achieve well, regardless

of need, and the achievement of the small numbers of students of minority ethnic heritage is very closely aligned with the rest of the school.

A key factor in maximising the progress, personal development and well-being of all students is the school's outstanding provision for care, guidance and support. Students respond extremely positively to the annual opportunity to vote for the 'Gillingham no-put-down-zone', reflecting the school's strong culture of inclusion. Staff know their students extremely well and rigorously monitor their academic progress and personal development to ensure that they fully meet their potential. A wide range of strategies are in place to support the more vulnerable students, including specialist provision in the independent learning suite and the student guidance centre for those in need of emotional or academic support. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities benefit from comprehensive support from teaching assistants and specialised therapists. Early morning basic skills sessions are provided to enable less able learners to improve their spelling, handwriting and mathematics, and the school actively engages parents in their children's learning through, for example, mathematics workshops. As a result, all learners make good progress, regardless of heritage or background, and for the vast majority of students, progress is outstanding. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

Inspectors agree with the school's view that teaching and learning are outstanding in the main school and good in the sixth form. Tremendously strong relationships, increasingly varied teaching strategies and a universal commitment to high standards ensure that learning is always purposeful and productive. Marking is effective because it helps learners understand how they can improve, and students are regularly involved in setting their own targets. Assessments are used particularly well in a number of subjects to identify strengths and areas for development. Students confidently describe their current levels of achievement and use their learning targets to plan subsequent pieces of work. For example, inspectors observed one excellent opening to an English lesson in which Year 11 students articulately described their points for improvement before embarking on an extended piece of written work. This ensured that all had clear and personalised learning goals, resulting in highly effective learning. A culture of openness and teamwork means that staff are always willing to learn from each other in order to improve their practice. Regular peer lesson observations enable the very best practitioners to share their excellent teaching techniques more widely. The school's carefully planned programme to improve teaching and learning in the sixth form has had a marked impact on achievement, and teachers have become increasingly effective at devising activities which encourage independent learning.

The school's outstanding curriculum plays an important role in maximising achievement and has been developed in consultation with students and local business leaders. A wide range of GCSE courses is complemented by well planned careers guidance and work experience opportunities. Since the last inspection, the provision for work-related learning has been extended with increasing numbers of students gaining qualifications in vocational courses. Arrangements to help these students catch up on their missed schoolwork have significantly improved and are very much appreciated by current Year 10 and Year 11 students. A key feature of the curriculum is the exceptional range of extra-curricular activities offered to students, with provision for sports and creative arts particularly strong. The school benefits from coaching links with an extraordinarily wide range of local clubs, and school concerts and plays are well regarded by the local community. Provision at AS and A2 level is extremely strong, though the school knows it needs to improve the range of vocational courses in the sixth form.

Leaders and managers play a key role in ensuring the very best outcomes for students. The headteacher personifies the school's golden rule, 'to treat others as you would wish to be treated', and is an excellent role model for colleagues and students. He is ably supported by a

highly effective senior leadership team. Staff thrive because they are trusted and given responsibility, and there is universal commitment to high standards in all areas of the school's work. Pastoral and subject leaders work in extremely close partnership to ensure that all students fulfil their potential. Self-evaluation is rigorous at all levels and plays a key role in driving improvement. Although strong systems of accountability are in place, these are matched by highly effective support procedures which ensure that underperformance is tackled quickly. An experienced team of governors provide exceptional support and have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Highly effective and resourceful financial management has led to significant improvements to school facilities and ensures that the school continues to provide outstanding value for money. Leadership of the very large sixth form is keenly focused on driving improvement and is now outstanding. Work to promote community cohesion in the local community is extremely strong, for example through well established community service programmes and sporting links with local primary schools. School leaders recognise, however, that opportunities to promote cohesion in the wider UK community are not yet fully exploited.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This extremely popular sixth form is an outstanding feature of the school's provision. The excellent leadership of the joint heads of sixth form has ensured that high academic standards have been maintained and improved while numbers have continued to grow. Academic progress has improved since the last inspection and is now very good. This is because there has been a greater emphasis on developing independent learning skills in lessons and, though this is not yet fully embedded in all subjects, some outstanding practice is evident. The A-level curriculum is extremely strong with a wide range of subjects offered. Provision for more vocational courses is less well developed, and inspectors confirmed the school's judgement that the sixth form curriculum is good overall. As in the main school, the personal development and well-being of students is exceptional. Students are highly articulate and provide excellent role models for younger learners. Retention rates are high and attendance is excellent. Students are extremely appreciative of the support they receive from their tutors, whom they describe as 'great', and speak knowledgeably about systems to support them should they fall behind in their work or need pastoral care. As one said, 'Staff will always put themselves out for you.' Sustained improvement since the last inspection and sharply focused leadership mean that capacity to improve is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the attendance of all groups of students matches the high levels seen in the sixth form.

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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	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/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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
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?	1	2
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?	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	1	
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**

1 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Gillingham School, Gillingham, SP8 4QP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team during our recent visit to Gillingham School. We really enjoyed talking to you in formal meetings and in lessons and were delighted to hear you speak so positively about your school.

The inspection team agrees that yours is an outstanding school. Your headteacher and his team are highly effective in ensuring that all of you fulfil your potential. Your teachers know you extremely well which means that they are able to quickly identify any need for additional help or support. Those of you on work-related learning programmes hugely appreciate the help you are given to catch up on missed work. Support for those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is excellent and helps ensure that everyone is able to fulfil their potential. Lessons benefit from the terrific relationships between students and teachers. Nearly all of you know your learning targets and excellent guidance from your teachers means that you know exactly how to improve. As a result, you make outstanding progress.

The curriculum provides excellent preparation for adult life. Work-related learning programmes have been expanded to ensure that all of you can undertake courses which closely match your interests. The range of extra-curricular activities in your school is exceptional, and particularly strong in sports and creative arts. It also responds to your interests, for example through the addition of cross-country opportunities. Since the last inspection, your sixth form has continued to improve and, like the main school, it is now outstanding. The excellent heads of sixth form work well together and have been instrumental in making this area of the school even better than before. Academic standards are high and the school offers an excellent range of A-level courses. The range of vocational courses offered is not quite so rich but the school has plans to improve this aspect of provision so that everybody's needs can be fully met.

A key strength of the school is its students. You are extremely polite and behave impeccably. Your commitment to supporting each other is really remarkable and inspectors think the 'Gillingham no-put-down-zone' is simply fantastic. Your school council has helped improve the canteen and all of you have been involved in decisions about the new school uniform. However, some of you do not come to school regularly enough and we have asked school leaders to ensure that attendance rises in all years to match the high rates seen in the sixth form. You can help by making sure you turn up to school every day. We wish you and your school every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector