

Pate's Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115754
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	326262
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Massey HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	972
Sixth form	361
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr James Hodsdon
Headteacher	Mr Shaun Fenton
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 October 2005
School address	Princess Elizabeth Way Cheltenham Gloucestershire
Telephone number	01242 523169
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 26 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and students. They observed the school's work and looked at documents including the school improvement plan, systems for tracking students' progress, individual education plans of some students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, minutes of governors' meetings, the school's virtual learning environment (VLE) and just over 300 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- The progress made by students, including those from vulnerable groups.
- The extent to which the school uses assessment data to secure improvement for all students.
- Whether the improvement since the last inspection indicates outstanding capacity to improve.
- The extent to which the school contributes to community cohesion.
- How successfully leaders at all levels are communicating the school's ambition and vision.

Information about the school

Pate's Grammar School is an average sized grammar school, which is supported by the Pate's Foundation. It is oversubscribed, with about eight applications for every place available, and serves a very wide geographical area so some students travel long distances to school. It has been a specialist language college since 2001 and a science college since 2006. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is well below the national average. Relatively few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the proportion for whom English is an additional language is low. A very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The vast majority of students from Year 11 continue in the school's sixth form and then on to higher education. The school takes in about a third of its sixth form students from other schools.

The school's Primary Enrichment Project is supported by funding from the Sutton Trust. Healthy Schools status was achieved in 2008 and the school also has Sportmark.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Pate's is an outstanding school which concentrates not just on high academic achievement but on developing well-rounded, self-confident students who recognise that their ability brings with it responsibilities towards the wider community. A very positive ethos for learning permeates all that the school does, and is not just something that takes place in lessons but happens in every activity both in and out of school. The accuracy of one parent's view that 'at Pate's it's cool to learn' is obvious from the atmosphere in the school. Careful induction of students into Year 7 ensures that they quickly understand the school's expectations for both learning and behaviour. Students enter the school with standards well above the national average, and outstanding teaching ensures that they make outstanding progress and attain exceptionally high examination results. An extensive range of activities outside the classroom, for example in sport, the arts and science, provides a breadth of enjoyable experiences beyond examination subjects and this encourages students to both work and play hard. Students enjoy school very much and this contributes to the calm, purposeful and happy environment, where they behave very responsibly and with consideration for others. Some described the school as being like a family, because students of all ages are so supportive of one another.

Teachers provide stimulus and challenge both in and out of lessons and, as a result, students are exceptionally well motivated, enthusiastic and well engaged in their learning. Although expectations are very high, care for individual students is very personal. One parent said, 'Pate's cherishes my child and has the same interest in him as I do.' Another said, 'I am amazed at how well they know my child'. Students commented on the exceptional efforts staff make to help them, willingly giving extra time both to support their academic achievement and organise extra-curricular activities. Regular assessment allows students' progress to be tracked effectively and those who are at risk of underachieving are identified quickly and given extra support. Students take responsibility for setting their own targets, reviewing them with tutors and acting on the clear guidance they are given on how to improve.

The headteacher and his senior team provide outstanding leadership. A strong focus on raising the quality of teaching and learning has generated energy and enthusiasm for improvement amongst the staff. The positive impact of training and encouraging teachers to share their practice in the school has already raised students' achievement and shows an outstanding capacity to improve. Rigorous new systems have been put in place to monitor the school's performance with a clear cycle of self-

evaluation, planning and implementation. However, the pace of change has been fast and although there is outstanding practice in the school, the quality of leadership at middle management level is still inconsistent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all middle managers focus on developing more exciting teaching and learning and rigorous implementation of new assessment and target setting systems through sharing the outstanding practice already within the school.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

All students arrive at the school with ability well above the national average in Year 7, and they make exceptional progress and achieve very high standards. GCSE results have shown a steady improvement over time, and in 2008 over 90% of students obtained five or more A* or A grades at GCSE. At Key Stage 3, attainment is also very high, particularly in mathematics, where 90% of students reached Level 8 in 2008. Progress and attainment for those few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those who are more vulnerable, matches that of their peers. The very high quality of work in art, music and drama indicates that students' successes go well beyond traditional academic subjects.

Very high rates of attendance indicate both students' enjoyment and the fact that they value learning. Both in and out of lessons students revel in the challenges they are given and enthusiastically tackle complex issues and demonstrate thoughtful insight and, as a result, the quality of their learning is outstanding. When asked to consider communities less fortunate than themselves or when reflecting on artwork, music, literature or news events, they show a high level of spiritual and cultural awareness and respect for their own and other belief systems.

Students in all year groups show highly developed personal and social skills. The views and opinions of others are heard and respected even if they cause disagreement. The consequences of inappropriate behaviour such as bullying are understood and this behaviour is deemed unacceptable. Students' mature attitudes are demonstrated frequently in lessons where they readily take the initiative, for example organising group work and volunteering to lead group discussions. In lunch breaks they organise meetings and clubs and many take part in competitions and fund raising events. Extra-curricular sport is very popular, with almost all pupils participating in at least one of the activities offered and the take-up of the healthy meals on offer is high.

The school council, led by sixth form students, is consulted regularly by the senior leadership team, and plays a major role in improving provision to meet students' needs. It is also involved in developing school policy, for example by contributing to developing the Pate's Learning Framework, which is a guide to what constitutes an outstanding lesson. A notable feature of this document is that it includes students' responsibilities as well as teachers'.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now outstanding. The school has focused extensively on developing and sharing techniques amongst the staff, and the senior team has created an atmosphere where teachers are willing to take risks and be flexible in their approach. As a result, lessons are now more stimulating and there is a much more interesting variety of activities for students, including extensive group work. Students often work independently without staff support – a skill that serves them well as they move up the school and into higher education. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge that manifests itself in high quality questioning and discussions, and they are constantly challenging students to develop their thinking skills. Assessment data are now available to track the progress of all students and are used effectively by the vast majority of staff to ensure that the work provided matches students' needs and leads them towards meeting very challenging targets. Although students report that they receive good feedback and know what they need to do in order to improve, the quality of day-to-day marking is inconsistent.

The school provides an outstanding curriculum that is closely matched to students' needs, abilities and interests. This is evident through:

- the specially adapted Year 7 curriculum, which eases the transition for students drawn from a large number of primary schools
- an accelerated curriculum for Key Stage 3 with much of the work completed by the end of Year 8
- an extensive range of courses at Key Stage 4
- a sixth form curriculum that includes a wide range and variety of traditional academic and practical A/AS courses.

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

In line with the school's specialisms, all students study one or more languages from the six on offer, and three sciences at GCSE. Particularly noteworthy developments include the Year 7 Enrichment and Skills and Year 8 Leadership and Community programmes, where students are encouraged and able to make productive links between subjects and develop transferable skills useful for further study and employment. Recently more departments have begun to use the VLE to enhance learning, with particularly effective use in psychology and philosophy and religion, where students maintain regular online discussion through the blog. All students complete work experience in the sixth form in order to help them make decisions about future careers. Extensive provision for work-related, enterprise-based activities is provided in main school, for example through the 'Dragon's Den' competition.

The very high take-up of extra-curricular provision is closely monitored on a group and individual basis, so that the school can modify the provision according to demand, and encourage participation where appropriate. The programme includes sporting, cultural, community-based and other activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and charity work.

The school takes a pride in knowing each individual student very well and ensuring that all have an equal opportunity to succeed. Staff are constantly looking out for students who may be experiencing either academic or personal difficulties and then providing appropriate and successful support, involving outside agencies if necessary. They provide excellent care for the few with learning difficulties and those with physical disabilities. Tracking systems that monitor students' academic performance are robust and are used to ensure that the varying needs of individuals are met.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	1
Effective assessment	1
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

A new headteacher was appointed in 2006, and a new deputy headteacher in 2008. The restructured leadership team has been very successful in communicating to the whole staff a clear vision of personal and social excellence for every student, in addition to the traditional emphasis on academic achievement. Robust and rigorous systems for evaluating and monitoring every aspect of the school's work have been introduced and are already having a positive impact on both the quality of teaching and students' learning and achievement. Middle managers, staff and students are involved in both self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Although this process is very effective, it is not yet as efficient as it could be and further changes to the management structure are planned for the future. Systems for safeguarding students are very thorough.

Governors are experienced and well trained with a wide range of expertise. They make a significant contribution to the success of the school. As well as ensuring that statutory requirements, such as safeguarding, are in place, they monitor the school's performance, challenge the headteacher appropriately and plan for the future. They are fully committed to ensuring students have equal access so that none are disadvantaged, for example, by being unable to attend school trips.

The vast majority of students at Pate's go on to higher education. Developing students who have a clear sense of social justice is at the heart of the school's vision, and the school makes an outstanding contribution to promoting community cohesion. A wide range of activities contributes to developing awareness of the issues faced by different social, faith and minority ethnic groups and creating a culture in which all are valued irrespective of their background. For example, a substantial proportion of students spend time helping voluntarily in the local community and the school has strong links through its specialisms with local primary schools. The primary outreach project uses funding from the Sutton Trust to raise aspirations for pupils in local primary schools.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	1
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Leaders and managers in the sixth form are dedicated to providing the best possible experience for students, and improving outcomes in terms of achievement and personal development. One parent of a sixth former said, 'As my son has progressed through the school I have become more and more impressed by the quality of his education and the commitment shown by teaching staff.' Parents and students who joined from other schools are appreciative of both the sensitive induction and the rounded education provided.

Students join the sixth form with high standards of attainment. Students make excellent progress, and reach challenging targets. Examination results have improved steadily in recent years and in 2008, 64% of the grades achieved were an A. This includes all groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or

disabilities and those who joined the sixth form from other schools. Academic monitoring and guidance for individuals and groups is regular and rigorous and staff intervene very effectively to tackle any areas of underperformance.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers demonstrate very high levels of expertise. There are opportunities for independent learning as well as peer- and self-assessment. Appropriate pace and challenge and very effective use of assessment result in high levels of student engagement, enjoyment, learning and progress. In a very few lessons, teachers do not check students' understanding carefully enough, and students do not have enough opportunities for independent learning.

The school is highly responsive to students' needs and preferences and introduces new courses and extra-curricular activities where there is a demand. A wide range of traditional, academic and practical A and AS courses is available including five languages as well as an extensive and stimulating range of extra-curricular activities. Almost every student is involved in some activity outside the classroom, including community and charity work. They make an excellent contribution to the school, for example by acting as 'house officials', running the school council or mentoring younger students.

School staff work very effectively together and with a wide range of outside agencies to provide excellent support for students. They receive thorough and personal guidance both in deciding on A-level subjects and university courses. Guidance and preparation for applications to Oxford and Cambridge is very thorough, and the school offers its expertise in this area to other schools in the locality.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, and have confidence in its leaders. Several mentioned:

- their confidence in the headteacher, particularly his ambition that no student should be lost in the crowd, his ability to maintain a sensible balance between work and extra-curricular activities and the fact that he listens to and acts on their views
- the dedication and commitment of staff, especially the time they give to support students and organise activities for them
- the weekly newsletter and regular email contact
- the excellent arrangements for transferring from primary school, which were welcomed by parents of students in Year 7, although some said that they were still unsure about their child's progress, because although they had received a

report with grades they had still not met subject teachers.

Many parents took the opportunity to say thank you to the staff and headteacher for the quality of education they provide, making clear that they valued the fact that the school was not just about academic achievement but about developing every aspect of each individual. One said, '...just so good – what other school has a head who sends birthday cards and has a birthday party for every student?'

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007–8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007–8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007–8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007–8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



27 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Pate's Grammar School, Cheltenham, GL51 0HG

You will recall that inspectors visited your school recently. We were very impressed indeed with Pate's and I am writing to tell you about our findings.

Yours is an outstanding school. It was clear that your education is about a great deal more than very high academic achievement. We found you confident, enthusiastic, thoughtful and very aware of your responsibility to support and contribute to your local community and the wider one beyond. We found the atmosphere happy, productive and cooperative and all of you demonstrating a very mature attitude towards one other. You obviously enjoy your learning and that permeated everything we saw, both in lessons and in the huge range of opportunities outside the classroom, from the exceptional arts, sport and cultural activities to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Combined Cadet Force. Teaching is outstanding overall, the curriculum is exceptionally well matched to your needs and there is a measurable impact on your attainment and progress both in terms of examination results and your personal development. In addition, you told us that the care you receive is outstanding. Staff know you very well and support you as individuals, giving willingly of their time to help your learning both in and out of the classroom.

You headteacher and senior team have a very clear vision of the kind of education they want to provide and have introduced very rigorous systems of monitoring and evaluation to ensure that their planning is well focused and leading to constant improvement. We were impressed at how much you have contributed through the school council to making sure that students' opinions are taken into account in this process. The only area for development is for the school to make the best use of the outstanding practice already existing amongst heads of department, to ensure that all departments are run equally well.

I do hope that many of you will read the full report on www.ofsted.gov.uk.

I wish all of you the very best for the future. I am sure you will continue to enjoy and benefit from all the many opportunities Pate's offers.

Mary Massey
Her Majesty's Inspector

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