

Highsted Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118802
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326895
Inspection date	11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Robert Ellis 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 (total)	864
Sixth form	213
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Statham
Headteacher	Jennifer Payne
Date of previous school inspection	10 November 2005
School address	Highsted Road Sittingbourne ME10 4PT
Telephone number	01795 424223
Fax number	01795 429375

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's inspectors and one Additional Inspector carried out the inspection.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues in detail: teaching and learning; the curriculum; guidance and support; leadership and management; and the impact of the science specialism. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF), national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, discussions with staff, governors and students, and the parents' 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

Highsted is a girls' selective school, which has specialist status in science. Most pupils are White British. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language and none is at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average but over one third of students in the sixth form are in receipt of an Educational Maintenance Allowance. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or difficulties is low and very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. A small group of pupils transfers from the Sheppey middle schools and joins the school in Year 9. There is a partnership with two other schools to extend the range of sixth form courses offered. The school runs an 'Aim High' club for pupils from local primaries, which promotes interest and enthusiasm for science, technology and mathematics. The school has previously experienced difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced specialist teachers, particularly in science and design and technology. The school has 'Investors in People' accreditation, the Sportsmark award, healthy school status and the ECO School Silver Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Highsted Grammar School provides an outstanding standard of education and care for its pupils and sixth form students. The school is very inclusive and there is a strong focus on encouraging both the academic achievement and personal development of all learners. Learners feel extremely safe and well cared for and say that their teachers know them well and give them excellent guidance and support.

Pupils enter the school with above average attainment but the range of attainment is wider than is seen in most schools of this type. Learners make excellent progress and the great majority reach or exceed their challenging targets so that the standards at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form are outstanding. Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and the quality of teaching they receive are key factors in their success.

Learners are rightly proud of their school. Relationships at all levels are excellent and staff and learners show mutual respect for each other. Behaviour is exemplary both in lessons and around the school. Learners share a strong sense of belonging to the school community and participate in decision making at every level. They show that they are developing a good understanding of other cultures and beliefs and they respect the right of individuals to be different. Learners show excellent attitudes to learning and thoroughly understand the need to adopt healthy lifestyles. The vertical tutor group system enables tutors to get to know individual learners very well and provides opportunities for learners from all age groups to mix harmoniously.

Teaching is at least good in all major respects and significant elements are outstanding. The school recognises that there is some variation in the quality of teaching and leaders are determined to make all teaching as good as the best. There has been innovative work since the last inspection to engage pupils and this has developed to take account of pupils' views and preferred learning activities. Teachers' good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects enables them to engage and motivate pupils. Lessons are well structured and most provide good opportunities for learners to work both independently and in groups on a range of interesting activities. The pace of lessons is brisk and teachers generally use questioning well to help learners develop their understanding. Learners receive good feedback on how they can improve and develop their work and there is a strong focus on getting pupils to evaluate their own progress towards their targets. Academic guidance is very personalised and encourages pupils' self-reflection. Evaluating each other's work is a feature of many lessons and this develops social interaction and allows learners good opportunities to value the views and opinions of others.

The great majority of learners attend extremely well, greatly enjoy their education and achieve so well because the curriculum is closely monitored and very responsive to their needs and interests. Learners have excellent opportunities to take responsibility and make a positive contribution to their own and the wider community. There is a strong work related dimension to the curriculum and learners have particularly good opportunities to develop skills, for example team working, which prepare them superbly for the next steps in their education or employment. Learners value the wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities offered in music, sport and a good mix of social and cultural activities. Learners' enjoyment was particularly evident in a rehearsal of the excellent special choir. Accommodation difficulties have placed constraints on the range of physical education activities available and facilities are shared with

an adjacent school to address this. The school has planned to develop additional accommodation to alleviate these difficulties.

The science specialism is having a significant positive impact on the work of the school and this has resulted in an increase in the take-up of science courses and innovative approaches to learning. These were initially trialled by the science and mathematics departments and are now being disseminated more widely. The outcomes of this are most noticeable in terms of improved engagement by pupils, higher attainment and a rise in confidence and expectation of what learners can achieve. The school is meeting its specialist targets, providing effective support for local primary schools and has become a pilot school for the national Science & Engineering Club scheme.

Monitoring of learners' progress is rigorous and there is rapid intervention when learners are identified as at risk of underachieving or in need additional support. Consequently all learners, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress. Learners say that staff are particularly generous with their time if additional help or support is needed.

Arrangements for safeguarding learners are robust and effective and staff are committed to providing a safe and supportive environment. The school works well with parents and other agencies to ensure that learners get the support that they need to make the progress that they should. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and almost all felt that learners were making good progress because teaching was good and that their child was safe and well cared for. A typical comment from a parent was, 'My daughter is progressing well and the school certainly gives her the support and confidence to aim high in the future.'

Leadership and management are successfully focussed on raising standards and ensuring that learners achieve to their full potential. Governors provide strong support and challenge the school to improve. Effective monitoring ensures that managers at all levels have a clear understanding of strengths and areas for development in their areas of responsibility. Self-evaluation is accurate and based on thorough analysis of performance data. Improvement planning identifies appropriate priorities and resources are used well to ensure best value. The impact of the actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning demonstrates an excellent capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students make excellent progress in the sixth form and consequently achieve results in examinations that are exceptionally high. The proportion of students who complete their courses is particularly high. Students identify that a key factor in their success is the high quality advice and support that they get from their teachers and the good opportunities for personal development that they take full advantage of. Sixth form students are actively involved in all aspects of school life and provide excellent role models and mentoring for younger pupils. The leadership and management of the sixth form are effective in monitoring and improving provision. The sixth form curriculum is very responsive to students' needs and good links with other schools and external organisations ensure that students have a wide choice of subjects to study.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing practice to continue to improve the proportion of teaching and learning that are outstanding in the relatively weaker subjects.

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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/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	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?	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

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?	1	
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**

12 February 2009

Dear pupils and sixth form students

Inspection of Highsted Grammar School, Sittingbourne ME10 4PT

Thank you for contributing to the inspection of your school. This letter provides a brief summary of our findings but I hope you will take time to read our full report, which is published on the Ofsted web site (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

- The school provides an outstanding standard of education and it is continuing to improve and develop new and innovative ideas about making learning more interesting and effective.
- Your behaviour is exemplary and you have excellent opportunities to develop as considerate and responsible young people. Consequently, you are able to make an extremely positive contribution to your school and the wider community.
- Examination results are improving because of outstanding teaching, an excellent innovative curriculum and the outstanding care, guidance and support you receive.
- Most of you participate in the extensive range of clubs and activities that are available and you have an excellent understanding of the need to keep fit and healthy.
- You told us how proud you are of your school and that you feel really safe, and get on well very well with each other and your teachers.
- The school has worked hard to provide courses that match your skills, interests and aspirations and involves you in decision making at all levels.
- The school is exceptionally well led and those responsible for leading and managing the school have a thorough knowledge of it well and are constantly looking for ways to make it better.

We have asked the staff to continue to work on developing teaching and learning so that even more lessons are outstanding. I am sure that you will want to continue to have the right attitudes to learning and play your part in making your school even more successful.

Yours faithfully

Robert Ellis

Her Majesty's Inspector