

The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118872
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326918
Inspection date	22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	David Butler 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	767
Sixth form	171
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Diane Connell
Headteacher	Maggie Bolton
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2005
School address	Wilmington Grange Parsons Lane Wilmington Dartford DA2 7BB
Telephone number	01322 226351
Fax number	01322 222607

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement in the sixth form; teaching and learning; aspects of care, guidance and support and students' personal development and well-being; and the impact of the school's specialism. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, assessment data, parents' questionnaires, planning documents, observation of lessons, and interviews with staff, students and the chair of governors. 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

The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington is a selective school with specialist status in mathematics and computing. The great majority of its students come from the Dartford area and the London Boroughs of Bromley and Bexley. Common timetabling arrangements enable sixth form students to attend courses in other local schools. About 14% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the great majority are fluent in English. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington is a good and improving school. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. The overwhelming majority of students feel safe, are happy at school and enjoy their education. They are very friendly, polite and respectful of each other and their teachers. Relationships among students, including those between different year groups, are excellent. Students comment very positively on the strong sense of community in the school, which they attribute partly to its relatively small size. Parents are also extremely positive about the work of the school and feel it is very effective in providing a well-rounded and balanced education for their daughters.

Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment. They make good progress and attain examination results by the end of Year 11 that are well above average. Almost all students attain at least five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, and a very high proportion also get A* to C passes in a modern foreign language and two science subjects. The proportion of passes at grades A* and A, an issue identified in the last inspection, has increased substantially. This good achievement by the end of Year 11 is a result of good motivation, effective teaching, excellent support and a curriculum that is well matched to the needs of the students. Overall progress in the sixth form is less rapid than in Years 7–11, resulting in satisfactory standards and achievement. However, many students make good progress in the sixth form and the most recent A-level results indicate improving standards.

The quality of teaching and learning has been improved since the last inspection, mainly through better monitoring and more effective use of assessment information to ensure that students are aware of their targets and know what they need to do to improve. Students feel that the great majority of teaching is effective but identify a small minority of lessons where they spend too much time copying down work and where there is too limited a range of learning activities. In contrast, some teaching is outstanding. Opportunities already exist for sharing excellent practice and these are worthy of extending further to promote more good and outstanding teaching.

Students and their parents value very highly the excellent care, guidance and support provided in Years 7–11. Students feel they always have someone to turn to if they are experiencing difficulties in their work or personal lives. Their progress is monitored extremely closely and reported on six times each year. Early interventions are made where there is evidence of underachievement. The small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given very good individual support and this is reflected in their good achievement. The school does a great deal to help students make the transition from their primary schools. Many parents of Year 7 students commented very favourably on how quickly their daughters had settled in and how much they were enjoying their first year of secondary school. Students are provided with high quality advice to help them make their choices for GCSE courses and for post-16 education, training and employment. There are robust procedures in place for ensuring students' safety and protection.

Attendance in Years 7–11 is very high and good in the sixth form. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Students have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives and where to seek help if needed. Incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are very rare and dealt with effectively when they arise. Students are very actively

involved in the life of the school. A very high proportion have positions of responsibility. Year 10 and sixth form students are trained as peer mentors to provide support for younger students. Year 7 students act as 'e-buddies' to primary students who are coming to the school in September. The work of the school council and the student voice is impressive. For example, students are involved in the procedures for appointing new members of staff, they comment on the quality of teaching and have piloted their own system of lesson observations. Students raise very substantial funds for charity, with each form group deciding on its own organisation to support. They engage with the local community, for example through putting on events for senior citizens. Students are well prepared for their futures through their highly developed literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, together with the skills for employment they gain through the programme of enterprise education and work-related learning.

Good use has been made of the school's specialism in mathematics and computing to enrich the curriculum, enhance facilities for ICT and promote improvements across subjects. The school's innovative work in the development and use of electronic communications for students, staff and parents is proving effective and has attracted national interest. Good progress has been made towards meeting the school's specialist targets apart from those for post-16 mathematics. However, the accelerated mathematics curriculum introduced in Years 7–11 is starting to attract more students to take A-level mathematics and to raise achievement. The school provides good support for work in ICT in local primary and secondary schools.

The headteacher and her senior team provide effective leadership and management. They have a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development in the school and have demonstrated they are fully capable of bringing about improvement. They take a great deal of account of the views of staff, parents and students when making decisions and deciding priorities. Governors provide good support and are prepared to question and challenge the school's performance in aspects of its work. The inconsistency in the quality of departmental subject management, identified as an area for improvement in the last inspection, has been tackled well by introducing better systems for departmental self-evaluation and more systematic monitoring of students' progress. The school has excellent partnerships with its parents, other schools and the wider community. Audits have been carried out to identify local community needs. An action plan is in place to build further on the school's already good promotion of community cohesion, for example through the work of the parish council.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school loses some of its highest attaining students at the end of Year 11, mainly because they choose to continue their education at schools closer to where they live. GCE A-level results are in line with national averages. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to students' prior attainment. There is no single explanation for why achievement is not better than this. There are weaknesses in teaching in a small minority of subjects but teaching is generally good and some is exemplary. The sixth form partnership arrangement works well and provides students with a wide choice of subjects to meet their needs. The poor attendance of a small number of students adversely affects their examination results but the great majority attend well. Students benefit from good quality care, guidance and support. Many students refer to the excellent individual support they receive but some find the transition from the style of learning in the main school to that required for A-levels particularly difficult. The school

has worked hard at improving students' study skills and raising their aspirations, but acknowledges there is still more to do in this area.

The sixth form is well led and managed. Improvements have taken place since the last inspection. More rigorous systems for monitoring students' progress have been introduced. Underachievement, particularly by potentially higher attaining students, has been more effectively challenged. This, together with improvements in teaching, contributed to the school attaining its highest ever proportion of A and B grades in A-level examinations in 2008.

Although achievement is only satisfactory in terms of examination results, the sixth form provides a good overall education for its students. Many students achieve well and the proportion completing their courses is very high. The great majority go on to university, with nearly all of the remainder entering employment with the opportunity to take professional qualifications. Their personal development is excellent; they become mature and thoughtful young women with the skills they need to cope effectively with adult life.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards in the sixth form by increasing aspirations and ensuring all students have the appropriate study skills needed for advanced level examination courses.
- Develop consistently high quality teaching and learning by extending the opportunities for teachers to share the exemplary practice that already exists throughout the school.

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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	2
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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
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	2	
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**

Dear Students

Inspection of The Grammar School for Girls Wilmington, Dartford, DA2 7BB

Thank you for helping us with the recent inspection of your school and for making us feel so welcome. I would like to share some of our findings with you. We found that GSGW is a good and improving school and that you are right to be proud of it. You are very friendly, polite and respectful of each other and your teachers.

Many of you told us that you enjoy your education and feel extremely safe and well cared for. You also told us that there is a strong feeling of community in the school. We agree with these views. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent and your attendance in Years 7–11 is very high. You have an excellent understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. We were impressed by the way so many of you take on responsibilities and by your work in supporting charities. Your student council and student voice are very effective in helping to bring about improvements. You make good progress in your work and attain excellent examination results by the end of Year 11. This is because you are very motivated, taught well and given excellent support. You are also provided with a good curriculum. Your school is well led and managed by your headteacher, other staff and governors.

- We have asked the school to make the following improvements.
- Although your sixth form provides a good education, examination results need to be better. Raising students' aspirations and ensuring they have the appropriate study skills for A-level courses would help achieve this.
- Teaching could be even better if teachers were given more opportunities to share the excellent practice that already exists in your school.

We are fully confident that the school can bring about these and other improvements so that it becomes even better. We hope you are able to contribute to this and wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

David Butler Her Majesty's Inspector