

Barton Court Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118916
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326927
Inspection date	11 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Maria Dawes 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	857
Sixth form	237
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Beryl Heap
Headteacher	Stephen Manning
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
School address	Longport Canterbury CT1 1PH
Telephone number	01227 464600
Fax number	01227 781399

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the progress students make at Key Stage 4
- the provision and outcomes in the sixth form
- guidance and support
- leadership and management.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, other documents provided by the school, observation of the school at work, interviews 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 were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Barton Court Grammar school is a co-educational selective school drawing most of its students from Canterbury and the surrounding area. The large majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low. The school was designated as a Specialist Language College in September 2005. Since September 2007 the school has offered the International Baccalaureate (IB) in the sixth form instead of other courses. A number of students join the school in the sixth form from other local schools, in addition to approximately 25 students from other European countries.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Barton Court Grammar School is a forward thinking school that has improved significantly since the last inspection. It provides outstanding education. The school is a happy and harmonious community where students are motivated to achieve as well as possible and develop into confident and successful young adults. Reflecting the views of many, a parent wrote, 'An excellent school. I am delighted with my children's academic progress and the pastoral care that is offered at Barton Court.'

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They are self-assured, articulate and astute. Their behaviour is exemplary and attendance is high. A key factor in the school's success is the respect that all members of the community show to each other, including the rights of individuals to be different. Relationships are excellent. One student told the inspector, 'Barton Court is like a village – a community where everyone can relate to everyone else!'

Students' achievement is outstanding. They arrive at school with high prior attainment, although the range is wider than in many other selective schools in the county. As a result of effective teaching and engagement and enthusiasm, they make excellent progress and the great majority, including the small number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, reach or exceed their challenging targets. Last year, a very few disaffected students failed to attain five or more A* to C grades at GCSE. This was particularly apparent in science. However, the school has taken robust action to ensure that this has been addressed for the current Year 11, and the school's assessments show that virtually all this cohort are on course to achieve exceptionally well. Since the last inspection, the school has given priority to raising students' aspirations and increasing the level of challenge for all students but in particular the higher attaining students. They have been particularly successful in this and as a result, the proportion of students attaining three or more A* or A grades has risen significantly and now exceeds that of similar schools.

Students and staff are very positive about the structure of the school day and in particular the three long lessons a day. Students concur with the school's view that teaching has improved in the last couple of years and is now outstanding. The school is developing a range of ways to take into account students' views on how they learn best. Teachers use a wide variety of activities and learning styles to engage and enthuse students. A large proportion of staff have benefited from extensive training and support for their sixth form teaching, and students across all year groups have benefited from the changes in teaching approach associated with the school's introduction of the IB. Students are encouraged to be analytical, curious and independent learners.

Pastoral managers are rigorous in their monitoring of students' progress and there is rapid intervention when learners at risk of underachieving and in need of additional support are identified. There is an extensive range of 'grade-booster' sessions to support students in examination years and students report that teachers will go the extra mile to help them.

The school provides students with an outstanding curriculum that effectively meets their needs and aspirations. To enable a more flexible approach to GCSE study, the school has condensed its Key Stage 3 curriculum into two years. A new innovation this year has been the introduction of Focus Days. These seven days, spread across the year, are excellent opportunities for each faculty to work with a year group on enrichment and extended projects, developing cross-curricular links as well as team working and other skills that prepare students well for their next stage in education. Students' enjoyment on one of these days during the inspection

was particularly evident in Year 7, where students were developing several aspects of knowledge and skills in dance, music and art through a carnival and circus workshop. There is high participation in the wide range of extra-curricular activities that vary from the more usual sports and music clubs to the Wild Food and Film-making Clubs. The new sports hall, funded jointly with Canterbury Christchurch University, will provide much-needed facilities to enhance the sports offer.

The language specialism is leading the way in many initiatives in the school and is making an increasingly strong impact on all aspects of school life. A language college student committee has been set up to advise on the direction of the language college from the students' perspective, and is currently piloting the training of students to observe lessons and give constructive feedback to teachers. Students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have the option of studying Japanese or Chinese in addition to a range of European languages. There are a growing number of international subject links and students involved in the e-pal scheme. The numerous international visits and exchanges include a Year 7 residential for all students soon after they join the school. A real strength is the degree to which local primary schools and the local community have benefited from the school's provision. Since the last inspection, the time allocated to the combined programme of personal, social and health education, citizenship and religious education has been doubled. This extensive programme gives students a good awareness of the multiethnic nature of the United Kingdom and the wide variety of cultures in a diverse world. However, opportunities for students to apply any learning outside the classroom are limited. Although students in the sixth form contribute in numerous ways both to the school and local community, there are limited opportunities for students in the main school to make such a contribution. Those opportunities that are in place, such as prefects or student voice, are not always clearly defined, leaving some students frustrated.

Students say that they feel extremely safe and secure and know that there are always members of staff to support and help them. They are confident that any rare issues such as bullying are addressed promptly. Procedures to safeguard students are secure. Transition into school is well planned and students settle quickly and confidently. Many parents commented on how pleased they were by this. Students generally appreciate and benefit from the school's innovative system of monthly individual mentoring with their tutor. However, the quality of this varies and it is not monitored as well as it might be. In addition, a small proportion of students do not get to see their tutors as frequently as they need.

A key factor in the school's success is its outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher is ambitious for the school and has a clear vision for a school where each student's potential is fulfilled both academically and personally. With his senior leadership team he has not been afraid to introduce a range of innovations to fulfil this vision, including, most recently, replacing traditional A levels with the IB as the only sixth form option. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that any changes have been introduced smoothly and they have appreciated and taken advantage of all opportunities to improve their teaching and management skills. The school has a very good understanding of how well it is doing and uses a range of ways of evaluating this, including parent and student questionnaires. Despite this, and although parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's provision, a small minority feel that insufficient efforts are made to take account of their views. Since the last inspection, the skills of middle leaders have improved and they provide good support in school improvement. The senior leadership group is aware that there is now the opportunity to give faculties more autonomy in evaluating the quality of their work. Governors are fully involved in and committed to the life of the school. The school has successfully addressed the issues identified at the last

inspection, in addition to improving its provision and outcomes for the students. It is not complacent, however, and has aspirations and plans in place to continue to broaden all students' horizons to enable them to live and work successfully in a changing and increasingly international world. It has very strong capacity to do this.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision for sixth form students at Barton Court Grammar School is outstanding. Students are unanimous that the introduction of the IB has been a success. As one sixth former commented, 'It's hard work but rewarding – all set within a supportive community.' The successful introduction of the IB has been in part due to the excellent leadership and management of the IB coordinator and other key staff and the very high levels of support and guidance from teaching staff and the full-time IB mentors. The number of students in the sixth form continues to grow, with an increasing number of students joining the sixth form from other schools as well as those joining from European countries for one or two years.

Students on the last year of the A level courses in 2008 made excellent progress and attained exceptionally high standards. The achievement of current students is very carefully monitored and tracking information suggests that they are on target to attain excellent IB results. Teachers have received good support in developing their teaching and the curriculum and students have responded well, developing into independent and inquiring learners.

Through the service element of the IB, students make a very valuable contribution to the school community as well as to the local community. Students have supported teachers in over 45 primary schools. In addition, they have supported settings as diverse as the local Refugee Befriending Centre and the Canterbury Festival. Students are very positive about the degree to which this has helped them mature and grow in confidence. 'It has pushed me to do things I might not have otherwise done,' commented one student. Students see themselves as global citizens and this is demonstrated by the harmonious relationships among the growing proportion of European students and other students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure a greater consistency in the regularity and quality of students' personal mentoring and support.
- Extend the opportunities for students in the main school to make a positive contribution both to the school and the local community.

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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	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	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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	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?	2	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	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**

12 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Barton Court Grammar School, Canterbury CT1 1PH

I am writing to thank you for the warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school recently. I valued the discussions I had with you and I should like to take this opportunity to share with you a summary of my findings.

Barton Court is an outstanding school providing you with an education that enables you to develop very successfully into confident, considerate and well-rounded young adults. The great majority of you enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning. This is reflected in the excellent relationships between all members of the school community. You are appreciative of the high quality teaching you receive and the academic support that enables you to attain exceptionally high examination results. It was good to see that the proportion of students gaining the highest grades was at an all time high last year and those of you currently in Year 11 are set to exceed this in the summer.

Your curriculum is outstanding. It includes a good range of subjects, including a number of different languages, and a great many enrichment activities. I particularly enjoyed seeing you at work on one of your Focus Days. The sixth form curriculum, in particular, is a strength of the school and the degree to which the sixth formers have wholeheartedly embraced all aspects of the IB is very impressive.

Your headteacher, with his senior team, is forward thinking and provides outstanding leadership. The school is extremely well led and managed. Staff and governors are dedicated and enthusiastic about improving the school further. I have highlighted two areas of improvement: ensure that the quality of the one-to-one meetings you have with your tutor is very good for all students and that all students are seen as frequently as they should be; secondly, enhance the opportunities that all of you have to be actively involved in the life of the school and make a contribution to the local community – the sixth form currently do this exceptionally well. I would encourage you all to take advantage of these improvements when they happen.

You have a school to be proud of. I wish you all the best for the future and, in particular, those of you sitting public examinations in the near future.

Yours faithfully

Maria Dawes

Her Majesty's Inspector