

Lancaster Girls' Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119811
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327139
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Georgiana Sale

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	879
Sixth form	316
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Philip Oglethorpe
Headteacher	Mrs Jackie Cahalin
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Regent Street Lancaster Lancashire LA1 1SF
Telephone number	01524 32010
Fax number	01524 846220

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Lancaster Girls' Grammar School is situated within a selective education area. The proportion of students in the school without English as their first language is below half the national average and the proportion from minority ethnic groups is just over half the national average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low.

The school was one of the first specialist technology colleges in the country, and acquired a second specialism in languages in 2006. In addition, the school has Leading Edge status and holds an International School award. It also has Artsmark, Healthy Schools and Investors in People awards, and is a Flagship Food for Life School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Lancaster Girls' Grammar School is an outstanding specialist languages and technology school that continues to offer an exceptionally high quality of education and excellent value for money. Students' attainment on entry is well above average. The school immediately begins to build on these firm foundations through good teaching, by providing care of the highest quality and by encouraging all students to participate in an excellent range of academic, sporting and cultural activities. Students thrive on this wealth of opportunity; they want to achieve their absolute best and thoroughly enjoy their time at school. Behaviour is exemplary and attendance is high. Girls are confident and articulate; they care for, support and respect each other. Parents greatly appreciate the richness of both the academic and out of school opportunities, as well as the care provided for their girls and are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One parent commented that, 'each pupil is valued by her peers and teachers; all work together and there is lots of fun as well as serious study'.

The curriculum is outstanding and makes a major contribution to the high standards. It is well supported by the extra-curricular opportunities which provide opportunities to gain further qualifications in, for example, dance. The outstanding range of high quality enrichment activities is testimony to the importance the school places on developing the whole person and to the teachers who see this as an integral feature of a young person's development. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are outstanding, with 96% or more achieving the highest grades in mathematics and science. At the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE results are similarly outstanding. Last year, every student achieved a minimum of at least five A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, and eight out of ten of them gained five or more A* or A grades.

Outstanding care, guidance and support contribute to the girls' excellent personal development and well-being. Students settle quickly and develop positive attitudes to their studies as the transition both into school and into higher education is carefully planned. The school works in partnership with support agencies to make sure that the girls' individual learning needs or other additional needs are met. The girls feel safe and report that they know there are trusted adults who will help them sort out any difficulties quickly. This nurturing environment ensures that the vast majority of the girls thrive as enthusiastic learners who are well equipped to move into higher education and on to the world of work.

Teaching and learning are good. A large majority of lessons are good or better. Staff have high expectations of students, and excellent relationships exist between the teachers and students. The best teaching involves the girls in a wide variety of learning tasks and students are provided with effective advice on how to progress to the next level. There was some excellent marking in all subject areas; however, the quality of marking was found to be inconsistent across the school.

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They enthusiastically participate in the wide range of after-school clubs and activities in order to keep themselves fit and healthy. Students said that the school is an enjoyable, warm and safe place to be. The girls enthusiastically contribute their ideas to improve school life through the school council because they know that their views are acted upon. For example, both dance and drama have been introduced onto the curriculum from students' suggestions. The school has international links, including with schools in Madagascar and India and throughout Europe, through its specialist language status. These links together with annual visits to a variety of places around the world are an

outstanding feature of the school and make a significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school is very well led by the headteacher ably supported by an experienced leadership team and governing body who know the relative strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is because the procedures for checking the school's performance are well structured and carried out with rigour. The headteacher has ensured that all staff are fully accountable for the standards achieved and are focused on learning and teaching. The school's specialisms in modern languages and technology have contributed well to the high standards as well as effective staff training. The school has maintained its high standards since the last inspection, and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form provides an outstanding education for all its students. The proportion of students who transfer from the main school is very high and they are joined by girls from other schools who make up about a third of the total number of students. Standards and achievement are outstanding, and in 2008, 70% of the girls gained only A or B grades. The personal development of the girls is outstanding. They take part in, and run, many extra-curricular clubs and activities within the school. The school rightly regards them as excellent role models and ambassadors. The provision is very well led and managed as an integral part of the school. As in the main school, the personal development and well-being of the students is outstanding as is their care, support and academic guidance. Challenging targets are set, and students' progress monitored closely. Swift action is taken to get students back on track if the students fall behind in their work. Academic guidance is excellent within subject areas, and helps nearly all students to progress into higher education.

Students have a good choice of academic subjects and the school is always looking to expand the curriculum further in response to students' needs and requests. For instance, business studies and AS level physical education have been recently introduced. Lessons are well planned and structured but in a minority of lessons, the tendency for some teachers to over direct the students constrains the opportunities for independent learning and class debate.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency and quality of marking across all subject areas so that the students know what to do to progress to the next level.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students arrive in Year 7 with very high levels of attainment. They make good progress especially in English and science, and by the end of Year 9 reach very high standards in all subjects. As a result of good teaching in combination with high expectations and careful monitoring of progress they make good progress through Key Stage 4 to reach exceptionally high standards at GCSE. In 2008, in the vast majority of subjects, including English, mathematics, science, technology and modern languages, 99% of the girls achieved A* to B grades. All groups of students achieve equally well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Girls' personal development, including their moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Attitudes to learning, as well as relationships throughout the school, are exemplary; senior girls are excellent role models for younger students and make an enormous contribution to the school's family ethos. Girls told inspectors how much they valued the personal support and encouragement shown by their teachers, as well as their friends, in helping them achieve so well. Residential trips and visits help develop greater understanding of others. It is clear from observing the girls at work, as well as from discussions, that they fully enjoy school and participate whole-heartedly in all the school has to offer them. Girls make an excellent contribution to the school community, not only through the formal channels of school council and student voice, but in the many ways in which they take responsibility for organising events, for example, the annual musical festival. Links with the local community are good, and they demonstrate a wider sense of community through the work of the eco-committee. Girls have an excellent understanding of the need for a healthy lifestyle and keeping safe, including internet safety. The outstanding personal development curriculum, their good social skills, and their high academic achievement all provide an excellent preparation for their future adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their students very well. Relationships, based on mutual respect, ensure teachers and students work in partnership to create the right conditions in classrooms for everyone to learn. The teachers' high expectations result in productive lessons, and well motivated students with high aspirations. Students listen carefully and behave well. They experience a good range of learning experiences. These, together with the students' positive attitudes to learning, result in lessons where the girls make good progress. Teachers' questioning is skilful; it develops the students' understanding and allows the teacher to assess students' progress in lessons. In some areas there is a consistent approach to marking which supports girls' next steps in their learning, but the school is aware that this consistency is not yet school wide. The sharing of good practice in marking is being led by the technology department and underpins excellent practice seen in that subject and in English.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

A traditional academic curriculum, and wide ranging extra curricular activities, very effectively meet the needs and aspirations of the students, offer a well-rounded education and prepare these academically able girls thoroughly for the future. One girl said 'there is something for everyone no matter what their interests'. The specialist language and technology college status has extended the courses available in school, for example girls now take three separate science subjects, and they can study electronics at Key Stage 4 and learn Mandarin out of school. The curriculum for all aspects of personal development is good because it develops strong personal skills, promotes good cultural and religious awareness, contributes well to an understanding of the global community and celebrates the cultural diversity of the United Kingdom today.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The pastoral care of students, and the academic guidance they receive, are outstanding. The school knows its students well and takes a keen interest in ensuring that each girl achieves her potential. Links with outside agencies, such as Positive Action for Young people, are good and provide effective support to vulnerable students and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school ensures girls do not miss out on essential trips and visits because of financial hardship. Safeguarding procedures are in place and conform to recent legislation. A significant number of staff have had First Aid training and thorough risk assessments, both on site and for outside visits, are carried out as necessary. Girls are well informed about their progress as they move through the school and have clear targets for improvement expressed through very challenging targets for the end of each key stage. Underachievement is identified at an early stage, and intervention helps provide effective mentoring and other appropriate support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has led the implementation of a strong vision for the school that ensures the girls' personal development matches their academic excellence. A shared sense of ownership by the whole staff is a key element in driving this vision forward. The school is not complacent and uses the results of honest and thorough self-evaluation, as well as parent and students' opinions, to move the school forward. Senior leaders use a range of data, measuring students' achievement against similar selective schools nationally, to raise expectations even further. Students' progress is tracked in a robust and comprehensive manner within the school, especially in Key Stage 4 and 5 so that the performance of individual students, as well as that of departments and individual teachers, can be followed. Support for girls who are falling behind with their work is quickly put in place and monitored to make sure it is effective. Staff performance objectives link well to subjects' and the school's development plans. This makes sure that staff training is focused so that it directly benefits the girls' learning. The governors provide outstanding support for the school and effective challenge and support to the headteacher. The school meets all of its statutory requirements.

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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	2	2
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	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?	2	2
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**

2 July 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Lancaster Girls' Grammar School, Lancashire, LA1 1SF

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me and the other inspectors when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers and visiting some of your lessons.

We have judged Lancaster Girls' Grammar School to be an outstanding school. It is a very special place because of the exceptional care and support that it provides. As well as helping you to achieve excellent results in examinations and make good progress, the school helps you to become mature, responsible, caring young people.

We were very impressed with your behaviour, the respect that you show each other and the efforts you make to help each other and make the school a great place to learn. You told us how much you enjoy your lessons, and how friendly and supportive the teachers are. We were pleased to see your enthusiastic participation in all aspects of school life, and can see why you enjoy the many after-school clubs and other activities that the school offers you. The sixth form students set an excellent example for younger ones. You all work hard in lessons and it was also good to see that you involve yourselves in a wide range of activities that help the school community.

Your headteacher and her staff lead the school very well. Your parents really care about your education and they are represented by a very good governing body which supports Mrs Cahalin in making sure you get the very best.

Although there are so many excellent things about your school, there is always room for some improvement. We have asked the school to make sure that all staff in all subjects give you precise advice in your books which will tell you what you have to do to progress further.

I wish you very success in your future careers, and a happy and fulfilled life.

Yours faithfully

Georgiana Sale

Lead inspector