

Guildford County School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125300
Local Authority	
Inspection number	340762
Inspection dates	4–5 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Joanna Beckford-Hall HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1007
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	223
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Janette Owen
Headteacher	Mr Peter Costello
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2006
School address	Farnham Road Guildford Surrey GU2 4LU
Telephone number	01483 504089
Fax number	01483 300849
Email address	ask@guildfordcounty.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and students. Inspectors also had informal discussions with students while looking at their work in lessons. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of school documentation including school policies, student tracking data and records of governing body meetings. Inspectors also took account of the views expressed in 219 parental questionnaires, and views in staff and student questionnaires.

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

- current progress made by all groups of students in lessons
- the learning and progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- teachers' use of assessment data to plan lessons and the effectiveness of feedback in lessons and marking
- the extent to which academic outcomes in the sixth form are indicative of a good curriculum and good quality teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of senior leaders in developing the leadership capacity of middle leaders as part of school improvement.

Information about the school

Guildford County School is an average size school with a sixth form. Most students are of White British heritage with a small number of students from minority ethnic groups. A small proportion of students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average and the number of students receiving free school meals is well below the national average.

The school gained specialist status in music in 2004 and has recently achieved a second specialism in mathematics and computing in 2009.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Guildford County School provides good quality education. The school is well led by the principal who galvanises the energy of senior leaders in driving improvement. Parents overwhelmingly confirm that the school is well led and managed. The school has good capacity to improve because it has well-chosen priorities that are reviewed rigorously. School leaders and governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses which is used to set ambitious targets.

The vast majority of students enjoy school. Students' behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding in lessons and around the school. Any momentary lapses are quickly dealt with. Students show good attitudes to learning which contribute to good achievement for the great majority of students. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities now make at least satisfactory progress and some make good progress, though this is not yet comparable to other student groups in the school.

Major strengths of the school's work are the care it takes of students, and guidance it provides in nurturing their interpersonal and learning skills. Outstanding care, guidance and support contribute to improvement in achievement and the great majority of students make good progress. Attainment is well above average by the end of Key Stage 4. Achievement in the sixth form is also good.

The quality of teaching is good. Students especially enjoy lessons which effectively use group discussion, independent work and different types of practical learning activities to develop knowledge. Some of the outstanding lessons observed combined peer and self-assessment using clear criteria to assess current progress and attainment. Verbal feedback to students in lessons is often good, a strength seen by the inspection team in many lessons. When this is used well, teachers check how effectively students are learning, and ensure they know how to improve and what to aim for. Praise is used well to raise self-esteem. Some students want more detailed information about their progress and how to continually improve their work. Senior leaders accept that more consistent and penetrating use of assessment in some lesson planning is needed.

The curriculum has good breadth and balance and is increasingly personalised to meet students' needs. Combined with improvements in teaching, this ensures the majority of lessons help students develop good understanding of the subject as well as cross-curricular themes. The impact of the music specialism is far reaching. Several boys' choirs and diverse ensemble groups frequently receive acclaim. Students' musical work with children at local partner schools instils confidence in their own ability as a performer and enriches presentation skills in day-to-day lessons. The inspiring musical specialism is an outstanding feature of Guildford County School.

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Students understand their local community. They support local homeless people, the elderly and engage well with children in events at primary schools. Parents and governors regularly attend events which celebrate the outstanding contribution students make to the school and the wider community, raising students' self-esteem.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Deeply embed the use of assessment practices in all teaching and learning so that teachers:
 - use assessment information more stringently to match learning to students' needs giving most able students more challenging tasks and supporting less able students by using different kinds of resources and changing the pace of learning
 - consistently evaluate the progress of all students in lessons so that every lesson gives each student well-targeted next steps in learning
 - share the existing good practice in verbal feedback and peer and self-assessment more widely across the school, so that the majority of lessons give opportunity for students to evaluate their own and others' progress against targets.
 - Accelerate the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities so that a greater proportion make good progress.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

An outstanding feature of students' achievement is their commitment to, and experience learned from, a range of school and wider community activities which they lead or take part in. They want to make, and indeed succeed in making, an outstanding contribution to the school. The student voice is heard through a thriving student council and most students who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed that staff are interested in their views.

Bullying instances are rare because staff successfully teach how and why students need to respect views of different people, and understand their own social and emotional needs as young people. A Key Stage 3 assembly gave poignant examples of qualities students need as responsible young citizens. Students enthusiastically respond to humour and guidance in their assembly.

Students understand healthy living. Very high participation rates show positive attitudes to inter-house and inter-school sports. A minority of students have less frequent participation in sport. The school offers alternative outdoor activities for these students.

Attainment at the end of Year 11 has been significantly above average and rising for four consecutive years, reaching a high in 2009 with 71% of students attaining five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics. This represents good progress for the majority of students. There is little difference in attainment of students from minority ethnic groups. The school is closing the attainment gap between boys and girls

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successfully. There remains variation in students' attainment in a few subjects, and the school has swiftly responded to this by better matching courses to student need and refocusing the interventions to effectively support students working on the cusp of grade boundaries for their GCSE courses. Assessment and tracking data currently show that students across the school are making good progress towards challenging targets. Learners at early stages of English language acquisition make good progress. This is further supported by what inspectors saw in lessons, with the large majority of students making good progress.

The very few students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress. The school effectively evaluates the impact of interventions for these students and teaching assistants provide good support in lessons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

An outstanding feature of students' achievement is their commitment to, and experience learned from, a range of school and wider community activities which they lead or take part in. They want to make, and indeed succeed in making, an outstanding contribution

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Embedding ambitious vision and continually driving improvement underpin the energetic team work at senior level. It permeates through middle leaders and teams across the school. Improvements in teaching are evident and systematic action successfully addresses the needs of individuals who are not yet on target to achieve expected

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grades.

Senior leaders encourage staff to take responsibility for leading charitable or curricular projects across the school, such as raising attainment of particular students in the 'Torchlight Group'. Succession planning to build the capacity of middle leaders is monitored effectively by governors.

School development planning is detailed which leads to clear outcomes that are regularly evaluated by leaders. Governors are fastidious in holding leaders to account and challenging them about rates of improvement. Minutes of governing body meetings reflect challenging debate, showing how governors' work complements that of senior leaders. Good improvements in ways of communicating with parents have been made. However, governors recognise they need to respond to ideas of parents more strategically to inform their decisions, as well as capturing the staff voice more prominently.

Discrimination is not tolerated and equality of opportunity is monitored carefully to maximise opportunity for all students. The school is a welcoming environment for staff and students.

Safeguarding procedures meet statutory requirements. Good attention by governors and staff to sustain effective practice in safeguarding training, policy review and health and safety of students helps students to feel safe.

The school is proactive in seeking opportunities to develop students' understanding of different communities and cultures, with a particularly sharp understanding of the local community. Students' understanding of the plights of peoples around the world is greatly enhanced through purposeful links with a school in Uganda.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Sixth form

Students' attainment is above average and, relative to their starting points, students make good progress. Success rates are high with many completing their A-level courses with grade A and B passes. Lower success rates at AS level are marked in some subjects, such as critical thinking, English literature and biology. Leaders are aware that students entering Year 12 need better understanding of how to study at this level. A review of the induction for Year 12 students is underway, in response to evaluation by leaders and student feedback.

There is some inspiring teaching which fosters students' independent learning skills and uses knowledge of their prior attainment to personalise learning. Students confidently ask questions of teachers, checking their own understanding during lessons. However, some teaching does not accelerate students' progress because the level of challenge is not sufficiently matched to the potential of students.

The curriculum offers a very good range of AS- and A-level courses, with photography and government and politics as recent additions. The National Vocational Qualification in Sports Coaching is a huge success, with high take up and good results. Students invest time, willingly contributing to community cohesion in school, working well with younger students in house activities and developing good leadership skills through fund raising activities.

Students' mature attitudes to learning lead to outstanding behaviour. Attendance is above average, reflecting students' enjoyment of learning. Progression rates to university are high and students value good links with the University of Surrey to find out about life as a degree student.

Leadership of the sixth form is good with careful tracking of student progress and a good understanding of the well-being of individual students. The sixth form development plan includes targets for development but leaders accept that how outcomes are measured and evaluated could be sharper.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents are positive about how well the school manages pastoral care and many are very pleased with the transition arrangements for students joining Year 7. A minority of parents expressed concern about behaviour but inspectors judge it as good. Despite

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improvements in the school's communication with parents, some wish to know more precisely how to help their son/daughter make better progress. An overwhelming majority showed high levels of satisfaction with the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Guildford County School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 219 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,007 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	108	49	104	47	5	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	80	37	128	58	5	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	70	32	127	58	11	5	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	79	36	120	55	12	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	68	31	135	62	11	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	61	28	126	58	22	10	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	45	21	143	65	16	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	71	32	116	53	6	3	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	85	39	111	51	15	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	48	22	126	58	13	6	4	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	61	28	117	53	15	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	80	37	119	54	8	4	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	112	51	96	44	7	3	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Dear Students

Inspection of Guildford County School, Guildford, GU2 4LU

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave inspectors when we visited your school recently. The vast majority of your parents who completed the inspection questionnaire believe you go to a good school. We also enjoyed hearing why most of you think your school is good too and we too judge that Guildford County School provides you with a good education, including outstanding care, guidance and support. Most of you make good progress during your time at the school. By the time you reach the end of Year 11 you attain standards well above the national average and those who stay on to the sixth form also achieve well by the end of Year 13. This is because the school is led well by your headteacher and in most of your lessons teaching is good. Your good attitudes to learning complement the hard work of the staff and provide you with lots of opportunity to learn well. The inspection team was impressed by your good and sometimes outstanding behaviour and how well you support and challenge each other in lessons. All of these factors help you make good progress.

You told inspectors that you enjoy school because the curriculum offers a good range of subjects and you have the chance to take part in a variety of extra-curricular activities and school events. We agree and think you should be very proud of the outstanding contribution that so many of you make to your school and wider community. It was good to hear that you feel safe in school and that you know why health and fitness is important to successful learning.

We have asked senior staff to make some improvements. These include:

- making sure teachers use assessment information more carefully in matching work to your different needs
- ensuring that all feedback helps you to know what precisely you have achieved and how to improve
- accelerating the progress of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities by building upon the good intervention work that exists.

We wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Joanna Beckford-Hall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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