

# The George Ward School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number126448Local AuthorityWiltshireInspection number340982

Inspection dates2-3 December 2009Reporting inspectorMary Massey HMI

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

Type of school

School category

Age range of pupils

Gender of pupils

Gender of pupils in the sixth form

Number of pupils on the school roll

Of which, number on roll in the sixth form

Comprehensive

Comprehensive

Comprehensive

Mixed

11–18

Mixed

Mixed

1112

1112

Appropriate authorityThe governing bodyChairMrs Christine DeadmanHeadteacherMr Stephen ClarkDate of previous school inspection8 November 2006

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Age group 11–18

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### **Introduction**

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 44 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation, policy and planning documents, students' work and 65 parent and 226 pupil questionnaires.

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

- how well students across the school are progressing and how effectively they learn in lessons
- the quality of teaching and how this contributes to students' learning and progress
- the capacity of the school to raise students' achievement, based on its previous track record, the quality of its self-evaluation and the impact of action currently being taken to bring about improvement.

#### Information about the school

The George Ward School is slightly larger than the average secondary school and has been a specialist technology college since 1997. It is a National Challenge school. The majority of students are White British, but the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is rising. About a quarter of students have special educational needs and/or disabilities, with the majority of these having a specific learning difficulty or behaviour, emotional or social difficulties. A smaller proportion has autistic spectrum disorder. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs is close to the national average. A small number of students have a hearing impairment or a physical disability. Very few students join or leave the school at times other than at the start or end of the school year, and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low. There is higher proportion of boys than girls in every year group. Sixth-form and 14 to 19 provision, including Diplomas, are extended through the West Wiltshire partnership of seven local secondary schools and a further education college. A new school building is under construction on the other side of Melksham. It is due to be completed in July 2010.

At the last inspection, in 2006, students' behaviour was judged unsatisfactory and the school was asked to ensure that procedures to deal with unacceptable attitudes and behaviour are consistently applied so that there is no disruption to students' learning. A monitoring inspection by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors was carried out in November 2007 and judged that the school had made satisfactory progress towards addressing the issues raised.

## **Inspection judgements**

### Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

4

### The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

## **Main findings**

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement.

Students and teachers report that since the last inspection, the atmosphere in school has improved very much. Inspectors found it calm and purposeful, with students readily able to talk about their learning. Most students enjoy being at school, and in lessons they are cooperative and keen to learn. Recent developments to the curriculum, particularly for Years 10 and 11, include strong partnerships with other schools, colleges and agencies. These ensure that there is a wide range of options to choose from, so everyone can find a course that suits their needs and aspirations. As a result, both behaviour and attendance, especially amongst older students, have improved since the last inspection. Changes to the curriculum for Years 7 to 9 are at an earlier stage of development. The care, guidance and support provided for students, especially for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are vulnerable, are good. There are some striking examples of occasions where the school's intervention has made a significant difference to outcomes for individuals. Robust systems to manage behaviour ensure that students know exactly where the boundaries lie. The vast majority respond well and this means that the exclusion rate has fallen over the last two years. In lessons, teachers are now able to focus on the quality of students' learning rather than managing their behaviour.

Students' attainment at GCSE is below the national average. After a substantial improvement in progress and results in 2008, there was an unexpected fall in attainment in mathematics in 2009. This reduced the proportion of students achieving five A\* to C grades, particularly when English and mathematics were included. The school has responded very quickly to this setback, and actions taken in mathematics since the beginning of the autumn term are already beginning to have a positive impact on both the quality of teaching and students' progress. A legacy of underachievement in science in the current Year 11 means that without substantial intervention, students will not reach average standards in 2010. However, clear strategies to support them towards reaching satisfactory outcomes are already in place, and work to provide sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching is already beginning to accelerate students' progress. Assessment data and lesson observations show that the majority of students in other year groups, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, are making satisfactory progress.

The school's recent focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning is already making a difference and during the inspection more than half of the lessons observed were good or better. However, there is still a very small proportion of inadequate teaching. The quality of lesson planning is variable, with some lessons proceeding at a slow pace and activities insufficiently stimulating to motivate and engage students. A very large majority of students say they learn a lot in lessons, that they know how well they are doing and that teachers explain how they might improve their work. However, teachers are not sufficiently demanding of students, including those who are gifted and talented, and in some lessons assessment data are not used effectively to provide activities that are well matched to students' individual needs. There is a wealth of information about individuals, particularly for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which could be used to support learning and accelerate progress, but this is not always used to the best effect by teachers.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are secure and robust systems have helped to reduce absence. The governing body is actively recruiting members with a wide range of skills. Many governors contribute regularly to monitoring activities and are known to staff. In spite of efforts to encourage parents to be more actively involved in their children's learning, the response has been limited. Only a very small proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire sent out at the start of the inspection.

The headteacher and the leadership team understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They have a clear plan for improvement, and are working on a wide range of priorities at the same time, combining sharply focused intervention to improve attainment quickly, with longer-term skills development for staff and cultural changes amongst students. Monitoring is extensive and thorough and this gives a sense of accountability to the staff, but the data collected are not always systematically analysed to show evidence of the impact of actions carried out on students' achievement and well-being. Without this summary analysis, it is not clear what interventions are the most effective and what further guidance and training for staff are needed to maximise the rate at which sustainable improvements can be made. Nevertheless, the efforts made over the last three years to improve behaviour, attendance, the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning have had a positive impact on students' achievement and well-being. This indicates that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide targeted intervention in order to secure improved attainment for current Year 11 students in GCSE examinations in 2010, particularly in mathematics and science.
- Improve the quality of teaching across the school, in order to accelerate the rate at which students make progress, by ensuring that teachers' planning:
  - provides sufficient pace and challenge for students
  - engages and motivates students because they are excited by their learning in

all lessons

- uses all the assessment data available to ensure that work is closely matched to individual students' learning needs, especially those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are gifted and talented.
- Analyse more effectively the extensive data already collected through monitoring, in order to:
  - evaluate the impact of actions taken, and interventions made, on students' achievement and well-being
  - have enough information to prioritise a limited number of tightly focused areas for improvement
  - assemble clear, summary evidence which demonstrates secure and sustained improvement in students' achievement and well-being over time.

### Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Although there was a dip in mathematics GCSE results in 2009 which brought down students' attainment overall to below the national average, standards in most other subjects have risen over the last three years. The school is not yet confident that the positive data it has collected to demonstrate students' progress in Years 7 to 9 are reliable, because systems are at an early stage of development. In classrooms, inspectors found students often making good progress, but judged progress to be no more than satisfactory overall.

Teachers and older students report that behaviour has improved greatly since the last inspection, although only half the students surveyed felt that behaviour in the school is good. Inspectors found students polite, courteous and confident, particularly in the older year groups, with good relationships with staff. The vast majority respond well to sanctions. Although a small minority of parents are concerned about the way in which the school deals with unacceptable behaviour, the incidence of poor behaviour is falling as a result of better systems, which make expectations and sanctions clear, better teaching and a curriculum which engages and motivates students.

Good quality religious education helps students' spiritual development, and the majority have satisfactory social and moral awareness. Students' appreciation of multicultural issues and the importance of community cohesion on a national and global level are both limited.

Students generally feel safe in school. Most are confident that if bullying or racist incidents occur, they will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Some younger students say that they do not feel so secure in corridors. Only just over half the students surveyed during the inspection believe that the school encourages them to be healthy, but they are aware of the factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle. The school council has been involved in the development of a healthier menu at lunchtime, although many students are not aware of the full range of issues with which the council is involved. There are good opportunities for Year 9 students to make a positive

contribution to the community through regular work with elderly people. Within school, some students help at open evenings and induction days, and help raise money for charity.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning			
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4		
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3		
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3		
The extent to which pupils feel safe			
Pupils' behaviour			
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles			
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community			
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being			
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3		
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			

## How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching was an area for development after the last inspection and since then has been a major focus for improvement. The impact of the school's efforts to improve teachers' skills can already be seen, particularly in English and mathematics. The best lessons include planning for a brisk pace and challenging activities, so students are engaged and motivated. In these instances students enjoy their learning, are keen and interested and make good progress. However, although particular students' needs are identified, for example those of students with special educational need and/or disabilities or who are gifted and talented, plans do not specifically include strategies and structures to tackle these needs. In the effort to encourage independent learning, teachers sometimes do not provide enough structure or resources to support those who find learning more difficult. Support from teaching assistants is particularly strong and

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

effective and is helped by good communication with teachers.

The use of assessment to support learning has also been a key focus for development in the last two years, with the expectation that all students know their current grades and targets. During the inspection this was found to be usually the case. Inspectors saw good examples of where helpful dialogue with students was informing them about progress from one lesson to the next, with the guidance given being both subject- and student-specific. In some lessons there were good opportunities for students to explain the strengths and weaknesses of each other's work.

Substantial changes to the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 have had a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning. The school uses a student questionnaire to make sure that provision matches needs. For Years 7 to 9, a new approach designed to develop students' basic skills is partially implemented, but has not yet had time to become fully embedded or evaluated. Although the school runs a technology week, and all students complete a design and technology course at GCSE, the impact of the school's status as a specialist technology college is not sufficiently visible to students, except through the provision of resources. The latter has had a particular impact on information and communication technology, where students describe good access to computers out of lessons. The school is currently not providing the recommended two hours of physical education for students in Years 10 and 11.

There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, although participation rates are not systematically monitored. Increasing numbers of students are taking part in high-profile public events, such as the recent Winter Showcase, which involved 75 students and a large number of staff.

Students describe transition between different stages of their education as well planned and thorough, especially for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Much time and trouble is taken to ensure that students are placed and supported well when they arrive at the school in Year 7. Vulnerable students are supported through targeted intervention, and well-informed teaching assistants work with them in classrooms, managing a good balance between providing help and encouraging independent work. The school has good partnerships with a range of outside agencies to support students, and is particularly effective at working with those pupils with behavioural difficulties.

#### These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

### How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and communicate their vision very effectively to staff. Self-evaluation is accurate and targets are both challenging and optimistic. The headteacher is very visible in school and has a 'hands-on' approach. After the reorganisation of the senior management team three years ago, roles and responsibilities were clarified and the clear line-management structure now in place ensures that middle managers feel accountable but also well supported by senior leaders. All leaders are now more skilled at judging the quality of teaching, and through regular coaching and professional development for staff, the proportion of good or better lessons has risen and inadequate teaching reduced. However, although National Challenge support has helped to provide good quality intervention to raise GCSE standards, the school's priority is to establish long-term, sustainable improvements in the rate of students' progress right across the school. Monitoring data are not yet analysed sufficiently thoroughly to provide clear evidence which shows the impact of the school's actions on students' outcomes ' both achievement and well-being. This restricts the school's ability to be sharply focused on the areas that will make the most difference. Although individuals are taken care of well, outcomes for different groups of students indicate that the effectiveness with which the school promotes equal opportunity and tackles discrimination is no more than satisfactory.

Plans to improve the school's contribution to community cohesion at a national and global level are at an early stage, although, especially through the school's technology status, there are good local links with the community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement			
Taking into account:  The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3		
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3		
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3		
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2		
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3		
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3		
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3		

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			
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve			
value for money	4		

#### Sixth form

The sixth form is a popular choice for students from Year 11. Sixth-form students are generally proud of the school and say the sixth form is 'like a family'. They are aware of how to keep themselves and each other safe and appreciative of the individual care and attention they get to help them improve. They are increasingly able to take responsibilities and the school is developing the range of opportunities open to them to support students lower down in the school and engage with the wider community.

The progress that students make in the sixth form is variable, depending on the subject. Students make particularly good progress in design and technology and English language at both GCE A and AS level. The curriculum has improved since the previous inspection and there are now more opportunities for those in the sixth form to identify a course of study which meets their needs and aspirations. This will be further strengthened when the school's plans for 14 to 19 pathways are embedded fully. Partnership working with other schools through the West Wiltshire federation is supporting this process well.

Teaching in the sixth form is often good, with students increasingly being given opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and work with other students to plan and develop work together. Teachers are clearly developing students' understanding of examination standards and how their current work might relate to their targets. This is most effective where it happens consistently. A good example of this was seen in a psychology lesson where students were marking each other's work to examination criteria and comparing their evaluation with the teacher's marking.

The senior staff in the sixth form are clearly ambitious to improve. They are setting clear targets and are developing secure planning and evaluation cycles. A sixth-form plan identifies improvement areas but these are not yet sufficiently robust or clearly understood by all staff and students. For individual students, parents are involved in reviews of progress which help to identify areas for personal improvement, with senior staff tracking subsequent progress.

#### These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

Sixty five questionnaires were returned by parents. Those parents who responded were very positive about the progress their children were making and there were several comments about the good quality of care, guidance and support received by students, and the fact that the school goes out of its way to ensure that the needs of those with learning difficulties, or who are vulnerable, are met. Most parents believe that the school is well led and managed and that teaching is good.

A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the way in which the school deals with unacceptable behaviour, and the perception of some students that the way in which some teachers implement the systems for managing behaviour is unfair. Others comments included concerns about lack of continuity of teaching in some subjects, because of split classes, and a lack of regular homework.

Understandably, some parents said that they were very pleased that the school will be moving into a new building later this academic year. This will remove some of students' concerns about the school's current accommodation.

#### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The George Ward 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 65 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1112 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Stro Agı	ngly ree	Agı	ree	Disa	gree		ngly gree
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	11	17	44	68	8	12	2	3
The school keeps my child safe	10	15	50	77	4	6	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	20	31	43	66	0	0	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	18	50	77	0	0	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	7	11	55	85	2	3	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	7	11	43	66	12	18	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	4	6	40	62	18	28	1	2
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)	7	11	48	74	2	3	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	9	14	49	75	4	6	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	3	5	37	57	18	28	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	6	9	38	58	11	17	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	9	14	45	69	5	8	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	12	18	47	72	4	6	1	2

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 oustanding 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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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:	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.
	<ul> <li>The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>The quality of teaching.</li> <li>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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 The George Ward School, Melksham SN12 8DQ

You will remember when inspectors came to your school recently, and I am writing to tell you our findings. I would like to thank you for welcoming us and telling us about your school. I particularly enjoyed my visit to the Winter Showcase evening, and was very impressed by the large number of you taking part and how confident you were to perform in public.

As a result of our inspection, we have given your school a notice to improve. Your headteacher and other senior leaders have recognised that for some time you have not been making as much progress as students of similar ability in other schools. They have already put in place systems to improve the situation and these are beginning to make a difference. For example, you told us that behaviour is much better so the atmosphere in school is calmer, and the curriculum has improved, particularly for Years 10 and 11. Nearly all of you told us that the feedback teachers give you means that you know your targets and how to reach them. The care, support and guidance you are given are good, particularly for those of you who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. However, by the time of this inspection there had not been time to sort out all of the school's weaknesses.

The main problem for the school is that GCSE results, particularly in mathematics and science, are too low. The school has already put into place very clear plans to support students in Year 11, so they will do as well as possible at GCSE in 2010. However, this is only a short-term solution, so we have also asked the school to make sure that the quality of teaching and the rate at which you all make progress improve. The school's leaders will monitor the impact of the changes they make, to find out exactly what works best, so that more effort can be put in to the most useful things.

We have given your school a year to improve and then there will be another inspection. We are confident that staff and students can work together to make sure that you all make better progress. The process has already begun, and will be helped by your move to the new school building in the summer.

Yours sincerely

Mary Massey

Her Majesty's Inspector

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