

Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118789
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379684
Inspection dates	2–3 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Alan Taylor-Bennett 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	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	1014
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	289
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rosie Serpis
Headteacher	Linda Wybar
Date of previous school inspection	26–27 February 2007
School address	Southfield Road Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 9UJ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 46 lessons and the work of 45 teachers, some jointly with senior staff. In addition, meetings were held with groups of students, representatives of the governing body, and staff. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including the school's development plans, its self-review, analyses of the attainment and progress of its students, records of lesson observations, and policies. Inspectors took account of the responses on the 534 questionnaires received from parents and carers, and other questionnaire responses from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well skills to support independent learning are being developed.
- The impact of the use of assessment, and short-, medium- and long-term feedback mechanisms, on the quality of learning and the progress made in each year group.
- The progress and the quality of learning in the sixth form, particularly in Year 12.

Information about the school

Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School is an academically selective school, with a specialism in music and English. It is of average size and the large majority of students are of White British heritage. Very few students have special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are cooperative arrangements in the sixth form with Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys and The Skinners' School to broaden curriculum provision. The school holds the Sportsmark and Healthy Schools status.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The quality of education provided by Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School is outstanding. The headteacher and her senior staff have established a strong and positive ethos throughout the school that supports excellent attitudes to learning and promotes outstanding behaviour. Girls have an obvious and well-founded sense of pride in their school and their place in it. Staff morale is high. Good leadership and management, an evident ambition to maintain existing very high standards while securing improvements in other areas, coupled with accurate self-evaluation and development planning that focuses on appropriate priorities, give the school a secure capacity to continue to improve.

The sixth form has a distinctive character but Years 12 and 13 still feel very much a part of the school. The many strengths evident in Key Stages 3 and 4 are also apparent in this outstandingly successful sixth form.

All aspects of the personal development of all groups of students are outstanding. The girls are confident yet thoughtful and mature young people who have appropriately high levels of personal ambition. Achievement is impressive, with levels of attainment throughout the school that are high because of the excellent good progress students make. Occasionally, the ground gained in some Year 12 classes is less striking, but when this happens, better progress is then made in Year 13.

Students are extremely well cared for and supported. The school identifies individual needs rapidly and astutely, and it responds in ways that enable individuals to feel very well looked after.

The range of subjects and qualifications on offer is well suited to students' needs. The curriculum is outstanding because of the ways in which individual subjects find opportunities to provide challenge and stimulus that go well beyond examination requirements.

The school's specialisms of music and English are used very effectively to enhance provision and to provide an exciting range of opportunities for the girls to broaden their range of experiences. Many students take part in high quality and well-planned music and English-based activities, many of which benefit the local community.

Teaching is consistently at least good across all subjects and it is outstanding in about one lesson in four. The best teaching unleashes the girls' creative and

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intellectual potential, and their willingness to contribute to lessons, through frequent and highly effective use of questioning to constantly gauge understanding. The school's drive to improve the degree of independence of thinking has not transformed enough of the good teaching to be outstanding overall, but it has the capacity to do so.

Students' written work is checked reliably but relatively little of the marking provides sufficient stimulus to help students to improve the level of sophistication of their work.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding to at least 60% by July 2012 by:
 - ensuring that questioning in lessons is frequent and well targeted and is used to provide high levels of challenge and support for all students, as well as a means for the teacher to gauge understanding and steer the learning
 - capitalising on students' creativity and enthusiasm for learning by giving them more opportunities to respond to challenges in their own ways
 - using marking to provide high quality feedback and to stimulate discussion and debate, so that students are able to see for themselves how to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The selective nature of the school means that girls arrive with high levels of attainment. However, a tremendously strong ethos, which combines high expectations with high levels of support, means that progress towards impressive levels of attainment in GCSE examinations is very strong in all year groups. As a result, their achievement is outstanding. The girls have a readiness and enthusiasm to make progress; there is a manifest enjoyment of learning, most obvious when there is challenge and high levels of stimulus in the teaching. Although the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in each year group is small, their needs are known and very well understood; provision is adapted extremely well to enable them to flourish and they make outstanding progress as a result.

There are excellent working relationships between all members of the school community, based on mutual trust and respect; even at times when staff have to remind girls about how uniform should be worn, it is done, and received, without rancour. The uptake of sport is very high and this, combined with an interest in eating wisely and a sophisticated appreciation of the nature of risks to their physical and mental well-being, results in students often achieving very healthy lifestyles, as reflected in the school's two national awards. The range and number of contributions that students make to their school are impressive. Many are mentors to younger

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students. For example, Year 8 students actively support new pupils when they arrive in Year 7, and there are departmental student mentoring arrangements in place. This generosity of spirit extends to the local community. Opportunities suggested by the school’s work towards the Arts Award, for example, promote exceptionally high levels of community engagement in music and the arts, and the 80% of the girls who take part in the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme make important contributions to their local community.

The impact of the advice and guidance offered to students about their future, at all points in the school, strongly develops their capacity to make good decisions and contributes powerfully to helping students to secure their future economic well-being. Opportunities for moral, social, cultural and spiritual development are many and varied, and often take the form of exciting challenges that have high levels of uptake. For example, every form group is involved in the annual Year 8 Shakespeare challenge, which involves identifying an extract from a play and bringing it to life in a 20 minute piece of drama. A wide range of roles is involved in these mini-productions, all of which develop self-esteem and confidence. The school also offers a range of opportunities to take part in cultural visits to many parts of the world. Students’ extremely high regard for their school, and for their learning, is reflected in high levels of attendance.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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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How effective is the provision?

The quality of care, advice and support is a significant strength of the school. Staff aim to know all of the girls as individuals and there is a consistently high level of responsiveness to need throughout the school. One parent told inspectors about a very difficult time their family had faced, and how the headteacher had responded personally and managed the situation, including support for the student concerned, with great skill and sensitivity across all staff. Transitions, such as students' arrival in Year 7 and the start of GCSE courses, are closely and extremely well managed. Links with outside agencies to support the exceptional needs of some students are highly effective. Staff take appropriate pride in this exceptional level of care.

Teaching is good, and there are aspects that are outstanding. The best teaching excites a superb response from students. For example, in one Spanish lesson, levels of engagement and enjoyment of the learning were extremely high because of the pace, dynamic and stimulating teaching which constantly tracked understanding via questioning in the foreign language. Students thrive in this kind of lesson. Good teaching is still very effective in supporting rapid and secure progress, because of the strong predisposition of the girls towards learning, but sometimes it reduces or even removes challenges that the girls would relish tackling. In these lessons, teachers tend to give too much information and provide too many answers rather than promote the active engagement of students.

The outstanding curriculum provides a very wide range of extension activities. These are often located securely in subjects' schemes of work, and therefore lend them relevance and promote students' capacity to see connections across pieces of work. The range of extra-curricular activities is very wide and greatly valued by pupils. Many are involved in musical and sporting activities before, during and after school, for example. Partnerships with other institutions are of high quality and strongly support learning.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The vision of the headteacher and the senior team is communicated clearly and effectively. As a result, this is a highly successful and a very happy school. A significant aspect of this vision is the high level of importance attached to responding

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to the learning needs and well-being of individuals. The school’s close tracking of the performance of groups across several years and its willingness to adapt provision in the light of its findings means that equality of opportunity is outstanding.

A high level of responsibility is devolved to middle leaders. This works well because staff are clearly passionate about their subjects and the level of care and guidance is robust throughout the school. Systems to hold middle leaders to account are well-defined and effective. Development planning identifies priorities clearly and these plans are concise and well understood. However, they do not always give a clear sense of the specific actions that must happen in each of the areas targeted for improvement, and the outcomes that could be expected at key points during the year which would signal that plans are on course. Whilst the school’s systems and management structures work effectively and efficiently, the level of quality assurance is not always sufficient to ensure that aspects of provision are consistently outstanding in every area. There is a continual and effective emphasis on improving the quality of teaching. As a consequence, the proportion that is outstanding has increased since the previous inspection. However, there is no agreed, bespoke description of what constitutes outstanding teaching in the main school and in the sixth form, resulting in the occasionally optimistic grading of teaching at the borderline between good and outstanding.

Members of the governing body support the work of the school actively, and they have the best interests of the students and the staff at heart in all they do. The governing body has made important contributions to the development of the school over recent years by, for example, giving a good steer to the better opportunities presented by the new buildings. It exercises appropriate oversight of the school’s very good financial systems but the quality of its involvement in other areas is not always as rigorous as it may be. Systems to ensure the safety of students are satisfactory in all respects but rely on the outstanding levels of care and individual support in the school, and are not subject to frequent formal quality assurance procedures. Parents and carers benefit from regular and high quality communications about the work of the school and the progress of their daughters, but there are no formal systems in place to enable them to be involved in contributing to the strategic direction of the school.

Despite its selective nature, the school draws students from a comparatively small area. As a result, it knows its community well and there are well-developed and important links which make good contributions to community cohesion. International links are very strong and include the building and equipping of a school in Ghana.

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	2

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school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Many students choose to stay on into the sixth form. This is because they value the school's promotion of academic excellence and the support it provides for their higher education aspirations. Neither in this, nor in any other respect, are they disappointed. Rates of progress to high levels of academic achievement at A level are exceptionally good, and nearly all students secure the university place of their choice. Nearly three quarters of students undertake voluntary community work of some kind. Many help by mentoring, for example supporting Year 7 students at a local school to improve their reading fluency, while some teach primary school pupils a modern foreign language through music. Students' experience and understanding of life beyond their local community are greatly enhanced through an exceptional number of very influential, long-standing and mutually beneficial international links, such as those with India and Ghana.

The A-level-based curriculum is entirely appropriate for students' needs. It is delivered imaginatively, and it stimulates high quality learning and the enjoyment of intellectual challenge. Partnership arrangements with two neighbouring school sixth forms enable a wide range of courses to be offered. Teaching in the sixth form is consistently at least good, and it is sometimes outstanding. The very best lessons are characterised by a buzz of inquisitive discussion and debate, with students busily interrogating their own and others' grasp of the work, ably facilitated by their teachers. A striking feature is the level of care and guidance, very much valued by sixth formers. They appreciate the positive and trusting relationships they have with their teachers. Individuals' progress towards challenging targets is monitored regularly and interventions are effective because they are both timely and tailored to the individual. This very high quality of provision, supporting outstanding outcomes for students, is a direct result of the excellent leadership and management of the sixth form.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
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Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers returning questionnaires was exceptionally high. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are happy with their daughters' experiences at the school; nearly three quarters expressed this sentiment strongly. The consistency of the positive response across all of the areas covered in the questionnaire is striking, and comments did not disclose any trends in views that were other than positive. One parent captured the tone of the many appreciative comments made, in saying, 'This is an excellent school, offering girls both academic and life opportunities on a broad scale. I wish I was a pupil there!'

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Tunbridge Wells Girls’ Grammar 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 534 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1014 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	357	67	164	31	8	1	1	0
The school keeps my child safe	330	62	197	37	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	221	41	260	49	28	5	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	326	61	177	33	7	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	308	58	211	40	3	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	183	34	258	48	63	12	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	161	30	303	57	37	7	7	1
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)	287	54	210	39	6	1	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	296	55	213	40	14	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	227	43	241	45	15	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	177	33	266	50	12	2	1	0
The school is led and managed effectively	399	75	124	23	2	0	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	389	73	136	25	3	1	0	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.

4 November 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Tunbridge Wells Girls' Grammar School,
Tunbridge Wells
TN4 9UJ**



Thank you for the warmth of the welcome you extended to the inspection team who visited your school recently. We enjoyed speaking with you and seeing your work in lessons; you made a considerable contribution to the inspection. You are right to be so proud of TWGGS: we concluded that the quality of education it is providing for you is outstanding. The quality of the sixth form is also outstanding. You will probably want to read the full report on the Ofsted website but I have presented a brief summary of our findings here.

The attainment of students in GCSE and A-level examinations is very much higher than the national averages. This is not just because the school is selective on grounds of ability. You make very good progress as a result of your excellent attitudes to learning, a very good curriculum, excellent care, guidance and support and teaching that is always at least good, and is sometimes outstanding. All aspects of your personal development are strong and the school helps you to become very mature and sophisticated, yet broad-minded, young people with a keen sense of community spirit.

Your headteacher has a very clear vision for the school. She and the senior team know how to make the provision even better. We agreed that more of the teaching could be outstanding and identified ways for this to happen: all of the teaching should allow you to engage with high levels of challenge to reflect your ability and high levels of motivation, teachers should use frequent questioning to gauge your grasp of ideas and elicit higher quality contributions from you and provide you with even higher levels of stimulus, and marking should give you clearer messages about how to improve your work further.

Improving an outstanding school is not easy, but staff are committed to giving every one of you the very best quality experience during your time at TWGGS. I know that you will all look for ways to work with them to achieve this and that you will benefit as a consequence.

I wish you every success and happiness in the future.

Yours sincerely

Alan Taylor-Bennett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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