

Dartford Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118883
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379701
Inspection dates	16–17 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Anne Wellham 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	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1064
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	259
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Brooke
Headteacher	Sharon Pritchard
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2007
School address	Shepherds Lane Dartford DA1 2NT
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspection team observed 34 parts of lessons taught by 30 teachers. Four learning walks, comprising short visits to lessons in English, mathematics and a range of subjects across the curriculum were carried out jointly with the leaders of English and mathematics and senior leaders. Five lessons were observed jointly with senior leaders. Meetings were held with leaders and managers, two other representatives from the governing body and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation, as well as 274 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, and those completed by students and by staff.

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

- How well procedures to track the progress of students, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and minority ethnic groups, are used to improve performance.
- How effectively assessment information is used to plan lessons that engage and meet the individual needs of students.
- To what extent leaders and managers set challenging targets to make sure that students make better-than-expected progress given their starting points.

Information about the school

Dartford Grammar School for Girls is an academically selective school with a large sixth form. Students attend from several south London boroughs as well as Dartford and the surrounding rural areas. The majority of students are White British with one third from minority ethnic groups, the largest of which are Black African, Asian and Indian and those from Other White backgrounds. The proportion of students speaking English as an additional language is close to the national average although very few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than that found nationally. The school has specialist status in science, mathematics and information communication technology (ICT). It achieved National Healthy Schools Status in 2010. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2011, having been head of school for two years, during which time the substantive headteacher worked as an Executive Headteacher of this school and another school in the local authority for one year.

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

Dartford Grammar School for Girls is a high achieving school which provides its students with a good education. Students attain excellent results in national examinations and they make good progress from their starting points, which are well above the national average. The proportion of A* and A grades at GCSE and A level is increasing because the school is using data analysis more effectively to identify and target subjects where students are not achieving as well as they could.

Students are proud to be part of the school community. Their outstanding behaviour and high attendance make a significant contribution to their learning. All students feel extremely safe and secure. Bullying and racism are very rare and dealt with quickly and effectively. The respect that students show to each other and the concern they feel for others less fortunate than themselves is translated into the multitude of ways in which they contribute to the local and wider community. The good curriculum, underpinned by strong partnerships and specialist science provision, supports students' development and learning very well.

There are examples of outstanding teaching and learning in the school but there is also a minority of weaker teaching. Where teaching is outstanding, the activities and tasks take account of students' learning and work, are carefully planned to move learning on quickly and provide sufficient intellectual challenge. However, in a few lessons the pace of learning is not quick enough because teachers do not assess students' understanding at key points during the lessons and amend their teaching in response to their needs. Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in some subjects are a key factor in preventing students from making outstanding progress overall.

Through the decisive leadership of the headteacher the school is introducing rigorous procedures to monitor and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and provide a thorough review of performance across all subject areas. This underpins its good capacity to improve. Good governance provides the school with well-informed challenge and support.

The sixth form is highly valued by parents, carers, students and staff. Sixth formers are excellent role models for younger students and make a significant contribution to the school through an excellent enrichment programme. Outcomes for sixth form students vary in quality. Examination results are high and students make outstanding progress in subjects where there is consistently strong teaching and they are guided to take courses that are matched carefully to their capabilities and interests. The

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leadership and management of the sixth form are no more than satisfactory because self-evaluation, although improving, is not rigorous enough to identify precisely and communicate clearly what needs to be done to improve the quality of outcomes for all students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching consistently provides high-quality learning for students across all subjects by:
 - identifying clear opportunities to assess and check students' understanding during lessons so that the pace of teaching can be amended in response to the learning that is taking place
 - taking account of students' different learning styles and individual needs so that all activities and tasks present sufficient challenge.
- Improve the outcomes for students in the sixth form by:
 - monitoring and evaluating provision more rigorously so that precise action can be taken to eradicate differences in achievement between subjects and to improve the consistency of teaching
 - ensuring that leaders and managers at all levels communicate a clear vision for improvement based on thorough self-evaluation.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In the majority of lessons observed the quality of learning was good with some instances of students making outstanding progress. Students are highly motivated and their keenness to achieve makes a significant contribution to their learning, even in the few lessons where the teaching does not challenge or engage them. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language or those who are potentially vulnerable receive intervention and guidance, which allows them to make good progress.

The school is exceptionally effective in promoting students' social, moral and cultural development. Students from different backgrounds and cultures collaborate in groups and work well together, often helping each other to learn. They respond well to opportunities to reflect on ethical issues and moral dilemmas and enjoy taking on positions of responsibility. They care deeply about those less fortunate than themselves and every student is involved in charity fundraising. Students have a good understanding of the risks that have an impact on their physical and mental health and emotional well-being and recognise the benefits of a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Students realise their own capacity for their future economic well-being through their high attendance and good punctuality. They apply skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology well and develop enterprise skills, personal qualities and team work by participating in the wide range of clubs,

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competitions and educational visits.

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	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The variation in the quality of teaching prevents students' learning from being outstanding. In a few lessons the work is not sufficiently challenging. However, where learning is of exceptional quality, teachers' excellent subject knowledge inspires students, stimulates their thinking and accelerates their progress towards specific targets. In these lessons students enjoy their learning because tasks are varied and interactive and take full account of preferred learning styles and individual learning needs. Effective teachers use a wide range of ways to assess students' understanding and are confident enough to take risks to amend tasks accordingly and push students to think for themselves. In addition, students receive precise, meaningful feedback on how to improve their work.

The curriculum provides a good range of academic subjects and meets the needs of most students well. Extra-curricular activities, including many visits abroad, visits to theatres, art galleries, music, art and science clubs, help to broaden and extend students' educational experience. Progress has been made since the previous inspection in making lessons more relevant to students but teachers do not fully exploit opportunities to draw on their personal experiences and use what is happening in wider society and the international community as a context for learning. The science specialism is an example of excellent partnership working. For example the science fair brings over 2,000 visitors to the school and provides

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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leadership opportunities for many students.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and the governing body have a shared understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and recent self-evaluation is providing a clear baseline from which to secure future improvement. Rigorous actions to analyse assessment data about the achievement of different groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, those who speak English as an additional language and the gifted and talented, have resulted in more precise monitoring. This is ensuring that all groups are making similar progress and effective action is being taken to narrow any gaps in performance across subjects.

Dedicated training for middle leaders in observing lessons accurately and feeding back to staff to help them to improve their teaching is improving the quality of challenge and support that they are able to provide to staff in their teams. Targeted support is improving accountability and raising expectations in the few areas of the school where relative performance could be better.

The school meets the statutory requirements for safeguarding and practice is good. The school engages with parents and carers well and is successful in involving them in supporting their children's learning and behaviour. The school actively promotes equal opportunity. It places a high value on the diversity of the students' backgrounds and ensures that the school is a cohesive community. It engages well with local partners and broader national and international communities.

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

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
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	1

Sixth form

Outcomes in the sixth form are generally good or better, but inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning prevent them from being outstanding. Most students follow courses which are appropriate to their abilities and interests, but in previous years transitions to AS- and A-level programmes have not been monitored carefully enough. A recent review of teaching and learning and the improved use of assessment data are beginning to have an impact on reducing variations in achievement between subjects and the number of students who do not complete courses at AS level. A stronger focus on accountability at all levels of management to secure planning for improvement is having a positive impact on improving the quality of students’ outcomes.

The sixth form makes a positive contribution to the school and the local community. Students’ good personal development and well-being are enriched by a full and varied range of extra-curricular activities, as well as opportunities to take on posts of responsibility. These all develop valuable workplace skills as well as contributing to students’ enjoyment and achievement. Students’ aspirations are high and most proceed to university. Some students, parents and carers report that they would value more guidance on transition into the sixth form, university choices and alternative pathways.

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	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

A small minority of parents and carers responded to the questionnaire. All parents and carers who responded felt that the school keeps their children safe and most are happy with their children’s experience at school. Inspection evidence supports this view. Around one third of parents and carers who responded submitted written

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responses with an almost equal balance of positive and negative views. There were concerns about the variation in the quality of teaching, communication and the promotion of healthy lifestyles. A few parents and carers felt that guidance in the sixth form could be improved. Inspectors found some evidence of variability in these aspects of provision.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dartford Grammar School for Girls 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 274 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1064 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	142	52	116	42	7	3	6	2
The school keeps my child safe	161	59	113	41	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	113	41	143	52	11	4	3	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	128	47	125	46	9	3	6	2
The teaching is good at this school	123	45	131	48	12	4	2	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	80	29	149	54	32	12	5	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	62	23	161	59	35	13	5	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)	129	47	108	39	17	6	3	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	109	40	138	50	16	6	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	104	38	137	50	17	6	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	69	25	145	53	18	7	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	111	41	142	52	4	1	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	154	56	106	39	8	3	4	1

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.



18 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Dartford Grammar School for Girls, Dartford DA1 2NT

Thank you for the friendly and polite welcome you gave us when we inspected your school. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers, visiting some of your lessons and dropping in on some of the clubs. We also enjoyed looking at the brilliant displays of art work along the corridors. We think your school provides you with a good education, allowing you to achieve excellent examination results and develop into thoughtful and independent young adults. You told us how safe and secure you feel in school. We were very impressed with the respect that you show each other, your outstanding attendance and behaviour and the many opportunities you have to learn outside lessons.

The headteacher and senior staff, helped by the governors, lead your school well. In order to make the school even better we have asked the school to make teaching more consistently good or outstanding. We have asked all the teachers to use the information that they have about your progress, knowledge and understanding to challenge you and to take account of your different learning styles and individual needs. You can help by discussing your learning with your teachers and letting them know if you find work too easy or too hard.

The sixth form is a very important part of the school and those of you in the sixth form set an excellent example for younger students to follow. You work hard and involve yourselves in a wide range of activities that help the school and the community. We have asked the school to monitor the teaching and curriculum in the sixth form more rigorously to ensure that you all take the correct combination of courses and reach your full potential in whatever subject you study.

We wish you all at Dartford Grammar School for Girls a very successful future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Wellham
Her Majesty's Inspector

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