

Spalding Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120665
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	380083
Inspection dates	7–8 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Trevor Riddiough HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	933
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Casswell
Headteacher	Nigel Ryan
Date of previous school inspection	22 May 2007
School address	Priory Road Spalding PE11 2XH
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 36 teachers, three tutor groups and two assemblies. Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, groups of students, and members of the governing body. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of students' progress, performance data, students' work, whole-school and subject development plans, numerous policies, school documents, incident logs, and case studies. Completed questionnaires from 268 parents and carers and 142 students were received and analysed.

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

- To what extent leaders, at all levels, have sustained or improved progress across all years, and especially for students of very highest abilities in the main school and the sixth form.
- How well assessment is used to promote the progress that students make.
- To what extent the curriculum meets the needs of students of all abilities, both in the main school and in the sixth form.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels (including governance) in monitoring, evaluating and improving performance in the main school and in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Spalding Grammar School selects its students by ability and the intake comes from Spalding and the surrounding area. The school is smaller than average in size with a larger than average sixth form comprising just under one third of the total school population. About a quarter of the sixth form is made up of girls. While the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low, around one third of the students in the sixth form are eligible for the education maintenance allowance. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very low, as is the proportion from minority ethnic groups. The majority of students are White British. The school has acquired specialist status in languages and engineering. The school has been awarded the Sportsmark and Intermediate International Schools Awards.

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

Spalding Grammar is an outstanding school with a good sixth form. It enables its students to achieve high levels in both their personal and academic development. All groups of students make good progress between Years 7 and 11. Those few students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because they receive effective personalised support. In the sixth form, students make good progress from their starting points to gain above-average standards overall by the end of Year 13. Combined with the continued high quality of the students' personal development, this enables them to gain good success in their applications to university, further training or employment. The school places as much importance on preparing students for their future lives as it does on their academic success. Students develop into mature and thoughtful citizens, able to cope effectively with challenges. They achieve well in many other areas such as sports, music and their contribution to life in school and the local community. These all help to develop their self-confidence, social skills and their ability to get on with people from other cultural backgrounds.

The care and guidance that the students receive is outstanding. The vertical tutor groupings together with the strong support provided within the house system contribute significantly to students' enjoyment of school. As a result they feel safe, achieve high levels of attendance and know that adults and other students care about them. Students behave very well in lessons and around school. Only occasionally do they lose concentration and their learning slows down in the few lessons which do not challenge them sufficiently. A significant strength is the curriculum, which is reviewed regularly and adjusted to meet the needs of all students in the school. It is flexible and is tailored, when necessary, to meet the needs of individual students, for example by varying the rates of progression. The school's specialism has widened the choices in languages to include Spanish and Mandarin and the engineering department provides for both academic and applied learning pathways.

Students learn well because teaching is nearly always good or better. Students spend time working in pairs and groups, discussing ideas and gaining the skills to undertake tasks independently of their teachers. This was identified as an issue from the previous inspection and has been successfully tackled as a priority by the school. The school's 'Active Learning Group' has been influential in the sharing of good practice and ensuring a greater focus on the impact of teaching strategies on students' learning. However, there remain elements of teaching and assessment which are not

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completely consistent across the school. In some lessons, higher-attaining students are not progressing quite as well because their learning is not specifically planned to challenge and extend them fully. Oral feedback to students is usually very helpful, but marking is sometimes less so, especially in noting how students may improve their work or in setting them targets for their next steps in learning.

The school's capacity for continued improvement is good. This is exemplified in the school's track record of improvement and its aspiration to improve even further. School self-evaluation is accurate and the school knows what to do to sustain its journey of further development. Leaders and governors are reflective and self-critical. The headteacher and his leadership team encourage staff and students to put forward ideas and take risks by trying out new and innovative strategies for learning. This has promoted a strongly positive morale and a sense of pride for all who work in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of students gaining the highest levels and grades throughout the school by:
 - increasing the proportion of high-quality teaching so that the majority is outstanding
 - ensuring that the learning needs of the highest-attaining students are planned and catered for in every lesson
 - improving the quality of oral and written feedback given to students on how to improve their work to that of the exemplary practice that already exists.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are well above average. The school has established a track record for enabling its students to attain consistently well above national average standards in GCSE examinations; this includes overall attainment in the school's specialist subjects. Provisional data for 2011 show this trend continued with virtually all Year 11 students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. The same proportion of students are on track to achieve these very high results again this year. The few students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive well-targeted support and their curriculum is tailored specifically to meet their needs and, as a result, their progress is exceptionally rapid. There are few differences in the achievement of different groups of students in the school; however, some students of the highest ability do not achieve the levels or grades that could be expected of them. There is also still some variation in the performance of subjects, notably in English. However, in both cases there are good arrangements in place to tackle these variations and the gaps are closing.

Students' attitudes to learning and their ability to apply themselves in lessons are

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excellent. For example, in a history lesson, students worked hard and supported each other productively in small groups to research and develop their understanding of Cromwell’s military role, which they then taught to others. Activities are generally well planned and students have regular opportunities to discuss and extend their learning. This is reflected in the good progress they make in lessons.

Students are welcoming, confident and comfortable with their teachers, visitors and other adults. Those interviewed confirmed a very effective understanding of risks with e-safety, travel, communications, and virtual social media. There is comprehensive provision for the promotion of healthy lifestyles, including that for emotional health and relationships, leading to exemplary adoption of safe practices and signposting for advice. Participation in physical activity is high. Students feel listened to and their attitudes towards bullying are commendable. They have an open mature acknowledgement that bullying might happen and are secure in their knowledge of how to deal with it. Students take the opportunities to lead in a wide range of opportunities such as their involvement in links with China and charitable events. Their influence on local sport is notable and within the school the vertical tutoring system allows students of all ages to take on everyday roles of responsibility.

Students are curious about the world around them and enthusiastically engage in new artistic, sporting or cultural experiences. They have a well-developed sense of fairness, right and wrong, and a tolerance of other people’s views. They engage well with other people from a range of backgrounds but lack some first-hand experiences of communities in contrasting circumstances. This limits their full understanding of life in a multicultural society.

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	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

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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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers plan a good range of activities that sustain students' interest and develop higher-order learning skills. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace that challenge learners, yet allow time for deeper thinking and reflection. Discriminate use of questioning assesses the learning and extends it further. High expectations promote good development of the students' ability to work independently. Occasionally a lack of appropriate planning for the highest attaining students in the class reduces opportunities for them to show the stronger or exceptional progress of which they are capable. In a very small minority of lessons observed, progress was limited because the use of time did not encourage a fast enough pace or the degree of challenge did not fully engage the students. Teachers use assessment well to support learning. Clear assessment criteria are used successfully by teachers and students as a guide to what they need to do to improve their work to reach their challenging targets and secure high grades in tests and examinations. However, this is not always recorded in their books so that they, their teachers and parents can check on progress.

The curriculum meets the needs of students exceptionally well. It is flexible and responds to individual learning needs, interests and strengths of the students. Pathways are constructed around students in terms of ability and aptitude, supported by strong information and guidance. The curriculum is under regular review and some developments attract the attention and interest of other schools, giving the school a teaching role, for example in the establishment of applied courses in engineering. Students make progress through the curriculum at a varied pace to suit their aptitudes; able students are entered for some examinations early and are offered additional qualifications such as triple science or advanced courses in mathematics. Flexi-days and developments from the 'Free Learning Block' initiative, which draws on support from external partners, provide effective cross-curricular provision and make a significant contribution to students' outstanding preparation for their future economic well-being.

The school has a highly effective appreciation of the unique character and challenges facing its selective, largely male intake. It has a keen understanding of the pressures the boys are under to succeed and thrive. Consequently, it has developed highly personalised but systematic approaches to care, guidance and support which ensure that students are treated as individuals in order that they can thrive in a challenging, academic environment. Problems are carefully anticipated with key groups at different points in their school career. The care for the most vulnerable groups from a health, familial or economic perspective is exemplary and striking examples are noted. Consequently, the school works extremely effectively to track progress and support highly effective personal outcomes for its students. Every child is well known to staff and the school can rapidly assess its effectiveness and re-shape support if required.

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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?

Since the last inspection, many aspects of provision have improved. Target-setting and monitoring of students’ standards and progress have become more effective. Students work well with staff to discuss how their work is assessed. Academic mentoring with students and their parents has generated improved standards. The expertise within the teams of leaders at all levels contributes towards this success. The headteacher and senior managers provide strong and effective leadership with a clear focus on raising standards which is shared by all who work at the school. Middle leaders have become confident and skilled in evaluating the work of their department and taking successful action for improvement. The governing body keeps a keen eye on securing the future for the school, as in its crucial involvement in the extensive re-building programmes and in its work to maintain a balanced budget.

The school matches its commitment to equality of opportunity with highly effective practice and application of its inclusive policies, and by tackling discrimination robustly. The school is keen for parents and carers to support their children’s work so that equality is the same for all families, whatever their backgrounds. Consultation and use of parental views are effective, particularly with one of the most recent developments relating to vertical tutoring. The school’s learning platform on the internet has been adapted to enable communication to and from home and offers parents a secure channel of communication regarding their children’s progress as well as on-line resources. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and robust, with rigorous attention given to child protection issues. All staff receive regular child protection and e-safety training, although a small number of risk assessments lack detail.

The school is a cohesive community with a broad social mix, and elements of the curriculum, as well as the range of trips and visits, help to develop students’ understanding of local, national and international contexts. The school recognises that the impact of its promotion of community cohesion is uneven across the religious, ethnic and socio-economic aspects of its work and steps are planned to iron these out.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
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	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

Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broader than in the main school and the ability range has widened in recent years. Despite this, overall performance has improved to above average levels in 2011, students' progress has remained good and further improvements are evident this year. This positive picture is due to more students studying courses which are well suited to their abilities and aspirations, better teaching and the improved confidence of students in managing their own learning. Attendance rates have also improved. Students enjoy their learning and commented on the way teachers inject interest in their work by, for example, engaging them in robust debates in English literature, giving high emphasis on practical work in science subjects or applying their learning into new contexts such as in economics or business studies.

Teaching is good and matches the profile in the main school. While there is some outstanding teaching, not enough of it meets the learning needs of the most able students. A strength is the high-quality care and guidance which enables students to be very well supported in their learning and which prepares them extremely well for their future education or the world of work. Sixth form admissions have been widened to include students from other schools in the locality. These students settle in extremely quickly and enjoy the responsibility they are given to take ownership of their learning. Effective action has been taken to improve their study skills and raise the achievement of these students, particularly the girls new to the sixth form and the school. The evaluation of provision in the sixth form is effective. A detailed action plan has been drawn up and is having a good impact on improving overall academic progress. As a result, the proportion of students reaching the highest grades at A and AS level is approaching the challenging targets that have been set.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
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

Responses from parents and carers were extremely positive, with the overwhelming majority saying that their children enjoyed school. As one parent said, 'since my son has been at this school, his learning and social skills have gone from strength to strength'. A small minority raised the school's promotion of a healthy lifestyle as a concern. Inspectors followed up these concerns; they found that the school has effective policies in place and a wide range of opportunities, linked to a highly effective curriculum, to support students' awareness of healthy living. Inspectors found that students understand well the elements of a healthy lifestyle and many live up to them in their participation in the many school activities on offer.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Spalding 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 268 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 933 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	106	40	147	55	11	4	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	96	36	163	61	8	3	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	114	43	129	48	15	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	111	41	133	50	13	5	7	3
The teaching is good at this school	97	36	143	53	17	6	2	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	82	31	133	50	35	13	6	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	48	18	164	61	45	17	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)	91	34	131	49	14	5	9	3
The school meets my child’s particular needs	101	38	143	53	15	6	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	84	31	142	53	26	10	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	63	24	144	54	28	10	7	3
The school is led and managed effectively	89	33	139	52	13	5	14	5
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	123	46	122	46	17	6	3	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.



9 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Spalding Grammar School, Spalding, PE11 2XH

Firstly, thank you for the warm welcome you gave us during the inspection. We found it very helpful to talk with you, look at your work and visit your lessons. You helped us to understand what it is really like to be a student at your school. We were particularly pleased to see you getting really involved in your lessons and making the most of the opportunities afforded to you.

We found that your school provides you with an outstanding education. You told us that you really enjoy coming to school and that you feel very safe. There are excellent relationships between yourselves and your teachers. You are well supported by your teachers, both academically in your lessons and personally so that you are well prepared for the next stage of your lives. Your behaviour in classes and towards each other is exemplary. The curriculum provides you with some interesting courses and the extra-curricular activities provide some memorable experiences. You take on a wide range of activities, including opportunities to show leadership skills and help younger students within the vertical tutor groups. In the sixth form, you make good progress and get the results you need to go on to higher education, work or further training.

We noticed that a number of you, especially high-attaining students, do not achieve the highest levels or grades possible because you are not challenged sufficiently in all your lessons. We have asked the school to look into this and ensure that in future more of you make outstanding progress and achieve the highest grades possible. We have also asked your teachers to give you clear, written advice on how to improve. This is an area where you can help by making sure you act upon the advice given, especially after your work has been marked.

You can be proud to attend an outstanding school where everyone wants the best for you. I wish you all success in the future and hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Spalding Grammar School.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Riddiough
Her Majesty's Inspector

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