

Maidstone Grammar School

Barton Road, Maidstone, ME15 7BT

Inspection dates 26–27 September 2013

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
| | This inspection: | Outstanding | 1 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of teaching | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Outstanding | 1 |
| Leadership and management | | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Maidstone Grammar School has maintained and built upon the very high standards seen at the time of its last inspection.
- Students' achievement is outstanding, both in their academic programmes and their personal development.
- Students thrive on the high expectations for their academic achievement. They thoroughly enjoy the challenge of learning, and make outstanding progress from their already above average attainment when they join the school.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students' above average attainment at the higher grades in AS and A level equip them exceptionally well for higher education and careers of their choice. They mature into thoughtful and considerate young adults, able to think for themselves and express themselves eloquently.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to broaden students' horizons and make learning stimulating. Feedback to students is good, but occasionally questioning and written feedback could be more challenging and informative.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. Relationships are good-humoured and students show their maturity in the respect they show for one another and the pride they take in their school.
- The range of courses gives students choice and meets their needs and aspirations exceptionally well. The breadth of extra-curricular activities is considerable and students enjoy participating in a wide range of sports, arts, clubs and enterprise events.
- The leadership of the headteacher, senior team and governing body is outstanding. They have built a shared vision of a school community building on its traditions of high aspiration, service and care for others.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 55 lessons, some of which were joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. They also visited a number of tutorial sessions.
- Meetings were held with four student groups including a sixth form group, school leaders and staff, and representatives of the governing body and local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and attended an assembly. They scrutinised students' work, progress data, evaluation and development documents, information about how the school cares for and protects students and staff, and records relating to behaviour and attendance.
- The inspection took account of 188 responses to the online Parent View survey submitted prior to and during the inspection, together with questionnaires completed by 45 staff.

Inspection team

Helen Hutchings, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Bray

Additional Inspector

Michael Elson

Additional Inspector

Janet Hallett

Additional Inspector

Cliff Mainey

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Maidstone Grammar School is a larger than average-sized selective boys' school which admits girls into the sixth form. It has a modern languages specialism.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds. Although increasing, few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children of service families) is low when compared with schools nationally. There are no looked after children in the school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported through school action is below that found in most schools, and the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is low. The main learning need is for dyslexia.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- There have been significant changes in leadership, with two changes of headship since the last inspection. The current headteacher took up his post at the beginning of the last academic year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen students' understanding of their work and what they have to do to improve further, by ensuring that the quality of all teachers' questioning, and written and verbal feedback is raised to the level of the best.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students make exceptionally good progress in all years and in all subjects from their above average attainment when they enter the school. By the end of Year 11, the attainment of all groups is high in comparison with national averages, as is the proportion gaining the highest GCSE A*/A grades. Students follow a wide range of programmes leading to accreditation in many more subjects than is the case in most schools.
- The proportions of students meeting and exceeding the nationally expected progress in English and mathematics are consistently above national rates for all groups of students, including the students with exceptionally high attainment on entry. In 2012, the last year for which comparative data are available, progress measures placed mathematics in the top 5% of schools nationally. Science, languages and humanities were all well within the top 20%; this reflects significant success for boys in languages, reflecting the school's specialism. School data show that students made even better progress in 2013.
- Although English GCSE results have remained well above average, boys have not made as much progress in English language as in literature, mathematics and most other subjects; the gap is closing quickly with better results in 2012 and 2013 over previous years and a rising trend through the school. No students are entered early for GCSEs so boys have the full time to study the courses.
- Students build well on their GCSE success and their attainment in the sixth form is high; the proportions gaining the higher A-level A* to B grades, AS-level A to B grades and the average points scores are high for all groups and show a rising trend since the last inspection. In particular, attainment at AS level is improving quickly as a result of improved monitoring and greater structure for independent study in Year 12, giving students a stronger foundation for A-level performance. Female students settle quickly into the sixth form and do as well as the boys.
- Because students join the school with above-average literacy levels, the school does not receive Years 7 and 8 catch-up funding. Nevertheless, the school carefully monitors literacy levels on entry, and has a carefully planned programme in place across departments to promote students' higher order literacy skills, such as evaluation, justification and empathy. Consequently, students continue to build their reading skills, which underpin their learning very well across the curriculum.
- Students respond well to the library facilities and enjoy the time given to reading in tutor periods. The school uses its expertise in dyslexia to provide effective support for identified students so that they make at least the same progress as their peers.
- The school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity and tackling possible discrimination is seen in the excellent progress made by disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Students who speak English as an additional language achieve exceptionally well and reach outcomes in line with, and sometimes above, those of other students. Strong links with external agencies and specialists are used to good effect to improve these students' language skills, particularly for examinations and coursework technical literacy.
- Students who are supported through the pupil premium achieve in line with their peers because of the individually planned support to meet their needs. In 2012, this group made more progress overall than others in Year 11 and their GCSE English results were similar to those of others; in mathematics they attained about a third of a grade higher. Last year, this group continued to make more progress than others.
- The impressive levels of progress students make through the school, and the outcomes in examinations across a wide range of subjects, mean that students are very well prepared for further study, training or employment beyond school.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The key to students' strong achievement is the high-quality, challenging teaching which is the norm at this school. Much teaching is outstanding and it is rarely less than good.
- Teachers capture students' interest and enthusiasm very well by adding variety to learning, with opportunities for individual study and group work. This results in high-quality discussion and debate to deepen students' understanding.
- Teachers have very high expectations of their students and use their excellent subject knowledge to plan lessons which are intellectually challenging and academically rigorous. The academic atmosphere for learning is outstanding, and teachers establish a non-compromising culture that all students will concentrate fully and succeed. Lessons are conducted at a fast pace, and yet give students time and space to reflect on their work.
- The promotion of reading, writing, numeracy and communication skills is very effective. Some outstanding oral work was seen in geography where Year 8 students discussed some of the issues involved in persuading people to take part in a census; they then used their discussion to develop extended writing. Teachers are particularly careful to ensure that subject-specific terms are used accurately.
- Homework is used particularly effectively to develop students' independence, for example through individual research – addressing an area identified for improvement when the school was last inspected.
- Teachers use a variety of questioning techniques with some examples of very effective, directed, open and searching questions to strengthen students' understanding and build their confidence. Similarly, there is good and sometimes excellent practice in verbal and written feedback, making it clear to students the quality and level of their work and what they have to do to improve, and to meet examination criteria.
- Students comment on how teachers are approachable and always ready to give additional help if there is anything they do not understand. However, the very best practice observed during the inspection was not fully consistent across all lessons, for example, just occasionally, questioning was not sufficiently probing to challenge students' thinking at the highest level.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Staff, parents, carers and pupils are unreservedly positive about both behaviour and safety in the school.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to all that the school offers are exemplary. Their positive approach has a very strong impact on learning in lessons and beyond. Their pride in being part of the school community is shown in their good manners, punctuality and trustworthiness.
- Attendance is well above the national average, and is consistently high for all groups of students.
- Students have a love of learning, taking the initiative and questioning maturely when there is something they do not understand. A key feature of learning is how students take responsibility for their own learning, working well both independently and collaboratively, and always trying their best. This is shown in well-presented work and a willingness to attend subject clinics if there is anything they do not understand.
- Students feel exceptionally safe in school and appreciate how they learn about keeping themselves safe, for example when using the internet.
- Students are fully aware of bullying in all its aspects, but say that any rare incidents are addressed quickly and effectively. Incidents, detentions and exclusions are declining in number as the school's recent sharing of its values promotes a stronger school community. This shows the school's effectiveness in fostering a high-quality understanding of difference and promotes good relationships, for example, between different ages. The previously few racist incidents have reduced further and homophobic incidents have been eliminated.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very strongly. The school develops a strong sense of public service and social awareness, for example, through regular charity fund raising and in the Combined Cadet Force, a key aspect of the school's extra-

curricular programme, run with the help of many teachers and school staff. There is a wealth of opportunities for students to develop leadership skills equipping them for life beyond school, including older students acting as mentors and 'subject leaders' for younger students, being house leaders, running clubs and leading assemblies.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and senior staff lead by example and consistently reinforce the school's high expectations. Staff and students praise the clarity of direction given by the headteacher in leading the school into the next stage of its development.
- All staff know the students very well and use data about their performance effectively to monitor their progress closely several times during the year in all subjects. This ensures that any potential underachievement is picked up and addressed quickly. Additionally, students are regularly challenged to raise their expectations and targets, and teachers are held to account for their performance.
- The school focuses very effectively on developing teachers as professionals. Leaders drive the improvement of teaching, involving middle leaders to provide a highly tuned programme of professional development matched to the needs of teachers with different skills and at different points in their career. This professional development improves teachers' skills and students' engagement and achievement. It has a powerful input on raising students' self-esteem and confidence through their enjoyment and success in learning.
- Students are given clear, unbiased advice about education, work and training post-16 and after the sixth form. Careers education and preparation for later life is promoted very well in tutor periods.
- There is a clear expectation that students join the school to follow a seven-year programme, reflected well in the outstandingly consistent progress that they make through their school career. The school's aim, to develop well-rounded individuals, is seen in the broad curriculum matching students' needs and aspirations, and an extensive programme of enrichment. This includes clubs valuing participation in sport and the arts, extended learning weeks and enterprise events giving students opportunities to work with students across the school.
- The school is working on better communication as a current priority. The success of recent structural improvements is reflected in the very positive parental response on Parent View. Parental involvement makes a strong contribution to students' learning, for example almost all parents and carers of Year 7 boys attended a welcome evening which included a talk on the school's approach to developing literacy.
- Recognising its continuing success, the local authority provides light touch support for this outstanding school but retains a close relationship with it, providing training for teachers and governors for example. Local authority lead practitioners have given good support to middle leaders to evaluate practice and establish improvement priorities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is very well organised and led, and governors have a range of skills and expertise to bring to their roles. Governors ensure that they are well informed about how well the school is doing. They receive and review information about performance to make comparisons with how similar schools are doing nationally.
 - Governors visit regularly so that they have a secure, first-hand knowledge of the work of the school, including the quality of teaching. They offer robust challenge for the quality of teaching through the pay review committee. Governors consider pay progression and make evaluative judgements on whether or not a teacher should progress, based on the performance management reviews carried out within the school. Staff see these arrangements as challenging but fair.
 - Governors ensure the financial integrity of the school and set clear policy aims, focused on providing high-quality education for all; for example, that the pupil premium is used to identify and meet the needs of individuals, funding, for example, their attendance at extra-curricular

events or their need for internet access at home.

- The governing body ensures that statutory requirements for safeguarding students are met and gives them a high priority.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 118835 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 426686 |

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

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| Type of school | Grammar (selective) |
| School category | Foundation |
| 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 | 1,236 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 372 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Lindsey Evans |
| Headteacher | Mark Tomkins |
| Date of previous school inspection | 13 February 2008 |
| Telephone number | 01622 752101 |
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