

Walderslade Girls' School

Bradfields Avenue, Walderslade, Chatham, ME5 0LE

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Students' previous underperformance has been rigorously addressed so that attainment is better and progress improving rapidly.
- From their low starting points, all groups of students achieve well, including disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and those students who are eligible for additional support.
- Teaching is typically good because teachers are able to use their subject knowledge and examination expertise effectively to ensure that all students make good or better progress.
- Students' behaviour and safety are good. Students are proud of their school. Relationships are supportive, harmonious and respectful.
- The very strong provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development enables the school to foster well-rounded adults who are understanding and tolerant of others.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students are outstanding and include regular staff training across all areas of health and safety, and child protection.
- The headteacher has provided the necessary motivation and impetus to engage all staff in the process of school improvement.
- All leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas to develop across the school. Staff have worked diligently to raise achievement and ensure good quality learning.
- Governors know the school well and understand what needs to improve. Training has given them the confidence to challenge the school and hold it to account.
- The sixth form is good and students make good progress from their low starting points on entry. Retention rates are improving and increasing numbers of students continue their education at the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement is not yet outstanding because higher ability students are not fully stretched to develop their learning in different ways.
- Teachers' marking is regular and detailed. However, written comments do not always provide students with clear guidance on what they need to do next to improve their work and meet their challenging targets.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons and part-lessons including nine joint observations with senior members of the school's leadership team. They also conducted a number of short visits to classrooms, focusing on teaching, assessment and behaviour as well as attending assemblies and visiting tutor group sessions.
- They looked at a range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, records of lesson observations and safeguarding documentation. The school's analysis of attainment and progress data was shared with the inspection team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders and other staff as well as the Chair of the Governing Body and two other governors.
- Inspectors held meetings with three groups of students, representing all age groups across the school. Discussions also took place with students informally.
- Inspectors examined students' books across a range of subjects including English, mathematics, science, and the sixth form, focusing on attainment, progress and the quality of marking and feedback.
- Inspectors took account of 53 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) as well as 36 staff questionnaires. Consideration was also given to the views expressed by parents in response to the school's own surveys.

Inspection team

Paul Metcalf, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Jane Blakey	Additional Inspector
Sue Cox	Additional Inspector
John McAteer	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Walderslade Girls' School is an average sized 11 to 18 school for girls. The school has a collaborative sixth form partnership with Greenacre Academy and students are taught on both sites in mixed classes by teachers from both schools.
- The school converted to an academy in November 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was inspected in February 2011, it was judged to be a good school. The school has maintained its specialisms in humanities and the arts.
- The majority of students are White British with small numbers of African, Caribbean and other White students. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is in line with the national average and of those who speak English as an additional language is below.
- The proportion of students supported by school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below the national average. The proportion of students supported by school action is well above the national average.
- The proportion of students eligible for the additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, which is for those known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after children and children from service families, is in line with the national average. The number of students eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium is high as attainment on entry is significantly below national figures. One student is educated off site.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress at the end of Year 11.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching to typically outstanding levels, so that all students achieve their potential, by:
 - providing further challenge for higher attaining students and helping them to develop and broaden their learning skills
 - improving written feedback to provide students with clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and meet their targets
 - sharing the very best practice from across the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the school with attainment which is significantly below national levels for their age. In 2013, the proportion of students getting five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics was in line with the national average. Students' attainment across other indicators is improving and is now in line with national averages. This reflects good progress from students' starting points.
- Previous underperformance in mathematics, humanities and languages has been rigorously addressed so that attainment in these areas is now in line with national averages and progress is good. Early entry examination results in mathematics established that the large majority of students were already making good progress.
- The school enters students early for GCSE English and mathematics examinations as teachers believe that it increases the confidence and examination skills of students. Early entry students achieve well and care is taken to ensure that students do not drop subjects until they achieve the challenging grades expected of them.
- Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 as a result of the school's focus on the basic skills and careful tracking against challenging targets. Progress in Key Stage 4 is at least good and, in English and the sixth form, it is particularly strong. Progress seen during the inspection was good or better. The large majority of parents agree.
- Students enter the school with levels of literacy which are below expectations for their age. The gap is dealt with in English lessons through additional support where necessary. Students' numeracy skills are developed well in mathematics lessons but not yet sufficiently promoted across other subjects. Students' use of technology is confident and encouraged.
- All groups of students, including those who are disabled, those who have special educational needs and those speaking English as an additional language, make similar, and occasionally better, progress than their peers as a result of the focus on teaching and challenging targets. The very small numbers of students attending off-site provision make good progress on courses that are personalised for their individualised needs.
- Students in receipt of Year 7 catch-up and additional funding also make similar, and sometimes better, progress than their peers. This is as a result of the school's focus on raising their aspirations and improving their achievement especially in English and mathematics. The attainment of students funded through additional government funding was two terms in English and four terms in mathematics behind their peers. The gap is closing as a result of the school's identification and better provision for their needs including reading help from sixth-form students and extra assistance from a mathematics specialist.
- Achievement in the sixth form is broadly in line with national averages for the AS- and A2-level courses. Examination results are improving as a result of better teaching and a complete restructure of the sixth-form provision including new staff, curriculum changes and more robust tracking of students' attendance and progress.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good. The most effective teaching is characterised by teacher's confident subject knowledge and high expectations supported by detailed planning and carefully considered resources to ensure that all students made good or better progress.
- Questioning is used well to check students' understanding and adapt the lesson, where necessary, to maximise learning. Interactions are courteous and relationships are strong. Teachers make good use of a range of teaching methods which engage and involve students. The best teaching was observed in English activities and the sixth form.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, as well those who speak English as an additional language, benefit from knowledgeable teaching staff, well-trained

teacher assistants and additional support such as that offered through the successful catch-up programme where most of their lessons are taught by the same lead teacher.

- Students eligible for additional funding and those supported by the Year 7 catch-up programme also receive individualised and personalised support which focuses on English and mathematics and encourages their good progress. Lower and middle ability students are well supported, but the development of higher ability students' independent learning skills is variable and not coordinated across the school.
- Marking is regular but the quality of teachers' feedback on students' work varies. Students receive useful information on their strengths and how to improve, but they rarely respond or enter into a dialogue about how they could improve it further. The best checks on students' progress were seen in English, mathematics, performing arts, social sciences and the sixth form.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and support their positive participation in lessons. Students' conduct and behaviour, both within class and around the school, is impressive. They work with commitment throughout their lessons as a result of their positive attitudes and embedded behaviour routines.
- Students are punctual, attendance has improved and fixed-term exclusions are falling. The school is implementing effective measures to improve attendance and further reduce the number of exclusions by placing a greater emphasis on internal rather than external exclusions so that students are better supported. Attendance and fixed-term exclusions are in line with national averages.
- Students treat each other very well. School records show that incidents of bullying, racism and extremism are very low. Students have a good awareness of different forms of bullying such as cyber, homophobic and religious bullying. Students say that any instances of bullying or harassment are dealt with efficiently and effectively by staff. Safety is good. Parents agree.
- The recently introduced behaviour policy focuses on positive, rather than punitive discipline. The management of behaviour by staff is consistent and fair. High expectations are the norm and behaviour has improved. Staff are aware of the needs of different students and have put effective strategies in place based on their specific needs.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is exemplary. However, behaviour and safety are not outstanding as students do not yet consistently display a thirst and love for learning. The development of students' independent learning skills and ability to manage their own learning is not yet consistent across the school.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and her senior staff have worked tirelessly to address weaknesses arising from the 2013 results. Staff questionnaires reiterate the positive impact of the headteacher and her commitment to the school. Comments talk highly of the 'real sense of community and ambition for the students'.
- Shortfalls in performance have spurred the school to refocus its priorities, improve teaching and make better use of data to identify and address weaknesses. Development planning identifies the key areas for improvement but documentation is rather too long. Middle managers have been empowered and are now well placed to drive forward improvements in teaching and learning because they are all strong teachers. Good use of Lead Practitioners and training time in school ensures there are plenty of opportunities for teachers to share the very best practice from across the school.
- Targets for teachers to improve their practice are carefully considered to ensure that high performance is suitably rewarded. High quality training and constructive support, where this is appropriate, ensure that all staff feel valued. This is confirmed in the positive responses from the

staff questionnaires.

- The school works extensively with a range of partners including the neighbouring boys' school and the common sixth form. The school is a lead secondary school working with ten primary schools offering support across a wide number of subjects including mathematics and the specialisms of humanities and the arts. The school has a range of strategies for engaging with parents and increasing their involvement in the life of the school. High levels of attendance at parents' meetings and a flourishing parent teacher association are evidence of these improvements. There were few responses to the Parent View questionnaire but the school's own surveys were mostly positive and always acted upon.
- The range of subjects offered is broad and balanced. Recent changes have ensured that they are now much better suited to the abilities, aptitudes and aspirations of the girls in the school with an appropriate balance of academic and vocational subjects. The school provides an exceptional range of extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities. The sixth-form curriculum ensures an appropriate match of students to courses.
- The development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is a real strength of the school. Students speak very positively about the opportunities to debate and reflect upon values, diversity and ethical issues as well as consider key questions such as: 'Why do bad things happen in the world?' and 'What would you do if you were God?'
- Students benefit considerably from opportunities to act as anti-bullying ambassadors and work with younger students. They were overwhelmingly positive about the pastoral system and the extent to which the school valued their opinion including the success of the school council. All students are equally valued and discrimination is not tolerated.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. There is excellent attention to detail along with high expectations of ensuring that all staff are trained across all areas of health and safety, and child protection.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body knows how the school needs to improve because members have a good understanding of achievement data and where the school stands in relation to national averages.
 - Governors have a growing awareness of the school and actively monitor its work through regular visits. Training has given them the confidence to challenge the school and hold leaders and other staff accountable for performance.
 - Governors have an accurate knowledge of the quality of teaching and ensure that any salary progression is merited. They understand how teachers' pay is related to performance and linked to the quality of teaching and the progress of students.
 - Governors know how the school uses additional government funding and Year 7 catch-up funding, and ensure that resources are used effectively to help students to progress. They have a clear understanding of how this additional money has been effective in closing gaps in performance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
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

Unique reference number	137630
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	443552

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

Type of school	Secondary Modern (non-selective)
School category	Academy converter
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	898
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nigel Scott
Headteacher	Louise McGowan
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01634 861596
Fax number	01634 666506
Email address	office@waldersladegirls.org.uk

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