

Dartford Grammar School for Girls

Shepherds Lane, Dartford, Kent DA1 2NT

Inspection dates

21–22 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Dartford Grammar School for Girls has a justifiably strong local reputation for pastoral welfare and academic excellence.
- All pupils benefit from exceptionally strong teaching in most areas. This leads to outstanding outcomes for nearly all pupils.
- Pupils attain outstanding results in their GCSEs, building on the excellent start they made in primary schools.
- A large majority of pupils stay on into Years 12 and 13 and achieve extremely well at A level. Others join the sixth form from elsewhere and achieve equally well.
- The school is extremely well led. The headteacher has very high expectations for everyone. She leads purposefully. Her commitment to the pupils is clearly seen.
- Senior leaders carry out their individual roles skilfully and collaborate well as a team. They are business-like and efficient in all that they do.
- Highly effective governors support and challenge the school rigorously. Governors are suitably qualified and experienced for their roles.
- The school provides a very successful traditional academic curriculum. It also encourages pupils to excel in creative disciplines such as art, dance, drama and music. Excellent artwork adorns every available space.
- The school makes an exemplary contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are taught to respect themselves and build their own sense of self-worth.
- The school is an inspiringly cohesive and culturally integrated community where all groups co-exist and cooperate admirably. This prepares pupils well for life in modern and diverse Britain.
- The school's pastoral system is regarded by all as a real strength. Issues are dealt with quickly and well.
- Pupils benefit from a rich and varied programme of clubs, activities and extra-curricular learning opportunities.
- The vast majority of parents are delighted that their children attained a place at the school and are doing so well.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase further the proportion of learners who convert outstanding outcomes at the end of key stage 4 into the highest grades at A level.
- Extend even further pupils' knowledge and deepen further their understanding by ensuring that stretching or challenging learning activities are introduced earlier rather than later into lessons.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leaders have created a vibrant and inclusive learning environment where all do equally well. Leaders have developed a unique atmosphere and ethos which the vast majority of staff, pupils and parents cherish.
- The headteacher is ambitious for all in the school. She works relentlessly to raise standards or extend them where they are high already. The senior deputy headteacher contributes hugely to the delivery of this vision. They are supported successfully by the rest of the senior leadership team.
- All senior leaders have a clear understanding of their individual roles. They carry out their duties with confidence and precision.
- Senior leaders teach alongside their managerial roles. Their practice is often exemplary and gives junior teachers excellent models to adopt or adapt. Leaders also understand at first hand, therefore, how well changes to the curriculum or assessment are working. Currently, they are constantly evaluating their own new scheme for assessing pupils' learning against the new national curriculum and new GCSE and A-level specifications.
- Leaders have created a successful process for checking the quality of teaching and improving it constantly. They monitor the quality of teaching by regularly observing how well pupils are learning, looking at pupils' work in books and checking their homework diaries. They provide training to staff when it is needed. Leaders follow up any training to see the impact it has had on performance. Teachers who need additional help to meet the school's high expectations are included in focused development programmes. A few choose to leave. Over time, the quality of teaching has improved from that seen at the last inspection.
- Middle leadership is strengthening, with some key appointments in the last two years. Middle leaders are increasingly involved in the management of teachers' performance. They are fully involved in necessary changes to the curriculum so as to ensure that there is no negative impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Year leaders make an exceptional contribution to the girls' well-being, and that of any boys joining the school for 16–19 study programmes. Parents and many pupils commented on the effectiveness of actions taken to ensure a smooth transition from primary schools. This is a major task, given nearly 100 feeder schools across at least five local authority areas, some on the other side of the Dartford crossing. Leaders are already working with the feeder schools to increase the number of disadvantaged pupils being entered for and passing the Kent selection test. The headteacher sees this as an important part of the school's mission 'to improve social mobility'.
- The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) leads a small but effective team whose members ensure that any barriers to learning are addressed as quickly as possible. This team is skilled at recognising and supporting girls with dyslexia or other barriers to learning. The SENCo is adept at seeking expert support from external professional agencies. They also complement the pastoral team's exceptional work which addresses any impact of, for example, family bereavements, medical issues or examination-related stress. Work to maintain the vast majority of pupils' mental health and well-being is thorough and effective.
- The work carried out by the coordinator for English as an additional language (EAL) makes an outstanding contribution to the progress and attainment of this group of pupils. The EAL coordinator keeps extensive records of her work, provides excellent materials to support the girls independently developing subject-specific technical vocabulary, and provides sympathetic advice and guidance if other language or cultural issues emerge.
- The school has a long and distinguished tradition of academic excellence. The curriculum on offer reflects that tradition. Leaders are, however, committed to ensuring that pupils are able to develop creative skills in art, textiles, dance, drama and music. They enthusiastically support the visual and performing arts. Compositions heard in a GCSE class, for example, were of a very high standard. All of the artwork that adorns the walls and corridors is equally high quality and contributes to a positive learning environment. Several parents remarked that the school had brought out talents in their children. Many told inspectors that their daughters' musicianship, artwork or acting had flourished at the school.

- Leaders ensure that pupils choose two languages to study in the two-year key stage 3 curriculum. This enables them to pursue two languages at GCSE. Most pupils study three separate sciences at key stage 4 and some follow a programme of accelerated history or geography leading to an early-award GCSE. They are not entered for the examination unless they are certain to achieve a grade A. In Year 11, these students work towards the submission of an extended project qualification (EPQ). The EPQ enables students to practise working at A level independently. This innovation enables such students to make a flying start in Year 12.
- The school uses every opportunity to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In geography, history and religious studies, pupils are able to explore issues of enduring or emerging concern. Issues in morality are also addressed in the extensive range of literature studied in English. The whole ethos of the school lends itself well to the development in pupils of appropriate attitudes. These will serve pupils well as they go on to live and prosper in modern, diverse Britain. They already make a strong contribution through their charitable work, including that of the fund-raising led by the school's Philanthropic Society.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is skilful and rigorous. Governors hold leaders to account but support them appropriately in their work to improve the school continuously. Governors check how well the school is doing and have a good understanding of current and historic achievement. They ask for regular updates on future levels of performance.
 - Governors share the headteacher's view that only consistently good performance should be rewarded. They review all pay progression decisions and, if necessary, ask leaders to reconsider any judged too harsh or over-generous. Governors expect teachers to be set appropriate targets which are in the best interests of the pupils. They ensure that all processes are fair and conducted appropriately.
 - The school receives very little additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils. Governors, however, ensure that this money is used well and as a result, disadvantaged pupils achieve at least as well as their classmates, and in many cases, better. Their performance is better than their peers nationally.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors are appropriately trained to ensure that safeguarding procedures are carried out accurately. They oversee the checks that the school makes on persons seeking employment at the school or anyone wishing to volunteer. They secure appropriate professional services to ensure that equipment is functioning safely and make suitable representation to the local authority to maintain and improve the buildings.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- All teachers, including many cover supervisors, possess appropriate subject knowledge. A large majority are subject experts who are able to function at a high level of performance.
- Leaders ensure that teachers are able to plan, deliver and evaluate lessons securely. They have provided training over time which has equipped teachers with a wide range and repertoire of methods to use in lessons.
- Pupils benefit from these different techniques so that they experience a variety of approaches. All benefit from the consistent expectation that teachers will plan every lesson and consider ways of making the learning as interesting as possible.
- Many pupils receive individual tuition from subject teachers after lessons, in vacation periods or at the end of the school day. This was noted especially in science where pupils sometimes seek further help with understanding complex concepts or ideas.
- Pupils often have opportunities to extend their learning by focused and purposeful educational visits and trips to, for example, Russia. Pupils also visit the ancient houses that lend their name to the house system such as Ightham and Chartwell or to the school's partner, Queen's College, within the University of Cambridge.
- Teachers follow the school's simple assessment policy consistently. This means that pupils have regular checks on how well they are doing and what they need to do next to improve.
- Pupils generally receive excellent feedback on their work in both oral and written form. This leads to outstanding progress as pupils can fill any gaps in their knowledge, improve the skills they are developing or seek additional resources or materials to extend what they already know or can do.
- The school provides outstanding and regular support in class or with additional and focused materials for the small numbers of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- The school provides exceptional and well-focused support for pupils who speak English as an additional language. These pupils make rapid progress at whatever stage of learning English they happen to be. Parents of these pupils are provided with information in a form that enables them to follow how well their children are doing.
- All teachers manage their classrooms effectively. They are called upon to manage pupils' behaviour rarely. Most teachers work cooperatively with the pupils so that lessons are characterised by professional and positive relationships.
- The vast majority of teachers support the school's drive to improve standards of oracy. Pupils are provided with opportunities to speak out loud accurately in class. Pupils are required to carry reading books with them at all times. Time is set aside in English lessons for silent reading and this encourages a love of books and passion for reading.
- Teachers check and test spelling on a regular basis. Most insist on the correct use of terminology in their subject. Teachers frequently extend pupils' familiarity with English by using a wide vocabulary or specific terms and words.
- On occasion, there is insufficient stretch and challenge in tasks in the early part of lessons. Some activities plan 'extension' tasks only towards the end, when opportunities for deeper or more open-ended learning may have passed.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. The school promotes sensitively the development of positive attitudes in the pupils. In a personal, social and health education lesson, pupils were provided with an opportunity to examine potentially harmful messages about body image in the media. The pupils handled this controversial topic maturely, expressing clearly their opinions.
- The school enables pupils to develop a strong sense of their own identity and self-worth. This is very impressive.
- Leaders reinforce these important messages by building a culture of praise and reward. Awards assemblies and the traditional annual prize-giving in the autumn celebrate the pupils' many and various achievements. Particular attention is given to the many sporting successes enjoyed by individuals and teams at the school. There are particular strengths in trampolining. A number of pupils have represented the town, county and country in a range of sports.
- Parents and pupils agree that the pastoral care available is a real strength of the school. Several well-documented case studies indicate the extent to which leaders ensure that pupils facing challenges in their lives experience very little impact on their ability to make progress.
- Safeguarding arrangements are all secure. Key documents are all in place and all staff are appropriately trained at the right level for the safeguarding roles they are expected to carry out.
- All pupils are taught how to stay safe online as well as the dangers of cyber-bullying and 'grooming'. Leaders also ensure that pupils are educated about female genital mutilation, forced marriage, the potential risk of radicalisation and what to do if they are worried that they or a friend may be susceptible.
- The school provides a range of activities for young women to learn how to develop their self-confidence, build resilience, respect themselves and their bodies, and to be independent and assertive. Support for pupils' learning about sexuality and relationships is timely and regarded highly by them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' conduct is exemplary. They are respectful of each other and celebrate difference and diversity.
- The vast majority of relationships between adults and pupils are mutually respectful and courteous.
- The attendance of pupils is well above the national average. Even those facing severe personal challenges are noted to have made every effort to be in school as often as possible. Pupils who annually achieve 100% attendance are commended publicly.
- The school has not permanently excluded any pupils since the last inspection. The rate of fixed-term exclusions is well below the national average and instances are extremely rare.

- Pupils' punctuality and the presentation of their work are exemplary. They take pride in their appearance and wear the school uniform smartly.
- Leaders acknowledge that there are a few, isolated instances of bullying. Inspectors concluded, as with many schools, that there is a little short-lived bullying. This may start or be enacted online and does not always make its way into school. When it does, the inspection team is convinced that it is addressed robustly.
- Inspectors found no instances of bullying based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation or other characteristic. The school's engagement with the Stonewall campaign provides strong evidence of its commitment to inclusion and support for diversity.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils secure outstanding results in all key stages. Levels of attainment in all measures are well above national benchmarks. Very high proportions of pupils achieve key performance indicators. For example, close to 100% of pupils annually attain five or more A*–C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. Around three quarters achieve the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).
- Pupils make exceptional rates of progress in English and mathematics, even though they enter the school with already high levels of attainment in these subjects. Many achieve the highest grades.
- The progress of current pupils in all subjects and all year groups is consistently impressive. The school's new method of calculating progress provides individual, pupil-level information about performance on a termly basis. This information is communicated five times a year to parents. The availability of such detailed information enables leaders to act decisively if any pupil appears to be falling behind. As a result, momentum for all is maintained or specific interventions are put in place.
- The progress and attainment of disadvantaged pupils are often better than those of their classmates. As such, they compare extremely favourably with the performance of other pupils nationally. The performance of these pupils is above the national average for similar pupils nationally.
- The performance of pupils who speak English as an additional language is exceptional. Such pupils do as well as their classmates and better than similar pupils nationally.
- There is no difference between the performance overall of pupils from black or minority ethnic groups, compared with White British pupils or any other groups within the school. Black African pupils do better in this school than their counterparts in other schools nationally.
- There is no difference between the performance overall of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and other pupils in the school. The support and additional tuition available to them ensure that their performance compares well with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in other schools.
- The school has a proud tradition that none of its pupils is counted as 'not in education, employment or training' at each annual census point.
- The school ensures that each pupil is prepared extremely well for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- A high proportion of students progress to universities. A few go on to Oxford, Cambridge and many others, including other Russell Group universities. Several, including some who are disadvantaged, go on to study for careers in medicine, science, technology and engineering. An increasing proportion go into high-level apprenticeships in, for example, accountancy.
- Pupils exhibit exceptional attitudes to reading as an outcome of the school's significant work to develop their love of literature.
- Pupils produce many fine works of art and music as well as dance, drama and musical performances.

16 to 19 study programmes

are outstanding

- The leadership of the 16–19 study programmes is strong and effective. Oversight is provided by one of the deputy headteachers so that the senior leadership team has a regular insight into current levels of performance.

- The school insists on the maintenance of firm entry requirements so that there is stiff competition for places in the sixth form. Pupils not likely to meet this standard are provided with impartial advice and guidance so that they can secure further education, training or employment elsewhere. All students entering the 16–19 study programmes have achieved at least a grade C in English and mathematics.
- The rigour of recruitment processes contributes to extremely good outcomes at the end of key stage 5, as does high-quality teaching. The proportions of students passing all their subjects are very high. For example, in 2015, there were particular successes in physics, fine art, textiles and religious studies.
- The curriculum is heavily focused on traditional academic subjects. The school also maintains an A-level offer for those who wish to pursue creative subjects such as art or music. This is appropriate for the vast majority of students in the sixth form.
- Not all students who attain outstanding results at GCSE level go on to convert these to the attainment of the highest grades at A level. Therefore, value-added measures are not always 'above the line' in published data. This masks the fact that students may still have achieved the grade they require for the next step in their career, even if they could have potentially attained a higher one.
- Form tutors, the sixth-form team and the on-site careers adviser provide effective support for those applying to university or for apprenticeships. This is an outstanding feature of the school, universally praised by all.
- Exceptional pastoral care limits the number of students subject to mental health issues. Stress is managed well, especially in the examination season.
- Students benefit from opportunities to explore the world of work, though few have a formal work-experience placement in keeping with the overarching aims of the 16–19 study programmes. Many, however, volunteer in charitable settings or local primary schools, learning much about responsibility and the importance of self-discipline in work-like settings.
- The school provides varied and plentiful opportunities for students to become involved in junior leadership roles. Students on 16–19 study programmes present excellent role models and mentoring behaviours to young pupils. Both the mentors and the younger pupils talk positively about the mutual benefits of these relationships.
- The school ensures that students on 16–19 study programmes receive age-appropriate education on sex and relationships, how to stay safe online and how to prepare for life as an active citizen. Students have opportunities to practise democratic processes by holding mock elections and also participating in the selection of a head girl and head boy.
- The attendance of students on 16–19 study programmes is above the national average. Students are usually punctual and dress appropriately in business attire. This also prepares them for a future in the world of work.
- A current student commented that his 'choice to attend Dartford Girls was based on its reputation for pastoral welfare and academic excellence – I've not been let down'.

School details

Unique reference number	118883
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10000591

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of students in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,066
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	265
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Brooke
Headteacher	Sharon Pritchard
Telephone number	01322 223123
Website	www.dartfordgrammargirls.kent.sch.uk
Email address	school@dartfordgrammargirls.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16–17 November 2011

Information about this school

- Dartford Grammar School for Girls is an above average-sized school which is growing. The local authority has asked governors to expand the number of pupils to assist with an increasing demand for places.
- A few boys join the school each year to follow 16–19 study programmes.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who are from black or minority ethnic groups is above the national average. Other than White British pupils, the largest single group of pupils are Black African.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The school benefits from a very stable population which enjoys below-average levels of deprivation.
- The school works with a local, informal cluster of primary schools to increase the number of disadvantaged pupils who are entered for and sit the Kent selection test at the age of 11.
- The school uses no alternative providers of education.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection began as a short inspection of a good school under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. On the first day of the inspection, leaders provided compelling evidence that the school might be judged outstanding if inspected under section 5 of the same Act. The lead inspector converted the inspection to a full section 5 inspection. On the second day of the inspection, a further four inspectors joined the team.
- Inspectors observed learning in 41 parts of lessons, 15 of which were observed jointly with leaders of the school. Inspectors conducted three lengthy tours of the school to see learning in progress. Learning was observed in all areas of the curriculum and most subjects.
- Inspectors held regular meetings with senior leaders. The lead inspector met subject leaders, year leaders and the English as an additional language coordinator. Inspectors also met the special educational needs coordinator, leaders of the 16–19 study programmes and a group of teachers at different stages in their career.
- The lead inspector met members of the governing body.
- Inspectors took into account 71 responses to Ofsted’s confidential staff survey.
- Inspectors met with three groups of pupils and spoke to many others informally. Inspectors took into account 106 responses to Ofsted’s confidential pupil survey.
- Inspectors also met with five parents and considered 171 responses to Parent View (Ofsted’s confidential online parents’ survey), spoke to one parent by telephone, and took account of an email sent into the central call centre.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of the school’s documentation, including information about the performance of pupils, the work of the governing body, the school’s budget and documents relating to the school’s wide range of enrichment activities.

Inspection team

Dr Simon Hughes, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Catherine Old	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Anne Turner	Ofsted Inspector
Susannah Wood	Ofsted Inspector
David Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Phillip Storey	Ofsted Inspector

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