

Ilkley Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107421
Local Authority	Bradford
Inspection number	287812
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Anthony Briggs

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1539
6th form	304
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs R Beeson
Headteacher	Mrs Gillian James
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002
School address	Cowpasture Road Ilkley West Yorkshire LS29 8TR
Telephone number	01943 608424
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ilkley Grammar School is much bigger than most other non-selective secondary schools. Students are drawn from generally advantaged areas. The school's population is very stable with slightly more girls than boys. Almost all students are of White British heritage with a few from a range of minority ethnic groups. All students speak English fluently. Very few are eligible for free school meals. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the number of students with a statement of special educational need, are low. In September 2005, the school gained specialist status in science and humanities. It has achieved the national healthy schools award and Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Students, parents, teachers and inspectors all agree that Ilkley Grammar is a good school. Not only that, it has some aspects that are outstanding, not least the superb way in which students are cared for and their personal development and well-being enhanced.

Students enter school in Year 7 with high standards. They maintain these standards throughout Key Stage 3. They do well in science, are particularly strong in mathematics, but they do not achieve as well in Year 9 tests for English. By the time students leave Year 11, their GCSE examination results are exceptionally high and have been for years. These impressive standards are maintained in the sixth form where students do exceptionally well in their A-level examinations. Consequently, students enjoy being at a school where they all achieve well and this is reflected in their excellent attendance figures and their own assiduous and highly positive attitudes to learning, which contribute significantly to their success.

Students are proud of their school. They behave excellently in lessons and around the building. They like the way they get on with their friends and their teachers. They feel extremely well cared for and value the fact that there is always somebody to share a problem with should they need to. Students know how to keep safe and have a highly developed understanding of the principles of a healthy lifestyle, participating well in the many out of school opportunities and making sensible choices about food and drink at lunchtimes. Students are well prepared for their future careers and almost all students from Year 11 and Year 13 continue with their education. Parents speak very highly of the school and are pleased with the progress their children make, summed up by one parent who stated: 'Our child has flourished and his progress has astounded us.'

Students learn well because teachers are extremely knowledgeable about their subjects and pass their expertise on effectively to the students. Relationships are excellent and are founded on mutual trust and respect. This results in really motivated students and an environment that is focused on high quality learning. However, there are occasions when teaching lacks excitement and does not fully engage students. In these lacklustre lessons, students become passive and their enjoyment wanes.

The good curriculum meets the needs of students well. It is enhanced by a vast menu of greatly valued, high quality, extra-curricular activities. The school's specialist status has been used effectively to improve resources in science and to provide more information and communication technology (ICT) equipment across the school. The specialist subjects are contributing successfully to improving teaching and learning, and raising standards. The impact of the specialist status has produced excellent links with partner schools and the local community.

Leadership and management of the school are good. The headteacher is highly respected. She and her deputy headteacher have a crystal clear vision for the future of the school and are relentlessly bringing about changes to strengthen it even further. The schools' own evaluation of its work mainly matches inspection judgements and shows a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses. The improvements since the previous inspection have been carefully managed. Governors understand the school and give clear direction and support to senior leaders. Consequently, the school shows good capacity to further improve.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is good with some outstanding features. The great majority of students enter with good or very good results at GCSE. Because of effective teaching, they make good progress in the sixth form and attain high standards in most subjects by the time they leave school. There is a very good system for mentoring all students which ensures that those less motivated and those underachieving are quickly spotted and either challenged or helped. Consequently, the retention rate in the sixth form is exceptionally high and most go on to higher education.

Leadership and management are good. The relatively new and increasingly effective school's leadership team is tightening procedures whilst maintaining the very positive atmosphere. Curricular provision is good. Students are very enthusiastic about life in the sixth form. A broader choice of academic courses is now offered, along with a sprinkling of vocational options. Students' personal development and well-being are excellent. Students have very mature attitudes to learning and act with an exceptionally high level of responsibility, notably in the organisation of their council and the very good mentoring of younger students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure teachers make all lessons more interesting and learning fun in order to fully engage all students to promote even better progress.
- Improve students' achievement in English in Years 7 to 9 so that they do as well as they do in mathematics and science.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The standards across the school are exceptionally high. Students enter the school with well above average results in their primary school tests and they achieve well in Years 7 to 9. The overall results in the 2006 Year 9 tests were significantly above the national average. The exceptionally high results in mathematics represent excellent achievement. However, English results, although still above the national average, have declined over the past three years and students should be doing better in the subject. The school met its specialist school targets in mathematics and science, but not in English at Key Stage 3. In the GCSE examinations, students maintain their very high standards. The 2006 results were significantly above the national average. The 73% of students gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was impressive. However, in 2006, a small group of students did not do as well as they should have. A rigorous analysis of the results by senior staff has led to concerted action being taken to tackle the reasons. Improved tracking of students' progress is now identifying potential underachievement earlier and successfully tackling it. For example, the newly formed 'Impact Group' is particularly popular with Year 11 students who feel it is 'really helping to improve grades'. Consequently, internal assessments show good achievement in the current Year 11 with the school well on course to meet its 2007 targets.

Students enter the sixth form with above average standards and almost all complete their courses successfully, many attaining the highest grades. In 2006, A-level results were well above average. However, history results have been disappointing for several years. Overall, students' achievement is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are outstanding. Students are very mature in their responses and behaviour both in lessons and around school. They get on well together because relationships at all levels are excellent. They say they feel safe in school and that staff can be trusted to help and support them. Attendance is very high because nearly all students enjoy their education and display fantastic attitudes to learning. In some lessons, however, enjoyment diminishes where teaching strategies are less varied and tasks are mundane. Yet, even in these lessons, students' behaviour remains acceptable. Students are committed to healthy eating and drinking and value the new 'deli style', healthier meals on offer. Parents contribute well by ensuring packed lunches brought to school are healthy. The school holds the Sportsmark award, reflecting students' very good participation in physical education activities beyond the taught curriculum. There are extensive, high quality contributions by many students to the local and the wider community through the school's specialist status work. Students are especially well prepared for their future economic well-being through the high standards they achieve in literacy, numeracy and ICT, and they demonstrate an outstanding commitment to continuing education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students benefit from their teachers' excellent knowledge of both their subjects and examination requirements. Many teachers' enthusiasm for their subject motivates students to do really well and to enjoy their studies both in the main school and in the sixth form. Excellent relationships between teachers and students lead to a highly positive working atmosphere. As one student said, 'You can really trust your teachers.' New resources such as interactive whiteboards are used very effectively to add interest and clarity to learning. Students say they enjoy lessons in which they are actively involved. In these lessons, the pace of learning is fast and students of all abilities are challenged to do well. A good range of methods such as group and pair work are used to ensure that pupils are fully engaged. However, not all teachers make their teaching interesting enough and lesson planning does not always make sure that the work is suitably challenging for the full ability range in each class. There is sometimes too much teacher talk focused on techniques for passing examinations rather than ensuring all students are learning as well as they should. In these lessons, students have to listen too much and do too little; they become restless and make less progress. Teachers are making increasingly better use of assessment information to see whether students are doing as well as they should and to put in place actions to help those falling behind.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of the school's curriculum is good with outstanding features in both the main school and sixth form. Students leave school well prepared for the future. The exciting and vast range of enrichment activities is a significant strength and a key factor in promoting the students' outstanding personal development. The very well-planned programme for citizenship and personal, social and health education develops the students' highly mature understanding of matters relating to health, safety and the wider world. The students' very high examination results confirm the appropriateness of the taught curriculum throughout the school. There are suitable opportunities for vocational courses for a small number. The school is appropriately seeking to increase vocational courses for students aged 14 to 19, but is constrained by the serious limitations of space on its site.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding care, guidance and support given to all students make a very effective contribution to their personal development and well-being, and academic progress. Procedures to safeguard students are well established. Very comprehensive information is provided to help teachers support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Transition arrangements from primary schools are excellent and very extensive, especially for more vulnerable students. Younger students, in particular, are pleased with the way staff use their planners to reinforce learning by rewarding good work on a daily basis. Arrangements for predicting and tracking students' progress are rigorous and give a very clear picture of what each achieves over time. Effective action is taken when students are not on course to reach their targets. Students are advised well about the relevant courses on offer and effective guidance helps students move on to further study and employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher is highly regarded by staff, students and parents. She has very high expectations and a clear and good understanding of the school's strengths and areas requiring development and what action is necessary to improve it. The newly appointed deputy headteacher and the assistant headteachers share her vision for the school. This powerful senior leadership team have complementary skills and are successfully driving forward improvements. For example, the school has made significant progress in using data to analyse how well individual students are doing. The monitoring of teaching is more effective and has recently shown that there is not enough exciting teaching in the school. The middle leaders work well together and play an important role in shaping the way forward. Senior leaders speak highly of the effective support they receive from the local authority link officer. All these improvements are leading to teachers' better understanding that the progress every student makes and their enjoyment of learning are as important as getting good examination results.

Although the school distributes regular newsletters and the comprehensive website provides up-to-date information, many parents feel that senior leaders do not communicate or consult with them enough. Inspectors are satisfied that the school is aware of this issue and is trying to improve communication.

Governors are well informed about the school; they are supportive and hold the school to account. They, along with the highly competent bursar, have been particularly successful in redressing a deficit budget and providing secure financial control of the school to ensure good value for money.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Ilkley Grammar School, Cowpasture Road, Ilkley, LS29 8TR

Thank you for making our recent visit to your school so enjoyable. We were very impressed with your mature attitudes and the way in which you openly told us about what you liked about Ilkley Grammar School. Your views helped us to focus our inspection and check on just how well your school is doing. You told us how proud you are of your school and how you get on well with each other and your teachers. We agreed with you and judged your school to be good with some outstanding features. Please take the time to read through the full report and see how we have agreed with your views and how we have incorporated some of the things you said.

You told us how the teachers and other staff make you feel cared for and safe and how you felt that you had lots of opportunities to develop as young adults. We agree that the school does an excellent job of looking after you and ensuring you develop well. We also agree that there is a terrific range of out of school clubs and activities for you to take part in. You said that you thought that Ilkley Grammar was a school that did well academically and we agree. You attain really high standards and achieve well in nearly all of your subjects. However, you have not been doing as well as you should in English in Years 7 to 9 so we want the school to improve this.

Your comments about how you learn were very perceptive and it was clear that you know that you are doing well in a successful school. Some of you explained how you learned more in lessons that involved you in practical activities and how these were far better than when teachers talk too much or just go over techniques to help you pass exams. Again, we agree with you and we want the teachers to make all lessons more interesting and learning more fun so that you all make as much progress as you can in every lesson. Those of you we spoke to in Year 11 told us how impressed you are with the 'Impact Group' and how you think that this is really helping with your work.

You were very positive about the way the school is run and we agree that the leadership and management are good.

There is no doubt that you and your parents are pleased with Ilkley Grammar and we can see why.