

Dartford Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118883
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291279
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	745
6th form	282
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Brookes
Headteacher	Jane Wheatley
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2001
School address	Shepherds Lane Dartford DA1 2NT
Telephone number	01322 223123
Fax number	01322 294786

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This academically selective school has a large catchment area with students coming from several south London boroughs as well as from Dartford and surrounding rural areas. About 70% of students are White British with students from Asian and Black African backgrounds being the largest ethnic minority groups. The percentage of students taking free school meals is low. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is also well below the national average. The percentage of students for whom English is not their mother tongue is about average and rising.

The school achieved science specialist status in 2003 and it is a satellite school for the South East Region Science Centre based at Southampton. The school was awarded Artsmark Gold in July 2004. The school has been awarded Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with many outstanding features. Standards are high and students achieve well. Reflecting a quotation on its website: 'The test of a successful education is not the amount of knowledge that a pupil takes away from school, but her appetite to know and her capacity to learn', the school successfully encourages students to study further by helping them to learn with interest and enthusiasm. Students mature into thoughtful and considerate young adults who appreciate the part they can play in society in their futures.

Students feel very safe and are happy at school. Their behaviour is excellent and they get on well with each other and with members of staff, valuing these good relationships highly. Students' well-being and personal development are outstanding. The school tackles the very rare instances of bullying firmly and students are confident that there is no racism. Students are very aware of what they should do to lead a healthy lifestyle and realistic that they do not always put such knowledge into practice. They confess to needing chocolate bars on occasions and a few sixth formers admit they do not take enough exercise.

The school has an outstanding, imaginative curriculum. In 2004 it registered to deliver the International Baccalaureate (IB) Mid Years Programme (MYP) and became a DfES pilot school for teaching the Key Stage 3 curriculum in two years rather than three. This allows students to feel less pressurised following their GCSE courses. Parents would like to receive clearer information about how the curriculum works. The range and number of extra-curricular trips and activities are excellent as are the numerous events offered through the school's science specialism.

The school knows that a small number of students could achieve even more GCSE A*/A grades and it is successfully raising the percentage of these high grades. Teaching and learning are good with students' keen thinking reflected in the interesting questions they ask. They appreciate being guided to consider how they learn and how to study. Teaching does not regularly include references to how work is relevant to students' lives and some lessons are not delivered with enough fun and excitement.

Students' preparation for the world of work is well considered and they have very good basic skills, for example in mathematics. They give generously to charities and respond well to initiatives which enable them to contribute to the local and overseas communities. The care, guidance and support they receive are outstanding as the school successfully nurtures and guides students as they mature.

Leadership and management are good. With a keen awareness of everything that happens in the school, the headteacher gives clear and focused direction to curriculum developments and the areas where improvements are needed. Senior and middle leaders are supportive and efficient.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

In this popular and expanding sixth form, standards are high and students achieve well. Teaching is good with girls being given much responsibility for their own learning. A few lessons do not offer the stimulation to generate the best achievement, evident in the small minority of subjects where the percentage of A-level A/B grades could be higher. Students know what they need

to do to improve their work and understand and appreciate how teachers monitor their progress towards their target grades.

The sixth form is well managed and students receive the same, high quality care, guidance and support as in the main school. Arrangements to help internal and external students settle into the sixth form are very good, as is preparation for their progression into higher education. Sixth form students are an integral part of the school and enthusiastically embrace the many extended curriculum and leadership responsibilities offered to them. This contributes to their outstanding personal development and well-being. They appreciate and respond well to being treated as sensible, young adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the percentage of high GCSE and A-level grades by helping students to appreciate the relevance of work to their present and future lives and by delivering more lessons in an imaginative and stimulating style.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are well above average in all years. Students make outstanding progress in Years 7 and 8. The first group to take the national end of Year 9 tests a year early, in English, mathematics and science, achieved very high levels. In all other years, students achieve consistently well with four out of five attaining ten or more good GCSE grades. In 2006, over 60% of A*/A grades were awarded in English, English literature, French, information and communication technology (ICT), drama, music, religious studies, textiles and short course citizenship.

Predictions, based on students' standards on entry to the school, reveal the potential for even more high grades in a few subjects. The school is alert to the range of factors contributing to these slightly underperforming subjects and is taking the right actions. There is no difference in the achievement of students from different ethnic groups or those for whom English is not their mother tongue.

Many sixth form students study five AS courses in Year 12 and almost one third take four A levels in Year 13. In both examinations the percentage of A/B grades has risen steadily in recent years with strong results in textiles, sports studies, sociology and vocational ICT. The popularity of subjects, especially biology, linked to the school's specialism has increased since 2003. In four years the number of students studying A-level mathematics has more than doubled.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students much enjoy their education and value everything the school has to offer. Their attendance is excellent and they behave extremely well. They have respectful relationships with one another and with staff, and learn and study diligently. They relish being involved in the varied activities outside of lessons, ranging from debating to Strictly Come Dancing competitions!

Girls feel there is always someone they can talk to if they have a problem and praise the support given to them in Year 7. They understand how to lead a healthy lifestyle because they study relevant topics in several subjects and many of them participate in extra-curricular clubs involving physical activity.

Numerous students, particularly in the sixth form, contribute to school life and to the local community. The school council has a strong voice and has been instrumental in bringing about changes to the school environment. Sixth formers take an active role, for example as house captains or working in local primary and special schools.

High expectations of students' moral and social values are strongly evident in the respect students show for others' differences and their concern for those less fortunate than themselves. Students take pride and put much energy into organising events which raise significant sums for charities. Cultural development is strong within the arts and through the opportunities provided for dramatic and musical performances and educational visits in this country and abroad. The brilliant displays of textiles and art work in corridors lift everyone's spirits as they move around the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students comment on how helpful they find their teachers and that they get support whenever they need it. Teachers prepare carefully and most lessons contain a good mixture of activities and discussion. Girls come to lessons ready to learn and to work hard. Whilst many girls answer questions willingly, a few are happy to sit back passively.

Students often ask interesting questions, reflecting that they think about what they are learning. Teachers cannot always respond in depth as the 45 minute lessons are short and do not always start punctually. Occasionally, too little time is left at the end of lessons to review the work covered, although some teachers are skilful at reinforcing and checking understanding as lessons progress.

Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects and some of them deliver lessons with an enthusiasm which stimulates students' deep interest. It is often the same teachers who highlight the relevance of topics to students' present and future lives. In such lessons learning is outstanding.

Teachers mainly use the wealth of data about students' progress and attainment well, to plan and to ask challenging questions. Students have mixed feelings about evaluating themselves in the 'Personal Learning Profile'. Some feel it is helpful, others that it is a waste of time. The picture is similar for marking – most of it is extremely helpful but comments such as 'lovely work' are not constructive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The principles of breadth, flexibility and choice underpin the curriculum, successfully reflecting students' aspirations and interests. Students' motivation has increased through the excellent

curriculum links with feeder schools and by Key Stage 3 being compressed into two years. Year 9 students welcome sampling the GCSE option courses and benefit from time to work at a high level. Some Year 10 students study the Science for Public Understanding AS course. These innovations have been successful because they have generated more GCSE A*/A grades and enhanced students' enjoyment of learning.

Sixth formers have an excellent choice of academic subjects and the IB Diploma is also an option. In addition to many leadership opportunities, they participate in IB Creativity, Action and Service activities. In Years 7 to 11, carefully planned enrichment days concentrate on the IB's 'Areas of Interaction' which include approaches to learning and community and service. These all help to make students thoughtful, aware and considerate of others.

A significant strength of students' school life is that over 100 residential and other trips, visits and activities take place each year. The school's science specialism permeates much of the curriculum and contributes to valuable links with many Kent schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The high quality care, guidance and support lead to girls feeling confident and well supported. Many of them speak positively of the support they receive for their academic work and for any personal difficulties. Staff know the girls well and take immense care to ensure their welfare. Very good attention is paid to health and safety with robust child protection and anti-bullying procedures.

Strategies are put in place when any girl is seen to be at risk of underachieving. Students who experience particular difficulties receive sensitive and well planned guidance to help them move forward. Particularly able and talented students are provided with stimulating and challenging opportunities and activities.

Information is shared well with parents through regular, detailed and informative reports. The school is working towards an Eco Award and many girls appreciate the importance of sustainable lifestyles. Through voluntary work and science links, staff and students foster community cohesion, especially with primary schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher gives astute, strong leadership. She is clear about how she wants the school to develop. She is ably supported by two deputy headteachers, a bursar and effective senior and middle leaders. Faculty leaders provide good guidance and direction. The exciting and imaginative science specialism activities are very well organised. The training and accreditation of science technicians in Kent is very successful.

The governors have much relevant experience which they bring to their deliberations. The recently appointed chair has a perceptive understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors are very supportive, and rightly confident that leaders at all levels meticulously monitor the impact of initiatives, especially those in the curriculum.

The effectiveness of the school's realistic and thorough self-evaluation has generated rising standards and an excellent capacity to improve further. The headteacher is aware of those aspects of teaching which could make learning more stimulating. She, and all staff, value the school's ethnic mix which contributes to the school's harmonious atmosphere. Students flourish at the school.

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	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
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	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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?	1	1
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	1	
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

27 April 2007

Dear students

Inspection of Dartford Grammar School for Girls, Dartford, DA1 2NT

Many thanks for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We wish we could have talked to more of you as we so enjoyed hearing your views on many aspects of school life. You appreciate all the excellent opportunities the school gives you and so you will not be surprised to hear that we have described its overall effectiveness as good with many outstanding features. These include the imaginative curriculum, the wonderful visits and extra-curricular activities, the care and guidance you receive and your responses to all these by the way you are maturing into thoughtful and considerate young adults.

You are taught well and it was evident that you think about what you are learning. We heard you ask some intelligent and interesting questions. Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects and some of them deliver lessons with an enthusiasm which stimulates you to think deeply about your work. It is often the same teachers who highlight the relevance and significance of work you are studying to the world outside school. In such lessons your learning is at the highest levels and then you attain the best possible grades in examinations.

The standards you achieve are very good but, in just a few subjects, there could be even more high grades. So the only thing we have asked the school to work on in the future, to raise standards even further, is to help you to appreciate the relevance of work to your present and future lives and to deliver more lessons in an imaginative and stimulating style.

For those of you facing tests or examinations this term I hope they go very well and that all of you have happy and successful futures.

Clare Gillies Lead inspector