

Colchester Royal Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115359
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	311926
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

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	Boys
Number on roll	
School	791
6th form	301
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr John Tillett
Headteacher	Mr Ken Jenkinson
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2003
School address	Lexden Road Colchester Essex CO3 3ND
Telephone number	01206 509100
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a smaller than average, selective boys' school where girls are admitted to the thriving sixth form. There is a small boarding section for sixth form boys. The school is non-denominational but accords broadly with Christian values. The school draws from a very wide area and serves much of north east Essex. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is very low. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is above average, although the numbers that do not have English as their first language is below average. Attainment on entry is well above average, as Essex grammar schools select from the most able of the school population who choose to apply. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is low, as is the number with a statement of special educational need. The school holds a specialist accreditation for science.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The aim of the school is to provide an academic education to rival that of the best and it is outstandingly successful in this matter. The school produces consistent and notable academic success at all levels; standards and achievement are outstanding. Colchester Royal Grammar has been the highest performing state school at A level five times in the last eight years and has always been amongst the top five maintained schools nationally.

As might be expected with such results, teaching and the students' attitudes to learning are outstanding. The provision of education, integrated care and support services in meeting the needs of learners are excellent. The students' personal development is exceptionally good and so is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Outstanding partnership work is part of the excellent care, guidance and support that promotes learners' well-being. Boarding provision is good with a number of notable strengths; the school has met all the requirements of the recent social care inspection.

Leadership and management are outstanding and maintain a very sharp focus on students' well-being and achievement. Senior managers and governors have taken very effective steps to promote improvement since the last inspection; for example, by enhancing the provision for information and communication technology (ICT). Departmental leadership is strong; subject leaders produce a comprehensive analysis of academic achievement and review this rigorously with the headteacher. Senior staff have initiated developments to enhance the evaluation of teaching and learning in order to provide more focused professional guidance to staff in the school's continued pursuit of excellence. HMI agree with the school that this is a key development for the future.

The school has specialist status in science where the quality of provision is particularly impressive. Many lessons in this area focus on developing the challenge in the subject matter to the highest possible level and making use of particularly incisive questioning techniques. Staff have contributed to in-service training for local schools and sixth form students are working with the county library service to develop learning materials for local primary school pupils. Many departments have benefited from the ideas developed under the auspices of the school's specialist status. A number of other subjects have the capacity to support a bid to the Department of Children's and Families Services for a second specialism.

The school has consistently demonstrated its outstanding capacity to make any necessary improvements.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school justifiably considers the sixth form its flagship, and it provides an outstanding standard of education. Standards are exceptionally high and students achieve extremely well.

A level results are outstanding. In 2007, 66% of entries resulted in A grades and 89% achieved A/B grades. Thirty-one students were offered a place at either Oxford or Cambridge University; virtually all students secured a place on the higher education course of their choice.

Students' personal development and well-being are excellent. They have a very mature attitude to their studies and make an impressive contribution to the wider life of the school. Many, through their role as prefects, have leadership responsibilities, and the sixth form are excellent

role models for younger students. There is significant evidence of sixth formers contributing to the wider community, for example in the donation of Christmas hampers to Age Concern. Teaching and learning are outstanding in the sixth form. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which they use very effectively to explain complex issues and to ask searching questions. Lessons are characterised by a very high level of academic challenge and rigour, and students respond with relish. They work very well together in discussions and in practical activities.

The curriculum is very well suited to the needs of this highly academic group of students. The range of A-level subjects is extensive and there is a wide range of enrichment activities including the opportunity to take a sports leader award.

Students greatly value the higher education guidance and advice they receive and feel very well prepared for university life. They particularly appreciate the fact that teachers take pains to know their individual strengths and aspirations, and provide them with opportunities to develop their experiences and skills further; for example, by providing sessions aimed specifically at those who wish to go into medicine or law. The school encourages students to participate in many local and national competitions, and many are very successful; in 2007, a female student won the 2007 Young Economist of the Year competition. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade for sixth form: 1

Boarding provision is outstanding. Students comment, 'Boarding is excellent, I am very happy here'. The Commission for Social Care Inspection of October 2006 found that boarding met national minimum requirements in most areas and exceeded them in several respects. The few areas for improvement noted in that report have now been comprehensively addressed. There is effective leadership by the boarding manager and staff provide a high standard of care and welfare.

Students speak highly of their boarding experience and praise staff for the way that they provide excellent pastoral support. Students are pleased with the accommodation, which is comfortable and homely. They make menu suggestions and enjoy the high quality of food presented. They have facilities to make some of their own meals and snacks. Students and their parents are delighted with the very good arrangements for laundry. The boarding council gives students a voice by which they can express their views on any area of their boarding experience. They all know who to turn to if they have concerns or need help. Students feel secure and well looked after and are happy to comply with the sensible boarding rules that ensure their safety. Behaviour is exemplary. Students welcome the many opportunities for cultural, social, sporting and recreation that are provided. They appreciate the links maintained by staff with their guardians. Students state that boarding prepares them very well for transition to university. Boarding promotes all aspects of personal development exceptionally well.

What the school should do to improve further

The school's self-evaluation highlights a number of important and well-argued areas for future development; inspectors considered that one of these could be at the core of the further enhancement of provision.

- Refine the procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to turn effective teaching into outstanding learning opportunities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The 2007 Key Stage 3 results for English, mathematics and science were very high and likely to be amongst those of the highest performing schools nationally. Similarly, the proportions of pupils who achieved the higher Levels 6 to 8 are far above the national figures and should only be compared with data from other selective schools.

The 2007 Key Stage 4 GCSE results are certain to compare favourably with any other school in England. All pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, that included English and mathematics. Interestingly, 88% achieved five or more A*/A grades at GCSE that included Maths and English and half of the year group attained ten A*/A grade passes. Notable successes were achieved in physics, chemistry, German, English and French.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. There is a deep commitment by the school to ensure that all students achieve well, both personally and academically. Students enjoy coming to school, work hard and above all, have very positive attitudes to learning. This is shown especially in the numbers of students who consistently support school events and activities, as well as in their examination results. Attendance is excellent and behaviour in lessons and around the school outstanding. Bullying is minimal and dealt with effectively; students say they feel safe and highly valued. Exclusions are very low. 'School life is wonderful here,' noted one Year 10 student. Parents are, understandably, overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent, helped by the example given by the small number of boarders. The school has high expectations of its learners who in turn have similar expectations of their teachers. This is shown in confident, mature debate within lessons and their questioning of the subject matter presented by their teachers. This greatly enhances their prospects of future economic well-being and is a significant strength of the school. Students have a highly developed sense of what it means to adopt healthy lifestyles. Their contribution to the life and culture of the school and the wider community, including other local schools, is excellent.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding overall. The vast majority of teaching is securely good or better with a small proportion judged to be only satisfactory. Teachers use questioning expertly to stimulate analytical thinking, make connections between ideas and promote a highly competitive academic atmosphere in class. They have high expectations of what their students can achieve, and they make maximum use of available time in lessons. Teachers have excellent

subject knowledge and expertise, which underpins their clear, detailed and in-depth explanations. Many lessons are characterised by engaging lively activities, which capture students' interest and enable them to develop independent and team-working skills. These lessons often include resources that appeal to students, such as well-judged PowerPoint slides or games. One such lesson was with a Year 7 French class. The teacher conducted almost all the lesson in French, and her enthusiasm, clarity of expression and engaging slides helped the students to make very rapid progress. On the few occasions when learning was judged to be only satisfactory, teachers over-dominated the lesson and provided few opportunities for students to be actively engaged.

Regular marking supports the high quality of learning in most lessons and constructive comments guide the next steps in learning. Occasionally marking is too general and not sharply focused on improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It responds extremely effectively to the academic aspirations of all students and is instrumental in ensuring academic success. Students have access to a very wide range of subject options at GCSE and A Level and the school is constantly seeking to extend these still further. Everything that should be in place to meet national requirements and recommendations is included. Curriculum planning includes close attention to providing activities that students enjoy, improving awareness of healthy lifestyles, ensuring students' safety, building links with the local community and preparing students for further and higher education. The school has been successful in establishing and developing its status as a specialist science school. This has given good impetus to the range of provision available and to students' achievements in science. The school has a good programme for maintaining and developing its resources and facilities across all subjects.

Students have access to an extensive selection of school clubs and activities. These include sports, languages, performing arts, music and recreational pursuits. Personal development is further enriched through well planned extra-curricular activities to support the most able students. Excellent examples are the Sports Leadership Programme, Young Enterprise and business competitions. Of particular significance are the links to other countries and cultures such as Germany and Hong Kong. Those students with specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given good support.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. The school provides a secure, positive and happy environment for students. They and their parents offer significant praise for the way the school promotes exceptionally high standards in social and emotional development as well as academic and wider educational success. Learners are particularly well supported through the subject and pastoral monitoring systems and the personal, social, health and citizenship programmes. Students are well informed about their progress and reach some of the highest academic targets nationally. The school website provides a sophisticated mechanism for enhancing independent learning and is highly valued by the students. The school works well with parents and other agencies. The few students with learning disabilities and/or

difficulties are very well supported and achieve as highly as their peers. Arrangements for the safeguarding of students meet current government requirements; health and safety and visit risk assessments are carefully managed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The leadership of the school has been outstandingly successful in its pursuit of academic excellence and, as students' note, in providing 'personal support' for all learners. Leaders and managers at all levels set very clear direction and example leading to the promotion of high quality of care and education. The school aspires to be the best, sets challenging targets that most establishments can only aspire to and regularly exceeds them. The school's self-evaluation is excellent, analytical and precise; HMI found it to be consistently accurate. Equality of opportunity is promoted in the school's relentless pursuit of excellence. Students note that discrimination is absent from their school lives. Resources, including staff, are deployed very effectively and, when considered against the school's consistent academic success, provides outstanding value for money. The governors are particularly well informed, recognise the excellence of the school leadership and discharge their responsibilities in an outstanding manner.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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?	1	1
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?	1	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

9 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Colchester Royal Grammar School, Colchester, CO3 3ND

I wish to thank you for the contribution you made to the recent inspection of the school. As you will have heard from the headmaster, the school was judged to be outstanding in all respects. Every student we spoke to commented how positively they viewed the school and the quality of the educational opportunities provided. Key factors in the school's continued success are the very positive attitudes to learning that you all bring to every aspect of your education and in the way you feel nurtured and valued by the staff.

The school development plan includes a number of issues to be addressed in the future in order to maintain the quality of provision you currently enjoy. However, inspectors picked out one key area to enhance the development of the school. I have asked the headteacher to refine the procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to ensure that the significant proportion of effective teaching you currently enjoy develops further outstanding learning opportunities.

In the main body of the report you will see how positively we viewed the school and how impressed we were with your contributions to its daily life.

It was a pleasure to meet you and I look forward to hearing about your future success.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector