

Maidstone Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118835
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313111
Inspection date	13 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Stephen Long 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	1258
6th form	368
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Christopher Morgan-Jones
Headteacher	Neil Turrell
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2004
School address	Barton Road Maidstone ME15 7BT
Telephone number	01622 752101
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement in English; achievement in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form; care guidance and support; the students' personal development; and the curriculum in the sixth form. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Maidstone Grammar is a larger than average selective boys' school which admits girls into the sixth form. The majority of students are of White British heritage and very few speak first languages other than English. The school has specialist status for modern languages, a Healthy School Award and has recently become a foundation school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Maidstone Grammar School provides outstanding education. The headteacher and staff have very high expectations for the students' academic and personal development which are reflected in the school's purposeful environment for learning. A large majority of parents are strongly supportive of the school's work, with one commenting, 'I have nothing but praise for this exceptional school and am grateful that my sons are receiving such a good quality of education.'

Students' attainment on entry is well above average and they make outstanding progress to reach exceptionally high standards. By the end of Year 9, the results in national assessment tests in mathematics, English and science are well above average, with students exceeding the levels expected in very large numbers. There have been some fluctuations in performance in English and the school has identified that students generally do better in mathematics and science because teaching in these subjects is of a consistently higher quality. Effective action has been taken to tackle weaknesses in English teaching and the most recent evidence shows students on target to do better. Standards in other subjects are also well above average by the end of Year 9.

In Years 10 and 11, the students continue to make excellent progress with nearly all gaining at least five good GCSE grades including mathematics and English. There are variations in their progress between subjects, reflected notably by the differing proportions of students gaining the highest grades. Better tracking of achievement and intervention where there are concerns is helping to close these gaps. However, students' progress is variable because of some inconsistencies in fostering the independent learning skills necessary for them to secure the highest GCSE grades.

The students' excellent academic progress and preparation for later life are supported by their very positive attitudes to learning. Most behave very well indeed and display excellent moral and social development through their relationships with each other and with staff. The majority thoroughly enjoy school and attendance is exceptionally high. Students say they feel safe, well cared for and are confident that issues such as bullying are addressed promptly. Procedures to safeguard students, including through employment checks for adults, are secure. The monitoring of students' personal development is excellent. Vulnerable students are identified and helped, in particular by the student support department and through work with outside agencies such as social services. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very effective so they make progress in line with their peers.

The students make a good contribution to the school as a community through the school council and activities organised through the house system. These initiatives are relatively new and are giving them a stronger voice in school life. Outside school, students make a good contribution to the wider community, for example through voluntary work.

Teaching and learning are highly effective. The majority of teachers use assessment information well to plan learning which meets students' varying needs. They are enthusiastic and most have very good subject knowledge, although difficulties

recruiting to some subjects mean this is not always the case. Lessons typically feature clear learning objectives, excellent pace through logically linked activities and effective behaviour management. Many teachers use excellent strategies to check progress, for example questioning to test understanding and to enhance students' speaking and listening skills. Led by language

staff, teachers increasingly use technology such as interactive display boards to engage students, and additional adults, including language assistants, are deployed well to support students.

Academic monitoring and guidance are good. Students' progress over time is tracked well and they have regular opportunities to review it with staff. Verbal guidance for improvement is often excellent in lessons, as is some, but not all, marking. Learning is most effective where lesson and homework tasks challenge students to think independently about how to develop their work. A student, in discussion, reflected that the best teachers 'provide you with enough for you to do it yourself but help if you need it'. However, this practice is not universal and students are not always involved sufficiently in deciding what to do to meet their high targets. Most students feel well supported when making options decisions. The majority of parents think communication with them about their children's progress is very good, although a number would like more access to subject staff.

The school's good curriculum has particular strengths in meeting students' academic needs through the range of subjects offered and the strong impact made by its specialist language status. This has resulted in a significant broadening of language study in school, the development of strong links with primary schools and the local community, for which the school is a major provider of language learning, and the development of international connections. The students' social and cultural development is enhanced by their opportunities in languages, helping them develop their understanding of other countries. The school has made good progress in meeting very challenging academic targets associated with its specialist status. These have been met fully for younger students but at GCSE and sixth form level they have been met in some languages but not others, although standards in all are very high.

In Years 7 to 9, the school rightly identifies that the students are ready for a more challenging curriculum through earlier access to GCSE study, beyond that already available in some subjects, and this is planned for next year. In Years 10 and 11, there are appropriate plans to give students more time for personal, social and health programmes, for religious education and for citizenship. These give the students a good understanding, for example, of how to avoid the dangers of alcohol, good spiritual development and awareness of the multi-ethnic nature of our country, but they do not give them the excellent understanding that the school wants and of which students are capable.

A very wide range of enrichment activities contributes strongly to students' enjoyment of school and to their learning. Within these, sport is very popular and an important aspect of school life, contributing well to students' understanding of how to stay fit and healthy, and to their development in key areas such as teamwork.

Outstanding leadership and management are evident in the strong improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher sets very clear direction and challenging but manageable targets for the students' academic and personal development. Senior and middle leaders provide strong support and their work is well coordinated. Monitoring and evaluation are largely accurate although the school had been cautious in evaluating some areas of its effectiveness, notably the extent of students' personal development. A very wide range of evidence about the quality of provision and students' achievement is employed to plan improvements at whole-school and subject or year group level and to check the impact of past initiatives. Resources are skilfully focused on priorities, including professional development for staff, where the school has responded well to challenges in recruitment. The governing body monitors the school carefully and challenges robustly where necessary.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form students are excellent role models for the rest of the school. They make a very valuable contribution to the school community through acting as mentors, prefects and taking lead roles in the school's outreach work with local primary schools. The staff know and support them well so they develop into confident and well adjusted young people, the vast majority of whom progress into higher education.

The students make good academic progress so that standards are above average by the end of Years 12 and 13. There is some variability in the progress made in different subjects at AS and A level, and progress is generally better in Year 13 and on the two-year international baccalaureate course. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to prepare lessons that are interesting and challenging. Discussion and debate are often of a very high order and students display excellent behaviour and attitudes to learning. Teachers monitor students' academic progress carefully and intervention is swift where underachievement is identified. Guidance for improvement is comprehensive and lessons contain many opportunities for teachers to check students' understanding and move them forward. However, the development of their independence in learning shares the same inconsistency as in the lower school with teachers sometimes providing guidance for improvement rather than challenging students to do this for themselves and thus limiting their capacity to gain higher grades. This is more evident in Year 12 than Year 13 or on the international baccalaureate course, where expectations of independence are more consistently applied. The curriculum has been developed in recent years to meet students' needs exceptionally well in the range of courses offered and in supporting their personal development. Sixth form leadership is extremely well managed between a number of key staff. Sixth form effectiveness is monitored watchfully and developments, as evident in the curriculum, are timely and well considered.

What the school should do to improve further

?Improve students' independent learning skills so that they are consistently engaged and challenged in learning for themselves and in deciding how to improve their work to meet their targets.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	2	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	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?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	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

15 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Maidstone Grammar School, Maidstone ME15 7BT

This letter is to summarise the outcomes of the recent inspection and to thank those of you to whom we spoke for your participation.

Maidstone Grammar is an outstanding school which enables you to make strong academic progress and reach very high standards. The staff have very high hopes and expectations of all of you. Led by the headteacher they work hard to improve what is provided for you. Your attitudes to learning, behaviour and attendance are excellent overall and these too support the academic progress you make. You told us you feel well cared for, that staff know you well and provide the support you need with work or if you have other concerns. You make a good contribution to the school through activities such as the year council and this is beginning to allow you to have more influence over what life is like at the school. Sixth form students make an excellent contribution, for example by mentoring younger students. Teaching is very effective in supporting your learning and most lessons are interesting and well prepared to meet your needs. Your progress is monitored carefully and you get excellent advice about how to improve from most, but not all, of your teachers, for example in their marking. Your parents and carers are kept well informed about your progress although some would like to meet subject teachers more often. The curriculum has strengths in the extent of the opportunities for you to study languages and the sixth form curriculum offers an outstanding range of opportunities. You told us you enjoy the wide range of additional activities like study visits and clubs and that they add greatly to your enjoyment of school.

In all schools, even the most effective ones, there are areas for improvement and I have asked the headteacher to include the following in his development plans.

To ensure that teachers involve students more in deciding how to improve their work because this kind of independent thought and approach to learning is required in order to reach the highest level in each subject.

Thank you again and good luck for the future.

Stephen Long Her Majesty's Inspector