

Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118790
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313091
Inspection dates	30 April–1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1,244
Sixth form	313

Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Reidy
Headteacher	Mr John Harrison
Date of previous school inspection	24–27 January 2005
School address	Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 9XB
Telephone number	01892 529551
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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 four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys is an above average size, selective school with a specialism in humanities. Girls are admitted in Year 12 and make up a small proportion of the sixth form. Most students are of White British heritage; many come from socially and economically advantaged backgrounds. Very few take up free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational need.

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 and improving school; it is well led and provides students with good standards of education, guidance and care. The welcoming atmosphere of the school is a reflection of the positive relationships that exist. These supportive relationships are an important factor in students' enjoyment of school. Students have a positive attitude to learning, air their views and develop their leadership skills through house meetings, the school council, the prefect system and by mentoring and supporting younger students. The school values its partnership with parents, most of whom have high regard for the school. One commented, 'The school knows the boys well and strives to help every one of them reach their potential.'

Students make good progress from their starting points to achieve high standards. They enjoy and benefit from the wide range of opportunities available to them. The good curriculum meets the needs of students and is increasingly flexible in accommodating their choices. The school's subject specialism in humanities adds breadth to its provision, helps students develop awareness of global and environmental issues and is being used effectively to introduce more imaginative approaches to teaching and learning. Extra-curricular activities also help students to explore their potential and grow into confident and articulate individuals. Testament to their good personal development, students mature into thoughtful citizens who care about the wider community and welcome opportunities to make a positive contribution to it.

Teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding. Monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning is central to the role of leaders but there is more work to do in developing a common approach so that best practice is shared in a systematic way. The most effective teaching that really stretches and engages students is closely matched to different learning needs and provides opportunities for students to 'take off' with ideas and make them their own. Not all teaching is of this calibre.

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher provides strong and creative leadership; he is supported well by an effective and hardworking senior leadership team. Together with governors, they give clear direction to the work of the school. However, there is variation in the quality of leadership at some levels; this is evident in the unevenness of students' performance across subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Senior leaders are quite rightly focusing on strengthening systems to increase accountability for students' achievement. For example, a system to track students' progress has been introduced and the school recognises that refining and embedding it in practice in all curriculum areas is a priority. Self-evaluation identifies strengths and areas for development accurately. Good capacity for further improvement is demonstrated in the clarity of vision shared by senior leaders, in better systems, in the development of the curriculum and in the significant improvement in students' attendance.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is well led and managed. A large proportion of Year 11 boys enter the school's sixth form, where students from other schools, including a small number of girls, join them. The wide range of courses offered is enhanced by an effective consortium arrangement with neighbouring grammar schools. Students make at least good progress relative to their prior achievement and receive pertinent careers advice that results in the overwhelming majority continuing their education at university. Teaching overall is good. However, in a few subjects students' achievement is below what it should be, reflecting variation in the quality of teaching. In the best lessons, students are challenged to achieve the highest grades by staff whose subject knowledge and variety of teaching techniques inspires students. In addition to helpful, detailed marking, staff regularly report students' attainment to parents, which results in specific action for those students who are not reaching the levels of which they are capable.

Students speak highly of the help they receive from individual members of staff and believe the sixth form has a friendly and welcoming community atmosphere. The school takes seriously and acts upon the suggestions made by students, through either the sixth form council or the questionnaires and focus groups that are organized to gather students' views on specific issues. For example, a survey identified the need for greater availability of careers information and advice, which the school provided almost immediately. Students are keen to make the most of the many opportunities to take responsibility. They are fully involved in the school community and conscientious about contributing to its success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching from good to outstanding by matching it closely to students' needs and giving more opportunity for them to work collaboratively and independently.
- Ensure all curriculum areas use information from the tracking of students' progress to maximise their potential.
- Lift the performance of subject teams to that of the best by sharing good practice.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with standards that are well above national averages and, as would be expected, GCSE and GCE A-level results are exceptionally high in relation to national figures. A more significant measure of the school's effectiveness is the progress students make in comparison with those at other schools. Between Years 7 and 9, students make outstanding progress, due to good teaching and positive attitudes to learning. Progress at Key Stage 4 slows and there is variation in students' achievement in different subjects. Too few students gain the A and A* grades of which they are capable. The school is aware of the issue and senior managers are working with individual department staff to reduce this variability.

All groups of students achieve equally well, including the small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being **Grade 2**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their positive attitudes and good behaviour in lessons and around the school show that students enjoy and value their education. Their courtesy and consideration to each other reflects their moral and social maturity. This is apparent in their earnest commitment to the 'Fusion' project that trains older students to mentor their younger peers. In the spiritual dimension of development, they respond well to the opportunities available, for example, in religious education. Students engage readily with the wide range of cultural experiences on offer. They respect and appreciate the diversity of cultures within society.

The school has achieved a substantial improvement in attendance, having moved from attendance that was average last year to attendance that is well above average this year. In particular, the number of authorised absences has been reduced from well above, to well below, average. The school has worked hard for this improvement, which better reflects the enjoyment and achievement seen in lessons. The rate of exclusions remains low.

Students say, and parents confirm, that the school is a safe place where any bullying is dealt with effectively. In workshops and laboratories, students adopt safe practices. They also learn the benefits and enjoyment of regular physical exercise. Healthy eating options are available and students understand the importance of a balanced diet but do not always translate this into practice.

Pupils feel a sense of identity with the school and respond well to the many opportunities to contribute to the wider community. They show a commitment to continuing education and training after age 16, which is conducive to their future economic well-being, whether they enter the school's sixth form or not.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning **Grade: 2**

A strength of the teaching is good subject knowledge, which results in skilfully structured lessons with well sequenced activities. New ideas are explained clearly, enabling students to tackle tasks with confidence. Teachers' high expectations and the positive attitudes of students ensure most achieve very well. The pace of lessons is generally sharp and snappy. Success criteria are clearly signposted and students have sufficient opportunities to evaluate their own and each other's work. Homework is regularly set.

Students are especially successful when they work collaboratively or have the chance to exercise their creativity and original thinking in extended tasks undertaken independently. Some lessons are very teacher led with teachers talking for too long

and controlling the scope of the lesson too tightly. Consequently, opportunities are missed to extend the very able and give students responsibility for developing and applying learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

At Key Stage 3, the curriculum enables students to make good progress because it matches their needs well. The school is ambitious for all its students and has rightly identified that in Key Stage 4, while the majority of students can choose appropriate pathways from the options available, there is a minority whose choices may be constrained. A comprehensive review has been undertaken and appropriate plans are in place to broaden options and increase flexibility. In the sixth form, there is a wide range of courses available, including vocational courses offered in collaboration with other local schools and through membership of the West Kent Learning Federation.

The school was designated a specialist school with humanities status in September 2007. It is making good progress in implementing its planned strategies for the first year of operation, establishing strong foundations upon which to build future developments.

Work-related learning is incorporated into personal, social and health education (PSHE) throughout the school and all students participate in work experience in Year 11. The school provides a wide variety of enrichment activities that both support and enhance the curriculum well. Students are able to participate in sports and clubs at lunchtime and after school as well as field trips specific to subject areas.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support provided for students is very good, with academic guidance satisfactory. Health and safety, risk assessment and child protection procedures are rigorous and students are well looked after. Students with additional learning needs are identified and good support programmes put in place for those with learning and behavioural difficulties. The small number of students whose home language is not English are supported well.

The PSHE programme makes a good contribution to students' knowledge and understanding of the world of work, drugs and health-related matters. However, whilst some staff use tutor time well, the lack of a whole-school programme means this valuable 20 minutes a day does not contribute as much as it should to students' achievement and well-being.

A range of appropriate strategies is used to support students' learning, such as a study skills course to help Key Stage 4 students to prepare better for their GCSE examinations. Students and parents are informed about progress on a regular basis. Books are marked, but feedback to students on how well they are doing varies from the informative and helpful to just 'ticks' and comments such as 'good' or 'complete'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The appointment of the headteacher two years ago heralded the development of a different style of leadership. The new leadership and staffing structures are now successfully established. Teamwork is becoming a strength of the school. Teachers and support staff work together cohesively to achieve common goals. Good opportunities for professional development link to the school improvement plan as well as to the individual needs of staff.

The headteacher and senior team are strongly focused on continuous improvement and raising standards of achievement. Whole-school systems are strengthening. Middle leaders are developing the art of self-evaluation. Students' progress is tracked within subjects and across subjects. However, not all curriculum areas use this information well to help students achieve their challenging targets. Regular line management procedures are making teachers more accountable for students' progress. However, there is recognition that departmental strategies for monitoring teaching and learning need to be coordinated in an overarching approach to enable the dissemination of good and outstanding practice.

Governance is good. Governors are passionately committed to the school and ambitious for its success. They are very aware of their accountability and work hard to drive improvement and influence the strategic direction of the school. Close liaison with the senior leadership team and links with departments and year groups ensure they know the school well.

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

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?	2	2
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?	2	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage		
The effectiveness of boarding provision		
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	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.

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	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	

Annex B



2 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Tunbridge Wells Grammar School for Boys, Tunbridge Wells TN4 9XB

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and appreciated your openness and cooperation. This letter summarises the findings of our inspection. Your parents or carers will have a copy of the full report should you wish to read it.

Yours is a good and improving school that is well led. There is a wide range of courses available to you with appropriate plans to extend your options further in Key Stage 4. We agree there is a good choice of extra activities that help you to develop as well-rounded, confident young people with excellent life opportunities.

You enjoy good lessons that help you to achieve high standards in national tests and examinations. Relationships between you are strong. Staff and governors ensure you have good care and support and you say you feel safe and valued. You contribute to the school's success through your positive attitudes to learning and by airing your views confidently. You develop leadership skills through house meetings, the school council, the prefect system and by mentoring and supporting younger students.

Your school is always striving to improve and, to this end, we have asked staff and governors to:

- Match teaching closely to your needs and give you more opportunity to work collaboratively and independently.
- Track your progress in all subject areas and use the information to maximise your potential.
- Lift the performance of subject teams to that of the best by sharing good practice.

We were impressed with your willingness to take responsibility and your enthusiasm for learning. You make an essential contribution to the supportive and welcoming atmosphere in your school and care about the wider community, too.

With very best wishes for the future.
Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector