

Fort Pitt Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118798
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	326893
Inspection date	3 March 2009
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 (total)	887
Sixth form	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marion Cogger
Headteacher	Julia Bell
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2006
School address	Fort Pitt Hill Chatham ME4 6TJ
Telephone number	01634 842359
Fax number	01634 817386

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: students' achievement, initiatives in the curriculum, the quality of teaching and learning and the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from: examination of documents, lesson observations and meetings with staff, students and governors. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

When pupils join the school, their attainment is well above average although the range in attainment is much wider than that found in grammar schools nationally. Very few have learning difficulties or disabilities. Most pupils are from a White British heritage. The school has had specialist status in mathematics and science since September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It provides an excellent education for its students. The headteacher's excellent leadership is particularly well supported by the governors and senior leaders, who have a valuable range of expertise and skills. The school very successfully focuses on its four 'Excellents: Academic, Environment, Appearance and Community'. Students attain well above average standards in all years, particularly in the school's specialist subjects of mathematics and science. They receive a very high quality of care and guidance that supports their excellent well-being and personal development. Many girls proceed to university, often being the first generation in their families to do so.

Students' achievement is outstanding, with at least 50% GCSE A*/A grades in over ten GCSE subjects attained by Year 11 in 2008, and 50% or more A/B grades in twelve A level subjects. Determined not to be complacent, the school's key focus is to eliminate inconsistency between subjects in the percentage of these high grades and in the progress students make. To support this, it has recently appointed a literacy co-ordinator to strengthen students' higher level writing skills across the curriculum but it is too early to evaluate the impact of this work. There is no difference in progress or attainment by any group of girls; those with learning difficulties or disabilities or with a minority ethnic heritage do just as well as others.

Four years ago, the school compressed its curriculum so that students started their Key Stage 4 courses in Year 9 and all of this year group took GCSE examinations in 2008 at the end of Year 10. They achieved a very good percentage of A*/A grades and 97% of them attained five or more GCSE A*-C grades including English and mathematics. Also in 2008, Year 11 students, who had not followed the 'accelerated' curriculum, achieved the same percentage of five or more GCSE A*-C grades including English and mathematics, with a higher percentage of A*/A grades. Targets in the specialist subjects were met or exceeded.

Approximately one third of Year 11 students are now following AS courses, with the rest taking combinations of AS and GCSE courses. AS courses are taught to Year 11 and 12 students together; a few parents and students express concerns that the size of these groups is too large. They are no larger than teaching groups found in many sixth forms. Nevertheless, the school is aware of the students' and parents' concerns and will ensure that there is flexibility so that students' abilities, personal needs and aspirations are met.

In Years 9 and 10, all students study AS critical thinking, statistics and religious education and many study the three separate sciences, offered along with several other science courses. The uptake of specialist subjects has increased, with large numbers following science and mathematics courses.

Many elements of the National Curriculum for citizenship are covered extremely well in religious education and personal, social, health and enterprise education (PSHEE) lessons. Students enjoy these lessons and find them topical and interesting, for example a new unit on diversity and Britishness. Study of the UK's relations with the world as a global community, which would enhance students' understanding of other cultures, is less well developed.

Many girls enjoy sport after school and know exactly what is involved in living a healthy lifestyle, admitting that they do not always choose the healthiest options at lunchtime! Nevertheless, a curriculum weakness is that only in Year 11 do students have the government's recommended minimum of two hours a week of physical education.

Teaching and learning are good, with more that is good and outstanding than at the time of the previous inspection, and changes in staffing, in science particularly, have certainly increased the success and popularity of this and a few other subjects. Students' progress is monitored carefully and more, but not all, teachers now prepare work, based on assessment data, at the right level for individual students. Many lessons move at a fast pace and teachers capture students' interest by using the interactive whiteboards effectively, to present stimulating visual images or to let all students 'vote' for the right answer and to see how many of them get it right.

Some teachers are skilful at asking questions which make students think, and then responding to their answers with an even more challenging question. Many teachers encourage students to work independently and show them how to carry out research but occasionally teachers steer students' thinking too much or let them practise for too long skills they have mastered. Currently, teaching does not focus strongly enough on developing the skills students require for advanced level work which now starts in Year 9.

The school is sensitive to the fact that there are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and that some students do not have straightforward lives outside school. Initiatives to ensure a harmonious atmosphere and respect for all, such as counselling or evaluation of students' emotional literacy, underpin the school's excellent focus on equality and elimination of discrimination. Students get on well together and feel the school creates a very secure environment. They are taught, for example, about safe use of the internet and safety in relationships. They all learn first aid. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are secure.

Students' attendance is well above average, with very few persistent absentees. Girls behave extremely well. Teachers assume that the girls will behave sensibly and they do, as witnessed by relaxed chatter in the dining room, concentration combined with good relationships and humour in lessons, and social thoughtfulness. The school develops students' appreciation of morals by example and by discussing issues such as images of teenagers in the media in PSHEE. Students' spiritual development is good, particularly in religious education lessons but less so through assemblies.

The fairly new vertical tutor groups are popular with practically all students; girls in Year 7 much appreciate receiving help and spending time with older students. Girls rate highly the many house activities, including competitions and dances, which they often organise themselves. Students observe that the school council is increasingly effective, for example demanding bike stands to encourage cycling to school and to support the school's environmental awareness. The school and house councils regularly discuss and support a range of charities, particularly as students buy products from a student-run Fairtrade stall. Many students, particularly sixth formers, willingly respond to the many leadership positions they can apply for in the school and enjoy supporting others.

The number of sports and musical activities is excellent, from fencing to street dance or flute choir to the senior orchestra. Well over 100 students, some of whom are financially supported by the school, learn musical instruments. Many teachers provide clubs and revision sessions, and a debating group has started up recently but the majority of out-of-school activities are sport- and music-based. Following a school council request for more trips and visits, a good number take place each year, mainly in the UK.

After their examinations last year, Year 10 students carried out activities related to financial enterprise and workplace skills. Students are well prepared for life beyond school and receive much guidance on career and higher education options. Their literacy and numeracy skills are

very good and some, but not yet all, girls know how to work independently and use modern technology confidently.

A parent writes that 'My daughter is extremely happy at the school and does not have any concerns or worries' and many students said the same to the inspectors, observing that bullying is extremely rare and that, if they wish to, they can contact staff via e-mail. No racist incidents occurred last year. Many parents highlighted how all staff are encouraging and caring and that they appreciate receiving prompt replies to any queries. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported extremely well and one parent rightly observed that the school's pastoral care is 'fantastic'. In all years, non-teaching staff contribute much to the girls' personal development.

The school is fully aware of the local community's population and its needs and that it does not reflect the composition of the UK as a whole. Girls and parents appreciate that the school tackles local issues in its PSHEE programme and in assemblies. The local community benefits from some Year 11 students' work experience and sixth formers' community service placements. The school shares its excellent work in music in the local area, and students organise a Christmas party for senior citizens. Teachers and a few sixth formers teach mathematics and science in local primary schools. Some of the school's most skilled teachers have worked in a number of local schools to spread excellence in teaching and learning.

Some of the school buildings are rich in history and expensive to maintain but the governors use the financial resources carefully to improve facilities. They continuously probe standards and achievement and evaluate new initiatives. The headteacher is skilled at identifying teachers' particular skills and giving them positions whereby they can share their good practice with others. She is also firm in expressing the high standards she demands in teaching but equally encouraging when teachers want to try new ideas. The school knows itself well and has a straightforward action plan based on the right key areas.

The lack of impact of the school's specialism was mentioned in the previous inspection report but this is no longer the case. A lively newsletter summarises the activities and visits which take place, especially for gifted students, and non-specialist subjects have started to incorporate mathematical and scientific ideas, including enquiry skills, into their work.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Sixth formers mature into considerate and thoughtful young adults, most of whom have confidence in their ability to succeed at university and their future life. They are excellent role models to the younger girls. The school concentrates on encouraging students to have high aspirations, on raising their self-esteem and on extending their horizons beyond the local area. As in the main school, the quality of care and guidance is outstanding and students' personal development is equally strong. The headteacher and the head of the sixth form know all the students individually so they lead and manage with insight and sensitivity.

The school works hard to encourage students to apply to top universities and to interest them in universities beyond the local area, where two in five chose to go this year. A '3As' club (Aim, Aspire, Achieve) has been introduced for high attainers. The sixth form curriculum, which now starts in Year 11, gives students a very flexible and wide ranging choice of 'pathways' and levels, including foundation degrees. Options include academic (over 23 A level subjects), vocational, work placements, community service and research. As the sixth form operates in a consortium

with two local secondary schools, it is rare that students cannot study the combination of subjects they want.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the curriculum to increase the amount of physical education in Years 7 to 10, to incorporate fully the National Curriculum for citizenship and to further respond to evaluation of recent initiatives.
- Foster teachers' sharing of outstanding teaching practice and develop and strengthen the teaching and learning skills necessary for the advanced level work which now starts in Year 9.

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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	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/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which 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	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	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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 eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

March 4 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Fort Pitt Grammar School, Chatham ME4 6TJ

It was a pleasure to meet many of you during our recent visit; thank you for being so welcoming. You are receiving an excellent education at Fort Pitt and, confirming what you and many of your parents feel, we think it is an outstanding school. We agree that you are very well supported by the staff, all of whom care for you very well and want you to make a real success of your lives beyond school.

We listened carefully to your positive comments about the vertical tutor groups and your less favourable ones on the new curriculum arrangements. It is true that a minority of the AS groups are quite large but the school is aware of your concerns and we are sure that your learning is not suffering – large mixed-age groups are common in many sixth forms.

The 'accelerated' curriculum gives you the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects and to gain useful qualifications; the school will certainly listen to your thoughts about it as it seeks to make it as good as possible. The curriculum in the main school is one of the two areas we have asked the school to review - to increase the amount of physical education in Years 7 to 10, to incorporate fully the National Curriculum for citizenship and to respond further to evaluation of recent initiatives.

We were impressed with your behaviour, your social skills and how well you get on together and with your teachers. You are taught very well in many lessons and it is very good that your teachers are sharing good practice and keen to keep improving how they guide your learning. Related to this is the second area we have asked the school to work on: to foster teachers' sharing of outstanding teaching practice and to develop and strengthen the teaching skills necessary for the advanced work which you now start in Year 9. You can help too by continuing to work hard, as you do now.

We hope you will all be successful in your futures and thank you making our visit to your school so enjoyable.

Yours faithfully

Clare Gillies

Lead Inspector