

Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls A Specialist College for Language and Science

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125730
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	328387
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Rashida Sharif HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	615
Sixth form	234
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jeff Downes
Headteacher	Ms Kate Barnett
Date of previous school inspection	8–9 March 2006
School address	Shottery Manor Stratford-upon-Avon Warwickshire CV37 9HA
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 26 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, looked at the school's and departmental self-evaluations, the school's improvement plan, the tracking systems used to monitor student progress, the work in students' books, minutes of governing body meetings and 145 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- teachers' planning of lessons and the variety of approaches to learning used, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT)
- teachers' marking and feedback to students to help them know how well they are doing and what they need to do to further improve their work
- the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation in identifying the actions to be taken to bring about improvement in weaker aspects of subjects or teaching.

Information about the school

Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls is a small school with a growing sixth form. The majority of the students are White British. A small but significant number of students are from minority ethnic groups and very few speak English as an additional language. There are currently no students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school was redesignated as a language college in 2006, and achieved dual specialist status with science in 2007. It achieved the full international school award in 2007 and the Artsmark Silver award in 2008. Since the last inspection in 2006 the responsibilities of the senior and middle leadership team have been revised. The school works closely with some of the local secondary schools and colleges as part of the collaborative approach for the development of 14–19 education.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

1

Capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an extremely inclusive, caring and supportive school where students feel safe and well cared for. Students' attainment is consistently high across the school, including in the sixth form. Students make good progress and many make outstanding progress. Students' personal and social development are outstanding, as is the care, guidance and support they receive. The students benefit from a wide curriculum and an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities, clubs and events. Their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. Effective teaching ensures that the quality of learning is good overall, with many outstanding features. In the best lessons, all students are challenged by their work and enthused by the interesting approaches to enable them to apply their skills and understanding. However, in some lessons, teachers spend too long talking and work is not always matched carefully enough to students' individual needs and abilities. The marking of students' work, although thorough, varies in quality between teachers and subjects. Feedback generally tells the students how well they doing; however, it does not always tell them what they need to do to further improve their work. Monitoring and evaluation is thorough and the school knows its strengths and areas for further development. The school tracking data identify students and their differing needs, helping the school to set challenging targets. The school uses its staff and other resources, particularly through its specialist status, to enhance its work with local partner schools. While maintaining and improving students' high achievement, senior leaders and governors have brought about significant improvements since the last inspection. These include, for example, attaining dual specialist status in languages and science as well as achieving the full international award. The school has outstanding capacity improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching further, so that more is outstanding, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - use a broader range of teaching approaches which challenge, motivate and engage all students
 - use marking and feedback to make more explicit to students what they need to do to further improve their work.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

1

The large majority make good progress and many make outstanding progress, including those from minority ethnic groups. They reach very high standards in most subjects. Students are enthusiastic, highly motivated and determined to do well in everything they do. In the majority of lessons seen they worked hard and with considerable enjoyment. Occasionally their enjoyment and progress is limited by too few opportunities to engage in discussion, to explain their own understanding or to be challenged by the work they do. When the opportunities are provided, students express their ideas confidently, ask astute questions and reveal outstanding ability to express opinions and interpret information.

Students' personal and social development is excellent. They show well-developed social skills and treat each other with considerable respect. Younger students spoke highly of the sixth form mentors and the benefits they gained from them. Behaviour, both in lessons and around the school, is exemplary. Students have very good awareness and understanding of the importance of leading healthy lifestyles and their participation rates in sport and other activities are high. The language specialism and the impressive international links enhance the students' understanding of the cultural differences and beliefs of others. Students leave school at the end of both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form as confident and competent individuals and many as multilinguists. Their attendance is excellent.

The school has recognised that a few students have not performed as well as they could in mathematics. The school has responded swiftly and strategies have been put in place to resolve this underperformance. Early indications are that these strategies are already beginning to have a positive impact; however, these have not yet fully permeated through the whole school. The students have extremely well-developed literacy skills and most have well-developed numeracy skills, giving them an excellent preparation for their future economic well-being. Their social skills and ability to take responsibility are outstanding. The school recognises that ICT skills are less well developed and has plans in place to improve them further.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	na
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	1
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	1

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	1
Pupils' attendance	1
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	1
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	1

The quality of the school's work

Teaching is good and frequently outstanding. This is helped by consistently hard-working students who are keen to do well. Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of their subjects. The best lessons seen show the teachers using their expertise skilfully in imparting some difficult concepts to students. These lessons are well organised, delivered at a good pace and they challenge all students. At the same time the students are given opportunities to be actively involved in their own learning. Both teachers and students use questions skilfully to enhance discussion and debate. This raises their confidence and extends their knowledge and understanding. Occasionally, students have insufficient opportunities for independent learning because teachers give too much information and do not challenge all students. They are quick to comment if this is the case. As one student pointed out, 'We like to challenge and be challenged, we are not shy.'

The school has excellent systems to check students' performance and progress. Most teachers use these well to plan lessons that meet students' needs and to set challenging targets. Although most marking in books gives excellent guidance for students on how to improve their work, this is inconsistent. There is still too much marking that gives little guidance on how students can further improve their work. At times comments in books are not followed up.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and closely matched to students' needs. It is enhanced by excellent provision to study a wide range of modern foreign languages, promoted through specialist status, and an excellent range of extra-curricular activities and international visits. The school goes to considerable lengths to ensure that the curriculum for older students reflects their interests and aspirations. The school makes excellent provision for physical education (PE) both in and out of lessons, although it also recognises that space for PE is limited and has plans in place to address this.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Expectations and ambitions are high and drive improvements at all levels. The school shares its aspirations widely and its aims are supported by parents and students. The school sets challenging and aspirational targets, even when outcomes, particularly in attainment, are already high. Governors are fully engaged with the school and carry out their statutory duties thoroughly, regularly reviewing and challenging the school's performance. Resources are efficiently deployed and value for money is outstanding.

The school has made excellent provision for community cohesion and has made rapid progress in this area, particularly in showing the impact that their partnership is having on both the school and the local community. Partnerships with other schools and organisations are excellent through its specialist status and collaborative work. Students at all levels take on a very wide range of responsibilities, particularly in the sixth form, which contributes effectively to the school and local communities. The school takes pride in its inclusive approach, ensuring equality of opportunity for all its students to flourish and enjoy their education and life at school. Where the school has identified any variations in performance, action is taken to support these students. The school regularly seeks the views of parents and carers. However, school is aware that, although parents are kept well informed about their children's progress and they are happy with the care provided, some do not always feel that they are adequately involved in making some of the decisions.

There are rigorous procedures to ensure students' safety and security. Excellent relationships between students and adults mean that students feel secure and confident and that there is always someone to turn to if they need any help. The school provides excellent care for its students.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	1
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	1
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	1
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	1
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students' attainment is high, and they make good and occasionally outstanding progress, especially in history, English and politics. Teaching and learning are good and, in some lessons, outstanding. Students learn to work independently, organise their time effectively and express themselves clearly and with confidence.

Occasionally, teachers do not provide enough opportunities for them to raise and answer questions, limiting the level of challenge. As a result of outstanding care, support and guidance, which are appreciated by students and their parents, retention rates are high. Excellent transition arrangements help students new to the school to settle quickly. Their progress is very closely monitored so that any underachievement is identified and prompt action is taken. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community, making sustained commitments, for example to working with older people locally or the citizens' advice bureau, as well as providing support for younger students. The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. Planning is robust and based on a clear view of strengths and areas for further development. The school recognises, however, that study space for the growing sixth form is limited and has plans in place to address this.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The significant majority of the 145 parents who responded to the questionnaire are very happy with the school and what it does for their children. They commented on their children's enjoyment of school, how safe they feel and how well they are prepared for the next stages in their education and later lives. Many parents commented positively on the wide range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school, particularly those offered during school time to accommodate those students who live a considerable distance from the school. A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the limited facilities, particularly for the growing sixth form and for sport.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007–8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007–8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007–8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007–8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment: the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress: the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement: an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
- Capacity to improve: the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management: the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

27 February 2009

Dear Students



Inspection of Stratford-upon-Avon Grammar School for Girls A Specialist College for Language and Science, Warwickshire CV37 9HA

Thank you on behalf of the inspection team for the friendly and courteous welcome we received when we visited your school recently. This letter is to tell you about the result of our inspection. We very much enjoyed our discussions with you. We found your responses informative and very supportive of the school. We were very impressed with your positive attitudes and exemplary behaviour at all times. We judged your school to be outstanding. Attainment is high at all stages, including the sixth form.

Throughout the inspection we worked very closely with your senior leadership team so that the school was clear about how we arrived at our final judgments and that we were fair. Many of you also helped in the inspection by letting us know how well you think the school is doing and about some of the different roles you have in school. We were particularly impressed by the way you work and support each other and that you were not shy in constructively challenging your teachers. We saw some outstanding teaching and much that was good. You benefit from a wide range of subjects and an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities, clubs and events. We were also impressed with how well you support each other and how the mentors guide and support younger students. The staff work very hard to ensure that the school is a safe place for you and that you are well cared for both pastorally and academically. We particularly enjoyed observing you and your teachers in some of the more challenging lessons where both you and the teachers skilfully asked probing questions to help raise your already very impressive standards.

The school is very well led. Staff and governors set very challenging targets, even where performance is already very high. However, for the school to improve even further, we have asked for an increase in the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that all teachers:

- use a broader range of teaching approaches to learning which challenge, motivate, engage and enthuse you
- use marking and feedback to make more explicit to you what you need to do to further improve your work.

We are confident that your school will continue to improve and wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Rashida Sharif
Her Majesty's Inspector

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