

Bexley Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101462
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	307694
Inspection dates	15 - 16 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Dr Lynn Bappa

Type of School	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1544
6th form	425
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A J J Woodcock
Headteacher	Mr R I MacKinnon
Date of previous school inspection	06 October 2003
School address	Danson Lane Welling DA16 2BL
Telephone number	020 8304 8538
Fax number	020 8304 0248

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- Achievement.
- Teaching and learning.
- Aspects of the curriculum.
- Students' personal development and well-being.
- Leadership and management.

Evidence was gained from lesson observations, from discussions with leaders and students and from evaluation of a range of documentation. 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. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Bexley Grammar School is a larger than average selective school for boys and girls aged 11-18. It is a specialist languages college and has just successfully applied to add science and maths as a second specialism. The school is very popular and heavily over-subscribed. Some of the children come from homes that are socially and economically advantaged, but students come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is lower than the national average but is above the grammar school average. Around a quarter of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds - this is higher than average and also higher than in other local schools. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is much lower than average. The school has recently been designated a High Performing Specialist School and also has Leading Edge status. It has the International Award, Healthy Schools status, Investors in People and Sportsmark and Artsmark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

What makes Bexley Grammar School outstanding is an unrelenting drive to ensure that all students achieve their very best, both academically and personally. As one parent commented, 'We are privileged to have such a fantastic school in our area.' Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels and high quality teamwork is a particularly strong feature. The headmaster provides inspirational leadership and is held in the highest regard by staff, students and parents alike. One parent summed up the view of many when he wrote, 'The headmaster is an excellent leader who gets the best out of every child.' The school has no significant weaknesses and has an excellent capacity to improve even further. Management of its work as a specialist college is excellent and fosters the school's vision of always seeking to raise students' expectations and achievements. Governors provide a very effective balance of support and challenge to the headmaster and senior managers. The school works very well with a wide range of partners, including local schools and businesses. Relationships with parents are very positive and their views are listened to.

The standards reached by students in external tests and examinations are very high, as would be expected of a grammar school, and are steadily improving over time. The proportion of 16 year-olds who gain the highest grades at GCSE, for example, has increased by 10% in the last three years. Although students enter with standards that are well above average, attainment on entry is wider than normally seen in selective schools. Results in the national tests for 14 year olds are exceptionally high. Standards at GCSE are also very high, with almost all students achieving five or more A*-C grades and 47% gaining five or more A* or A grades. Despite these consistently high standards, the school is constantly trying to improve them and regularly meets or exceeds its challenging targets. Students, irrespective of their gender or ethnicity, make very good progress and their achievements are outstanding, both academically and personally. This is because the school's supportive ethos motivates students to perform to the best of their ability and makes them 'thirsty to learn'. As a result, they show high levels of interest in everything going on in school. This makes a major contribution to the excellent achievement seen. As one parent commented, 'Bexley Grammar School always caters for the strength of individuals as well as striving for academic excellence'.

Teachers build on students' well above average prior attainment very successfully through outstanding teaching. The ethos of the school means that students are very keen to succeed and that they want to learn. Classroom relationships are very positive and students feel that teachers 'will always go the extra mile' to help them. Teachers are passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects. As a result, students are challenged to think for themselves and develop their own enthusiasm for learning. In the vast majority of lessons, they are completely involved in their work, whether it is learning the Japanese alphabet or analysing the characters in a play.

A particularly strong feature of the school is its outstandingly rich curriculum that raises students' aspirations and stretches their imaginations. Students are proud of their school's specialist status. This is having a very positive impact on their academic achievement as well as on curricular enrichment and community provision. Students benefit from being able to study a very wide range of languages, for example, including Japanese, Russian and British Sign Language. All languages' teachers are expected to learn a new language and this ethos of high expectations has a positive impact on students, both culturally and academically. 'Since I came to this school, I have been abroad many times, go to the theatre regularly and have just seen my first opera', said one student. Another added, 'I'm going to China with the school soon - I'd never even been on a plane before I came here.' The recent success of the school's bid to add science as a second specialism is already beginning to have an impact. The school has also extended its community provision and developed excellent links with local schools and the community. 30 'Science Prefects', trained in data logging, visited neighbouring primary schools in the summer term to teach chemistry projects, for example.

While academic achievement is a strong focus of this school, this has not been achieved at the expense of students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which are also excellent. This is a very caring school. Parents, students and staff are rightly proud of this aspect of the work of the school. Behaviour and attitudes are exemplary, both inside the classroom and around the school. Students are

reflective, polite and a delight to talk to. They show a very good understanding of how to keep healthy and stay safe. They are very well prepared for their future lives. A particularly strong feature of the school is the amount of responsibility that it gives to students. The school council is very active and students feel that its views are taken seriously. Sixth form subject prefects help younger students with their work and also give lessons to primary school pupils in foreign languages (including Latin), sport and science. Students are involved in interviewing new staff and have been trained to observe lessons using Ofsted criteria. A new academic school council is in the early stages of being established and the school is very keen to develop the student voice even further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Sixth form provision is outstanding. Students make excellent progress and achieve results that are significantly higher than those found nationally, with a high proportion achieving A and B grades at A level. The students who are taking the International Baccalaureate (IB) instead of A levels attain particularly high standards. As one student commented, 'the IB gives us an edge when we go to university.' Sixth form lessons typically feature interesting activities and high levels of intellectual challenge. Those students who join from other schools settle quickly and achieve as well as their classmates. Retention rates are very good, with very high numbers of students staying on into Years 12 and 13. Almost all students leave the school for higher education, with very many applying and being accepted into the most prestigious universities. They are offered a very rich and varied curriculum, including an impressive enrichment programme that involves them in a wide range of community projects as well as providing opportunities to study additional subjects such as GCSE astronomy or an accredited British Sign Language course. Relationships between students and their teachers are excellent and there is a real community 'buzz' among the student body. Their personal development is outstanding and they play an impressively active role in the life of the school. Leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school has no significant weaknesses. However, the inspectors agree with both senior leaders and students that, in order to improve even further, they should extend and develop the student voice throughout and beyond the school.

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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 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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
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	1	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 learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest 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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

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	

Annex B

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

26 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Bexley Grammar School, Welling, DA16 2BL

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I should like to thank you for the very warm welcome that you gave us. Thank you particularly to those members of the school council and prefects, the Sixth Formers who showed me round and the many students who talked with us about their work and opinions of the school. We very much enjoyed our visit. We thought you would like a summary of the inspection findings, but also hope that you will want to read the whole report. We agree with you that you go to an outstanding school and we think that you help to make it such an amazing place to be. This is because you work hard in lessons and enjoy all the many activities that are on offer. You do extremely well in national tests and examinations and make excellent progress during your time in the school. You are developing an excellent set of skills needed for the world of higher education and beyond. You play a significant part in the wider life of the school and the community and are keen to develop this aspect even further. We agree that your headmaster and his staff lead the school extremely well and are keen to improve it even further. Your teachers teach you extremely well and work very hard to make your lessons challenging as well as fun. We think they succeed in this.

We do not think your school has any significant weaknesses, but agree that it would be an excellent idea to extend even further the responsibilities that you have in school and in the local community.

We wish you well and hope that you continue to make the best of your time at Bexley Grammar School.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lynn Bappa
Lead Inspector

