

The Royal Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110530
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	325168
Inspection dates	13 November 2008
Reporting inspector	David Scott

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

Boarding provision	The Royal Grammar School
Social care URN	SC049244
Social care inspector	Mr Robert Smith (AI)

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of School	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11-18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1373
Sixth form	394
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Higginson
Headteacher	Mr Roy Page
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2006
School address	Amersham Road High Wycombe HP13 6QT

Telephone number	01494 524955
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Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated:

- the varying achievement of some students in some subjects
- the quality of the curriculum and the impact of the specialist language status and specialist mathematics and computing status on improving standards
- the quality of teaching and learning.

Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, by observing lessons, by scrutinising the school's records of students' achievement and other documentation, and by discussions with students and staff. Parents' responses to questionnaires also informed judgements. 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 were other than justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Royal Grammar School, a college with specialisms in language and in mathematics and computing, serves students from a wide locality. There is boarding provision on the school site for 70 students. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is low, as is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Slightly more students than is typical nationally are from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and the number of students who have a home language other than English is average. The majority of Year 11 students transfer into the sixth form. The headteacher is responsible for both care and education in the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Royal Grammar School is an outstandingly effective college with specialisms in language and in mathematics and computing. Staff are fiercely ambitious for their students. The overwhelming majority of parents strongly support the school's drive to give students an outstanding educational experience. Reflecting the views of many, a parent wrote, 'This is a truly excellent school.' Boarding provision also contributes well to the students' academic success. Most feel very privileged to have access to so many stimulating out-of-hours opportunities.

A lynchpin of the school's sustained success is its determination to ensure that students are 'excited and enthused by the challenge of learning'. Students of all ages show very high motivation to achieve as well as possible. As a result, standards in the main school are very high, and students make exceptional progress in all subjects except information and communication technology, where there is some underachievement. Sixth formers also make excellent overall progress, but here there is greater variation in students' performance across subjects. In recent years they have achieved least well in computing and in business studies. The school has taken robust action to raise standards. As a result, current students' progress has improved and the school's assessments show that the 2009 cohort are on course to achieve as well in these subjects as they do in others.

The Royal Grammar School is rightly proud of its international dimension. This is closely linked to its languages specialism, its boarding provision and its innovative curriculum. Many staff and students have practical experiences overseas through links with schools in Europe and Africa. Students, for example, undertake European work placements, participate in an extensive range of projects for needy communities, and also take part in sports challenges worldwide. Within the school week, students have opportunities to study seven languages, including Russian, Mandarin and Japanese. The school's online award-winning website has open access to allow not only its own students but also those from elsewhere in the United Kingdom and from overseas to benefit from its creative languages programme. As a high-performing school, the Royal Grammar School has recently taken up the second specialism of mathematics and computing. Mathematics makes a very valuable contribution to the students' life chances, as a very high proportion of the students study mathematics and science in the sixth form. A real favourite is the opportunity, on one afternoon each week, to select an activity outside of their main studies so that they can follow personal enthusiasms. High numbers of students are also involved in musical events. Many were eloquent in describing their involvement in the latest production, 'Guys and Dolls'.

Students' personal development is outstanding. All students, including boarders, enjoy school. This is reflected in their exemplary behaviour, their mature and willing shouldering of responsibilities, and in the harmonious relationships between staff and students, and between the students themselves. A very strong feature of personal development is the way that students are involved in decision making through, for example, the school council. They are committed to leading healthy life styles and to keeping fit, both mentally and physically. Within the school's international environment, students feel safe and secure and appreciate each other's cultural traditions. Boys make a difference to other peoples' lives through their contributions, both within the school and in the wider community. Above all, students are very well prepared for their future economic success through their very positive academic and social achievements. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Maintaining this high-quality provision is at the heart of the school's staff development programme, which currently has a focus on checks on individual students' learning in lessons. Excellent knowledge and personal enthusiasm for subjects is a common strength of teaching at The Royal Grammar School. Skilful and challenging questioning develops and extends students' understanding through the variety of activities and learning styles used in the many highly successful lessons.

Carefully considered whole-school procedures regularly check and monitor students' progress. The care, guidance and support for students, both academic and personal, are exceptional so that all students, including boarders, thrive. The stable and secure school environment ensures that individuals are valued and helped as necessary. Partnerships with external agencies are well established and ensure that students' needs are dealt with swiftly.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The sustained improvements over many years owe much to the calm and reflective leadership of the headteacher and his very capable, committed senior team. All focus sharply on improving students' performance but at the same time ensuring their participation in an exceptional range of wider opportunities. Rigorous and honest self-evaluation pervades all areas of the school. The professional development of staff is given a high priority, with an emphasis on building leadership at all levels. As a result, all staff accept collective accountability for school improvement, and this is exemplified in the excellent teamwork between teachers. Governance is excellent. Led by an able Chair of the Governing Body, governors provide the school with creatively critical support that supplements its smooth day-to-day running. Clear direction and the determination to be even better characterises the school's planning. The school is aware, however, that there is still some variability in how middle leaders manage their responsibilities. In the past, this has had an impact on the students' performance in just a very few subjects.

Parents' views closely match the school's own evaluation of its excellent provision. The overwhelming majority agree that the school has made sustained progress on all fronts since the last very positive inspection. One parent commented, echoing the views of many, 'I could not have chosen a better school for my son.' The students' academic success has been sustained, teaching has developed further, and the outstanding practice within modern foreign languages has spread across many areas of the curriculum. The school has a very strong capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision for sixth form students at The Royal Grammar School is outstanding. At the end of Year 11, standards are very high. All but a very small number of the students remain in the school to follow advanced courses. A number of students, around an eighth of the year group, join the school at the beginning of Year 12. Students make excellent progress and achieve examination results that are well above those reached nationally both at the end of Year 12 and Year 13. The school is particularly successful in its specialist areas of modern foreign languages and mathematics. The proportion of students completing their course is exceptionally high. Almost all students go on to university, including over 20 who gain places at Oxford and Cambridge each year.

The high quality of teaching, and students' positive and enthusiastic approach to their studies, contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the sixth form. Students greatly appreciate the excellent personal and academic care and guidance they receive. They relish the very positive relationships they share with staff and with each other. Sixth form students take on significant leadership roles within the school and provide excellent role models for younger students. They undertake a wide range of responsibilities with dignity and efficiency, acting as prefects, mentors and even assistant tutors in personal, social and health education sessions. Many make a difference to others through contributions to the local and international community. Students are volunteers in hospitals and primary schools, and support many overseas charities. The post-16 curriculum is greatly enriched by an exceptional range of extra-curricular activities. Students especially value the opportunities for overseas work experience, sporting events and charity projects. They see themselves as global citizens and this is demonstrated in the harmonious relationships among sixth form international boarders and other students. Such experiences provide a valuable counterbalance to classroom studies and extend students' personal development very effectively. The sixth form is very well led and this, together with its sustained success over many years, demonstrates its strong capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The quality of boarding provision at the Royal Grammar School is good and the key National Minimum Standards are met. Boarders are well looked after and thoroughly enjoy and celebrate their boarding experience and opportunities. The enthusiasm of boarders is seen in the comments in response to surveys: 'It's a great experience and we are well looked after and the staff are great', 'The house tutors are good because I can go and talk to them whenever I want to', and, 'It's just generally great fun.' These comments confirm the warm and family-like atmosphere that is promoted successfully by the boarding staff team.

The inspection identified many areas of strong practice as well as a small number of areas for improvement. The school fully and promptly addressed recommendations arising from previous inspections and acted to address emerging shortfalls as this inspection progressed.

The school provides good support and guidance for boarders to ensure they develop healthy lifestyles. Health care needs are well met by the school, drawing on external support and services where needed. Medication is generally well managed, although there are minor shortfalls in the consistency of record keeping and the clarity of risk considerations when a boarder might self-medicate. Boarders receive good quality meals from the catering service that supports the boarding house.

The school takes great care to ensure boarders are safe. Students report no experience of bullying and are well protected by the school's rigorous approach and prompt actions should any occur. The school has comprehensive and effective systems in place to minimise the likelihood of abuse, and there is excellent monitoring of students about whom there may be welfare concerns. Careful attention is paid to ensuring that boarders experience appropriate levels of privacy.

Standards of behaviour are extremely high and are supported by the school's fair, transparent and effective approach to managing misbehaviour. The school has clear and effective systems in place for dealing with any concerns or complaints boarders might have.

Recruitment processes are sound, although not all the additional expectations of the relevant National Minimum Standards are being met in full. Structures for oversight of staff appointed prior to completion of all checks are not sufficiently formalised. Good attention is paid to ensuring boarders do not have contact with unchecked persons from outside the school through careful management of visitors and effective security measures.

The school maintains a generally good approach to matters of fire safety; however, systems and procedures for fire risk assessment lack consistency. The school pays good attention to ensuring boarders are not exposed to risks and hazards, through careful attention to risk assessment both on and off site, and through prompt attention to any concerns or defects that arise. More day-to-day activities in boarding have, however, not been subject to formal risk assessment.

Boarders receive excellent levels of pastoral and academic support through the system of personal tutors. This is further supported by the well-regarded input of prefects. Staff work well with the school to ensure boarders' needs are met. The school is also working towards improving the accessibility and effectiveness of the Independent Listener role as an additional support. Boarders are provided with an excellent structure of support for academic work, which helps them develop effective study skills and improve their academic performance.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding.

The school positively recognises and celebrates cultural and religious diversity and ensures the needs of boarders are well met. The atmosphere in the boarding house, which accommodates boarders from a wide range of backgrounds, is inclusive and harmonious and there is no evidence of inappropriate discrimination.

The school has good systems in place to ensure the views of boarders are listened to and that they make an active contribution to how boarding is organised.

The accommodation is of a very high standard and offers them excellent facilities for day-to-day living and study.

The school provides clear and comprehensive information on boarding life, and on expectations and admission criteria for potential boarders and their families. Boarding is well managed by a suitably experienced and enthusiastic team. The value and contribution of boarding is well recognised and promoted in the school. Boarding staff are well supported and have access to relevant training opportunities. Staffing levels in boarding during the week are good. However, the increasing numbers of full boarders across a wider age range means that the lower level of weekend staffing cover is less satisfactory.

There is effective monitoring of boarding practice carried out both formally and informally to ensure that boarders are being looked after well, and there is an evident commitment in the school to critically self-evaluate practice and positively respond to constructive criticism.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school should rapidly extend the capacity of those middle leaders whose monitoring and evaluation of their departments does not yet match that of the best in the school, so that students can achieve their very best in every subject.
- The school must ensure that it meets the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools currently not met, as detailed below:
 - ensure that consistent records of medication administration are maintained and that more formal assessment of self-medication arrangements for boarders is undertaken (NMS 15)
 - ensure that fire risk assessments are kept up to date, available at all times and subject to regular review (NMS 26)
 - ensure that recruitment procedures fully comply with the relevant National Minimum Standards and that supervision of staff appointed prior to completion of all checks is formalised (NMS 38)
 - ensure that procedures for risk assessment are extended to cover the physical environment and working practices in the boarding house (NMS 47)
 - review the levels of staffing cover provided in boarding during weekend periods. (NMS 31).

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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 effectiveness of boarding provision	2	
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	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well 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	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	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	
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?	1	
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



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

27 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Royal Grammar School, High Wycombe, HP13 6QT

After our visit to The Royal Grammar School, we would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your exceptionally friendly welcome and for taking the time to talk to us. You tell us that school is 'fantastic' and we agree with you. You are very appreciative of the scholarly teaching and also very keen on modern languages, music, sport and the wide range of clubs.

The school looks after you exceptionally well. Those of you who are boarders benefit greatly from the excellent teamwork between the house and school staff. All of you tell us you feel safe and that there is always someone to turn to if you need help. You speak highly of your teachers' readiness to assist you. Many of you make a positive difference to others through the school council, through your various house and other duties, and through your involvement in international projects. Because of the hard work of your excellent headteacher, governors and committed teachers, you are achieving exceptionally well. This opens the door to a wide range of further educational and training opportunities both at Year 11 and at the end of the sixth form.

Because you cooperate so well with what your school is trying to do for you, we are convinced that you will continue to support your teachers' efforts and go from strength to strength in developing your personal skills as well as your academic prowess. We have asked your headteacher, however, to make sure that all heads of department monitor and evaluate their departments in a way that matches the best practice in the school.

We wish you and the school a very successful future.

Yours sincerely

David Scott
Lead Inspector