



# Highsted Grammar School

Inspection report

**Better  
education  
and care**

Unique Reference Number 118802  
LEA Kent  
Inspection number 280393  
Inspection dates 10–11 November 2005  
Reporting inspector Mrs Helen Hutchings

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

Type of School	Selective	School address	Highsted Road
School category	Community		Sittingbourne
Age range of pupils	11–18		Kent ME10 4PT
Gender of pupils	Female	Telephone number	01795 424223
Number on roll	833	Fax number	01795 429375
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr R Patrick
Date of previous inspection	April 2000	Headteacher	Ms J Payne

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11–18	November 2005	280393

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

## Description of the school

Highsted Grammar School is a selective community school for girls. There is a partnership arrangement with two other local schools to provide a wide range of courses for students in the average-sized sixth form. The attainment of girls on entry to the school is above national averages but the range of attainment is wider than normally found in grammar schools. The proportion claiming free school meals in Years 7–11 is below average but about a third of girls in the sixth form receive an Education Maintenance Award. Most pupils are from white British backgrounds but a number of other ethnic groups are represented by small numbers of pupils in the school. A few girls speak English as an additional language but none are currently at an early stage of speaking English. A small proportion is identified as having learning difficulties and disabilities.

## Key for inspection grades

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

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## Overall effectiveness of the school

Highsted Grammar School is an outstanding school. It knows its strengths and areas requiring improvement very well. Before the inspection it judged its overall effectiveness as good, but inspectors think it is even better. This is largely because, in the inspectors' view, the school did not grade the excellent academic achievement of its pupils highly enough.

Pupils are given excellent levels of care, support and guidance so that they show outstanding personal development. Their very serious attitude to their studies, combined with challenging teaching, effectively enables girls to make excellent progress. They achieve the highest academic standards throughout Years 7–11 and in the sixth form. The curriculum gives girls an outstanding range of experiences and there is excellent involvement in extra-curricular activities. Sometimes girls are rather passive in lessons and are not given enough opportunities to discuss their work together. Since the school was last inspected, standards have improved faster than those nationally.

The school is ambitious for its students and is very effectively focusing the staff team and the girls themselves on raising their expectations and achievements. There is a strong mutual respect between staff and girls. Initiative is encouraged and girls say that they get on very well together, help one another and enjoy school. The leadership group evaluates the full range of work in the school very well. In its attempt to broaden the range of teaching styles the current focus for reviewing lessons has concentrated a little too much on evaluating teaching rather than its impact on learning. Parents have confidence in what the school offers. The school provides outstanding value for money and is well placed to make more improvements.

### Grade: 1

## Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

The school assessed the effectiveness of the sixth form as good, but inspectors judge it as outstanding. As in Years 7–11, the school did not grade the achievement of students highly enough. Good guidance and induction procedures, along with careful target setting and regular feedback on progress are important factors in supporting the outstanding progress made by students. The partnership arrangement with other local schools is praised by students and provides a very wide range of curriculum opportunities. Students make good use of these opportunities to put together well balanced programmes of study.

Standards are very high. There is considerable potential to reach even higher standards as the school focuses on areas identified for further development, namely extending the range of ways in which pupils learn in the sixth form.

Students praise the good relationships they have with staff and the support they receive.

**Grade: 1**

### **What the school should do to improve further:**

- encourage students to contribute more in lessons
- ensure that the monitoring of teaching by school managers focuses rigorously on its impact on students' learning.

## **Achievement and standards**

The attainment of girls in external tests and examinations is very high throughout the school, as would be expected of a grammar school. Standards in the national tests in Year 9, GCSE and at A level are regularly amongst the top 5% of schools and have improved at a faster rate than standards nationally since the last inspection. This represents outstanding achievement, given that the attainment on entry to the school is wider than normally seen in selective schools. In 2004, the progress made from girls' starting points in Year 7 to GCSE was in the top 5% of schools nationally. In 2005, GCSE results were slightly lower but still represented very high rates of progress over the time girls were in the school. Results at A level in 2004, the latest year for which national comparative data is available, were also amongst the highest nationally. Girls are very conscientious and reflective about their learning. They want to do well, take full advantage of the consistently good teaching across the school and work independently outside lessons to make sure that they achieve the highest standards. Many take a high number of subjects for GCSE, with some choosing to follow courses after school to gain qualifications in additional subjects which interest them.

The school is rigorous in its evaluation of its performance, and constantly challenges itself to do even better. It sets a wide range of challenging targets for whole-school, departmental and individual pupil performance, and successfully meets and often exceeds these. The data held by the school shows that achievement across all subjects and groups of girls (including those with learning difficulties and disabilities) is consistently high. Some minor differences were identified last year in performance in science and design and technology relative to other subjects in the school. This was largely due to difficulties in recruiting appropriately experienced specialist staff and the school has now had some success in addressing this issue.

**Grade: 1**

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## Personal development and well-being

The school is justifiably proud of its success in helping its students to develop in confidence in an environment in which they feel safe and where their efforts are appreciated. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Girls are trusted around the school and they reciprocate that trust in their exemplary behaviour. They enjoy school and, as a result, their attendance is very good. The students are hard-working and attentive in lessons, but they are sometimes passive: preferring to quietly take notes rather than volunteering answers to the teachers' questions.

Students benefit from the many opportunities on offer to take responsibility, for example through organising charitable events and taking part in the school council. This also contributes to their understanding of their rights and responsibilities as young citizens. Through work experience and their participation in an enterprise week, where Year 10 girls organise and run their own 'companies', students gain good insight into the world of work. Students learn about the need for a healthy lifestyle. It is perhaps a mark of the school's success in raising students' awareness that some girls voiced criticism to inspectors of the prevalence of chips on the menu for school meals.

**Grade: 1**

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. There are instances of outstanding teaching. Consequently, there is a positive work ethos where girls enjoy their work. The consistently high standard of teaching contributes to students' exceptional progress and achievement by the time they leave the school. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and communicate enthusiasm for their specialist subjects. In the best lessons observed, teachers used a variety of methods to help pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, girls were inspired to study a complex text and accurately identified the impact on the reader thanks to the teacher's outstandingly skilled use of humour, challenging pace and use of questions. In some lessons, pupils are required to listen for a long time and carry out tasks individually rather than learn through a broader range of opportunities, such as discussion and research.

Teachers assess and monitor progress very well and are constantly exploring ways to challenge their students. Marking gives encouragement but also identifies how girls might improve their work further. Students are involved in setting their own targets and are aware of their strengths and areas to develop.

There are good systems to monitor the quality of teaching in a climate of mutual support. However, the focus on analysing the teaching strategies, used during the lessons observed, is not always sharp enough in evaluating the learning which has taken place and whether achievement is as high as possible.

## **Grade: 2**

### **Curriculum and other activities**

The school provides an outstanding range of experiences that meets the needs of all girls very well and consequently they make impressive gains in all aspects of their work. The content of lessons is planned to match all pupils' academic needs very closely and this is one of the reasons for the consistent progression and excellent standards achieved. Lessons are enriched very well by visits and visitors to the school. This helps girls to gain the confidence and knowledge necessary to achieve very good qualifications for the next stage of their development and also equips them with skills to aid lifelong learning and the adult world of work and leisure. Sixth-form students have an extensive choice of academic subjects and vocational programmes if they want them. The personal, social and health education programme helps girls to understand the importance of leading safe and healthy lives and their growing roles and responsibilities within society.

There is a very high level of participation in the numerous clubs and activities on offer, including many organised and run by students themselves. Work experience is well considered and the school initiates some exciting placements such as those experienced by students in Belgian offices, hotels and with the British Council during a three-week programme in Brussels.

## **Grade: 1**

### **Care, guidance and support**

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support, which together contribute to students' very strong personal development and achievement. Students' progress is closely monitored against individual targets. Well focused additional support is given, where it is needed, for any students identified as at risk of underachieving or who need that extra push to achieve the very highest grades. Girls say that they cope well with the workload expected of them.

Despite the fact that the school takes pupils from a very large number of different primary schools, spread over quite a wide geographic area, all of the girls who gain a place are visited at their primary school. This, and the liaison with their primary school teachers, helps the girls to settle in quickly when they start in Year 7.

Throughout the school, students benefit from very effective pastoral support that helps them to deal with any personal or emotional problems which might impact on their learning. The small number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is supported very well, enabling them to achieve as well as their peers. There are effective arrangements for child protection and for promoting students' welfare. There are particularly effective systems in place to ensure internet safety.

**Grade: 1****Leadership and management**

The school evaluated its leadership and management as good. The evidence from the inspection indicates outstanding leadership and very good management. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school that is based on improving achievement through a whole-school focus on effective teaching and learning. At the same time, she understands the importance of enjoyment in education and there is a strong awareness in the school that teaching must address the needs of all individual pupils.

There are very effective procedures for tracking both the performance of individual pupils and departments. Intervention has been very effective in improving performance so that results have improved consistently year on year, in spite of year group differences in attainment when the girls entered the school.

The opportunity to restructure responsibilities on the appointment of new senior leaders was grasped positively and all are making an important contribution to school improvement. Whole-school priorities have been reviewed recently and are clearly identified in a comprehensive school improvement plan which involves all staff, is understood by them and provides an excellent basis for further improvement. The arrangements for ensuring the appropriate professional development of teachers are very good and linked well to the school improvement plan. Opportunities for sharing good practice within the school are developing well.

The school is committed to ensuring that all pupils are cared for and guided to achieve the best possible outcomes. Girls are consulted on a regular basis and most feel they have a real influence on many of the most important changes that have recently occurred. The school is in touch with parents and responds to their concerns. The views of parents and students are used very well to inform developments and are reflected strongly in the school's self-evaluation.

Governors are very supportive and are actively involved in helping the school to improve. They are effective strategic decision-makers, with an in-depth knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Very efficient use is made

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of resources and constant efforts are made to overcome significant deficiencies in accommodation in order to develop a stimulating learning environment. The school is well placed to improve further.

**Grade: 1**

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## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: Grade 1 is outstanding, Grade 2 good, Grade 3 satisfactory and Grade 4 inadequate.</b>	<b>School overall</b>	<b>16–19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	<b>N/a</b>	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The <i>standards</i> <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How well learners make <i>progress</i> , taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	<b>1</b>	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>1</b>	
The behaviour of learners	<b>1</b>	
The attendance of learners	<b>1</b>	
How well learners enjoy their education	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	<b>1</b>	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	<b>1</b>	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Annex A**

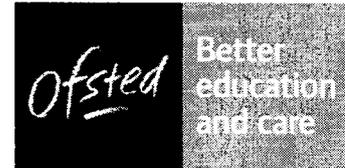
**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	<b>1</b>	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	<b>2</b>	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	<b>1</b>	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	<b>1</b>	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Does this school require special measures?	<b>No</b>	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	<b>No</b>	

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are educated about sexual health	<b>Yes</b>
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	<b>Yes</b>
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	<b>Yes</b>
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	<b>Yes</b>
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	<b>Yes</b>
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	<b>Yes</b>
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	<b>Yes</b>
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	<b>Yes</b>
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	<b>Yes</b>
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in Key Stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	<b>Yes</b>
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	<b>Yes</b>

## Annex B

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Highsted Grammar School  
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Sittingbourne  
Kent ME10 4PT

14 November 2005

Dear Students,

I want to thank you for the help you gave the inspection team when we were in the school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and appreciated how you went out of your way to help us find our way around. We were inspecting your school to see what it does well and to suggest ways in which it could improve.

We were very pleased with everything we saw and know that you appreciate that you attend an outstanding school. Here are a few of the things we found:

- you are confident learners and many of you told us that you cope well with your workload and enjoy learning
- you make excellent progress in your studies and achieve very high standards. This places you in a very good position to take full advantage of further education opportunities when you leave school
- under the excellent leadership of your headteacher, staff encourage initiative and listen to your views. The school council is effective in bringing about improvements
- you get on very well together, your behaviour is exemplary and you help one another so that the school is a happy place and your attendance is very good
- you take advantage of the very high number of opportunities to take part in clubs and visits out of school.

There are a couple of ways in which we think the school could improve still further:

- sometimes you are a little reluctant to answer questions in lessons, preferring to take notes. Remember that articulating your views and opinions is important to the way you learn
- many of you have completed questionnaires to help you and staff to understand the best ways for you to learn. When teachers are learning from one another by observing lessons, we have asked them to concentrate on looking at how well and how much you are learning, not just looking at whether or not you have interesting things to do.

Yours sincerely,

Helen Hutchings  
Lead Inspector