

Townley Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101463
Local Authority	Bexley
Inspection number	363655
Inspection dates	2–3 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,472
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	415
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	John Paterson
Headteacher	Desmond Deehan
Date of previous school inspection	12–13 November 2007
School address	Townley Road Bexleyheath DA6 7AB
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. Over 50 lessons were observed, including several accompanied by members of the senior leadership team, and about 60 teachers were seen in lessons and tutor sessions. Meetings were held with the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team, several groups of students, teaching and non-teaching staff and the chair and two other members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at many documents, including details about its specialism activities, policies, tracking and monitoring data, the school development plan, its partnerships and community links, and questionnaires completed by students, over half the staff and 455 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The impact on standards and progress of introducing precise targets in all subjects.
- How well teachers are helping students to improve their work by encouraging them to think for themselves and work independently.
- The degree to which the headteacher has generated staff support and acceptance for the changes he has introduced.

Information about the school

This large, selective school has specialisms in the performing and visual arts and mathematics and computing. The school has strong links with the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) programme and a Microsoft Academy. It has an intermediate international award and recognition as 'high performing with a special focus on gifted and talented'.

Students come from several south-east London boroughs so the catchment area extends beyond the local community. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is very low. Two out of five students, a higher-than-average proportion, come from minority ethnic backgrounds; none is at an early stage of learning English. A much smaller-than-average percentage of students have special education needs and/or disabilities.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school is good because students are very well prepared for higher education, life after school and work. They leave as mature and considerate young adults. They acknowledge that this is because of the excellent relationships that permeate the school, the good teaching and care they receive and the rich opportunities they have beyond lessons. As a parent wrote, 'Children flourish throughout their journey to adulthood.'

Students' awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues is outstanding. It is nurtured by the school's clear set of values combined with students' enthusiasm to learn about and debate issues impacting on their own and others' lives. They are extremely generous raising funds for charities – the school was one of the top in the country, fundraising for the Roald Dahl Foundation.

Students contribute much to school life with many, especially sixth formers, taking on responsibilities, organising clubs and activities, supporting younger ones and representing the school. The school council is largely run by students and the headteacher is keen to widen its work into the local community and to listen to its and other girls' views on school developments.

A review is underway to reflect on the present curriculum, which is already excellent in many respects. However, participation in extra-curricular sports is not yet monitored methodically and students do not have the recommended hours of physical education a week; some girls in Years 10 and 11 have less than one hour. Coupled with a reduced emphasis on healthy lifestyles in Years 10 and 11's personal development sessions, this contributes to two out of five students (and a small minority of parents) feeling that the school does not help them to be healthy.

In terms of feeling safe, parents and students are very positive and both acknowledge how much girls enjoy or 'love going to school'. Their outstanding behaviour and enthusiasm for learning contributes significantly to all they achieve. Even when teaching is merely satisfactory, they stay focused and work hard.

Inspiring and imaginative teaching exists in many subjects, but a few middle leaders and teachers do not interpret assessment and target data enough to guide their planning, ask skilful questions, extend students' independent learning and research skills or mark their work constructively. The headteacher rightly identifies such teaching practices as essential to spot underachievement early and reverse it.

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In all years, standards are very high because students make consistently good progress and attend regularly. Although most subjects' and girls' performance are often outstanding, since taking up post in April 2010, the headteacher has rightly focused on individual girls and the small number of subjects which underachieve. After rapid and perceptive analysis of the school's performance, he has moved it forward by introducing sharper targets based on accurate data, greater accountability at all levels and a thoughtful insight into areas where teaching and non-academic support are not strong enough. These recent improvements reflect the school's good capacity for further improvement. Fully supported by the increasingly effective governing body, he has not been deterred by the few parents', carers' or members of staff's concerns that the pace of change is too fast. Responses to questionnaires revealed that some do not feel well informed about developments. A different view was that the school has the perfect balance between 'traditional values and a dynamic, forward-thinking approach'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To remove underachievement in a few subjects and by a few girls, ensure that all middle leaders and teachers:
 - use estimated targets and assessment data to highlight where students may need extra help
 - plan questions and build on students' responses to check on understanding and promote high quality learning
 - mark work so that students know the standard of their work and what they need to do to improve it
 - balance teacher-led lessons with students learning for themselves and carrying out well-directed research.
- As part of the curriculum review already in place:
 - increase the amount of time for physical activity in all years
 - strengthen the healthy lifestyle component of the personal development programme in Years 10 and 11.
- Make sure that all parents and carers are aware of the new parents' council, as well as the traditional and online methods that the school now uses to communicate with them and for them to keep in touch.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students take pride in their work and are most attentive in lessons. They articulate their thoughts and ideas confidently and are eager to answer questions. When working in pairs or groups, whether practising their Spanish or music or evaluating each other's gymnastics skills, they get going energetically and productively.

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Spontaneous sharing of ideas, such as seen in a computing lesson on databases, is another way that students learn well together. Over 80% of students, parents and carers feel that behaviour is good and, apart from some chatter when form tutors do not direct morning sessions well, girls' behaviour is exemplary in practically all lessons.

In 2010, 65% of GCSEs were graded A*/A, an improvement since the previous inspection. Girls achieved over 90% A*/A grades in the separate sciences but less than a quarter of the year group took them; other science results were not as good. All students are now studying the separate sciences. Results were also below expectations in business studies, German, dance and drama, the latter two being specialist subjects. In 2010, Black African students did not attain as many GCSE and/or high grades as others. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least as good progress as others.

A student's quote on the school's website, 'Girls get so many chances to jump in the deep end and experience some amazing things', reflects what many students said during the inspection. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is very popular, as is participation in dramatic and musical productions or the numerous clubs and societies. In addition, students have excellent literacy, numeracy and computing skills, and many assemblies, often prepared by the girls, address issues that will affect their lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

Practically all teachers have expert subject knowledge which girls sense and appreciate. In several subjects, such as art, gifted and talented girls’ skills are welcomed and shared with others. Evaluating speeches against English GCSE grade descriptors was a most effective way for Year 11 students to understand how well they were doing; marking in this subject is particularly helpful too. Less successful learning happens when teachers talk for too long or do not realise that a few girls need a little extra support, do not all work at the same pace or need encouragement to voice their thoughts. Although teachers know their students well, some do not use assessment data to plan the next stage of students’ learning.

The school takes much care to support Year 7 students and many parents noted how quickly their daughters settled in: ‘She knew no one when she began but the transition appeared seamless.’ Bullying is extremely rare and exclusions are negligible. Many students feel that the careers advice and guidance they receive in Year 11 is neither helpful nor impartial. The headteacher is aware that, although most want to stay on, they would appreciate having information about sixth form alternatives.

Girls feel confident there is always someone they could share worries with if necessary. The headteacher has changed the name of the special educational needs department to students’ services; this is, rightly, to increase the number of meetings and the range and effectiveness of external agencies’ work, to introduce on-site access to counselling and to extend staff’s awareness of whole-child issues.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher realised that changes were needed to raise standards further, to reduce underachievement and to make satisfactory teaching and the use of assessment data at least good. More accurate data are now in place; most estimated targets for students were imprecise in the past. Performance management procedures have been sharpened because staff were not held to account if their students did not achieve well. Regular lesson observations and scrutiny of books by senior leaders are established and middle leaders’ involvement is growing. Not yet set up are formal records of particular teachers’ strengths that could be shared with

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others.

The inspection confirmed what most subject leaders and teachers acknowledge, that changes were necessary, but a minority feel they were made too fast and that clarity about practicalities was lacking. The headteacher, with the full support of the governing body and his senior leadership team, is determined to embed his initiatives.

Students respect the headteacher because they see him around the school, feel he treats them as young adults and ‘thinks in our perspective’. As written comments to the inspectors revealed, despite improved lines of contact, his communication with parents, carers and some staff has not been as effective. To meet their concerns, a priority is to ensure they know the rationale for changes.

The governing body has valuable expertise in areas such as finance and education and several, keen, new members. It is sharpening its practice, is better informed about areas for improvement and is fully involved with the well-considered development plan, based on accurate self-evaluation.

Many policies, for example for safeguarding, are being updated to bring them in line with statutory requirements. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are good. Staff training is more regular and partnerships with external agencies, especially health-related ones, are being extended.

In addition to university links, partnership activities include sharing performing and visual arts performances, the music technology and recording suite, and teaching expertise with secondary and primary schools. The mathematics STEM work in the borough and its development of YouTube material for any school to use is creative. Such work, and the Microsoft Academy, benefits the local community.

Students’ personal development and knowledge of different communities and cultures are enriched by regular language exchanges and, particularly in the sixth form, by overseas visits, to China for example. Assemblies regularly involve students sharing these experiences with others so that levels of community cohesion are good.

A recent Diversity Day was not only stimulating and successful but a reflection of the school’s keen focus on promoting equality and eliminating discrimination. With numerous speakers from the Refugee Council and Stonewall, for example, students’ awareness of discrimination was extended. A recently appointed arts/community coordinator has good plans to get students working on intergenerational local projects involving the police.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and

2

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driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Girls, and the few boys who join them in the sixth form, leave with a range of valuable experiences that serve them well in their futures; over 90% proceed confidently to higher education. By no means all students take advantage of the wide offer of enrichment activities, while several cope with academic studies and success in sporting and other activities outside school.

With over 80% A*–B grades in some AS subjects, those with considerably lower percentages are being targeted for improvement. Despite improving in recent years, AS results are not as strong as those at A level. The pressure of taking five AS subjects in Year 12 (being reduced to four) is one factor. Particularly for higher achievers, the school has introduced a Baccalaureate qualification which offers breadth and challenge and non-academic experiences.

Many lessons generate excellent learning as teachers extract students' best thinking and understanding of concepts through flexible and subtle questions and helping them to realise the features of work at the highest grades. A few teachers do not vary their style enough. Some students appreciate lecture-style lessons; others do not. Some are competent independent learners and researchers; others are not.

The sixth form learning manager is extremely committed but has too little time to cover all aspects of the role; the quality of tutors' effectiveness at monitoring students' performance is variable. Practically all students feel well cared for but a few, with a range of needs, feel that academic and pastoral support are not combined well enough and that it should continue when they return after absence.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
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Taking into account:	1
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Just under one third of parents, an above-average return, completed the questionnaire, of whom a quarter wrote comments. Many praised the lunchtime and after-school activities and/or the support which staff give to students and parents if they have any worries. A few felt that progress would be better if more teachers 'enthused' students or if behaviour was better. Inspectors observed a few lessons when teaching was not inspiring but saw predominantly outstanding behaviour.

The dominant concern expressed by parents was unhappiness with some of changes made by the headteacher, especially to the school logo and uniform and poor communication. Students were consulted about the new logo and the inspection team understands the practical reasons for making it simpler. The inspection team understands that the uniform has not been changed; after students' views have been compiled, parents' views will be sought.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Townley Grammar School for Girls to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 455 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1472 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	172	38	253	56	24	5	4	1
The school keeps my child safe	190	42	251	55	10	2	2	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	142	31	266	58	38	8	4	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	193	42	249	55	12	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	170	37	257	56	20	4	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	108	24	263	58	70	15	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	69	15	289	64	74	16	5	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	112	25	270	59	29	6	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	134	29	278	61	21	5	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	126	28	266	58	29	6	5	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	62	14	275	60	52	11	10	2
The school is led and managed effectively	115	25	283	62	24	5	6	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	197	43	240	53	12	3	3	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Townley Grammar School for Girls, Bexleyheath DA6 7AB

We had a great two days seeing you at work and meeting some of you during the inspection. Thank you all for being so welcoming. We were seriously impressed with how well you concentrate and work together in lessons. Disregarding the occasional chatter we saw, mostly in a few form times, we think your behaviour is excellent. Your enthusiasm to join in the rich variety of activities, clubs and trips the school offers is another reason you are so successful. It was most encouraging to hear so many of you say that you enjoy school, feel completely safe and appreciate everything the staff do for you.

GCSE and A level results are high but, even so, a few of you and a few subjects could do better – one reason why the school is good despite the fact that the overall outcomes are outstanding. There is no doubt that you leave the sixth form very well prepared for the next stage of your education and fully aware of the issues that your generation faces.

We have asked the school to sharpen up those aspects of teaching which are not as inspiring as the best. Ways for this to happen include marking your work better so you know how to improve it and encouraging your independent learning. The school must also increase the amount of time for physical activity and promote healthy living more.

Many of you described the changes the headteacher has introduced and said that you approve of most of them and the way he talks to you respectfully. In contrast, several of your parents are unenthusiastic about the new logo he's overseen, mistakenly think the uniform has been changed, and do not feel their opinions matter. We have suggested that the school makes sure they know about the new parents' forum and online ways they can keep in touch; you can help here.

Whatever the future holds for you, we hope you will have successful and enjoyable lives.

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Lead inspector

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