



Gordon's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 125303
 LEA Surrey
 Inspection number 293261
 Inspection dates 11 - 12 January 2007
 Reporting inspector Jennifer Smith (HMI)

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

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	West End
School category	Voluntary aided		Woking GU24 9PT
Age range of pupils	11-16	Telephone number	01276 858084
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Fax number	01276 855335
Number on roll	542	Chair of Governors	Mr John Wilbourn
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Mr Denis Mulkerrin CBE MA
Date of previous school inspection	01 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection Date(s)	Inspection No.
11-16	11 - 12 January 2007	293261

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Gordon's School is a smaller than average comprehensive school offering boarding accommodation for around a third of its pupils. The school has a long history and tradition, having originally been set up as a boys' home for underprivileged children. Pupils now come from above average socio-economic backgrounds and very few pupils have English as an additional language. A high proportion of its residential boarding pupils are from service families and those with a genuine need to board; the remainder are day pupils who live locally to the school. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties is lower than the national average, and those entitled to free school meals is low.

The school is consistently over-subscribed, despite the increasing school roll in recent years. Although having a flourishing sixth form, the pupils are on the roll of a neighbouring secondary school under a franchise agreement. The school is currently seeking official recognition for its sixth form.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'It is a fantastic school, great staff, great teaching and a lovely happy friendly atmosphere. Bullying is not tolerated and children feel safe as a result. Our children love every second at school and are doing well'.

These are the sentiments of a parent who has two children at the school; it encapsulates the opinions of many parents and the inspectors would agree with this view point. Gordon's is an outstanding school in every respect offering a very rich learning experience to its pupils. The headteacher and staff unashamedly value traditional education in its best sense but have embraced new technologies and constantly seek to improve still further.

The school has progressed well since its last inspection, raising standards even higher. Although pupils enter the school with standards that are above the national average, they continue to make very good progress and in 2006, 93% of its pupils achieved 5 A*- C grades at GCSE, which included English and mathematics. These high standards have been maintained for a number of years and are a result of excellent teaching and rigorous monitoring of pupils' progress over time.

The leadership and management from the headteacher reflect dedication and vision, which is shared by the small but very effective senior management team. This vision is well understood by heads of subject, heads of houses and others carrying management responsibility. Both the Gordon Foundation governors and the school governing body provide excellent support and challenge for the headteacher. The school evaluates itself well and can provide robust evidence to support the areas that it judges are its strengths and correctly identifies areas for further development. The extended curriculum is outstanding. Although the school is part of a local consortium seeking to develop alternative opportunities for pupils aged 14-19, this is at a very early stage of development. At present not all pupils undertake a full period of work experience but some additional work related activities are provided.

Much of the success of the school can also be attributed to the enthusiasm shown by the pupils throughout the school, who clearly enjoy the academic opportunities provided. They also enthusiastically engage in the very wide range of quality enrichment activities offered during the extended school day, which was a real pleasure to see. Personal development and well-being is outstanding. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their learning, they behave well in lessons and around the school and are exceptionally courteous, polite and respectful of their teachers and each other. The care, guidance and support provided are also exceptional, encouraging both pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are particularly gifted and talented. Although two thirds of the pupils are day pupils, there is no difference in the personal commitment and justifiable pride that these pupils and those that are full boarders, show for their school. The school has demonstrated that it has excellent capacity to improve still further.

A pupil summed up the Gordon's experience well when he said that, 'at Gordon's school, the opportunities are endless, but the greatest opportunity was the chance to come to Gordon's School!'

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The effectiveness and efficiency of the boarding is outstanding. The accommodation is, in general, within old buildings but they have been well cared for and refurbished to meet appropriate standards. Dormitories are of varying size with older pupils being allocated to a two pupil room. Common and study rooms are of good size and well-equipped. Pupils say that they are provided with increasingly healthy good quality food and drink and are actively involved in decision making. Pupils have a compulsory extra period in the afternoon and an additional two hours on a Saturday morning, which gives them outstanding access to sporting and other extra-curricular activities. Each evening there is also an hour and a half study period.

The welfare provision in the boarding houses is outstanding as are relationships between pupils and with adults. Pupils have good access to their parents if they wish to contact them and are allowed off site during the weekend but only to well-defined locations and with the approval of the house parents. Day pupils, who benefit from parallel facilities within day houses, are allowed to visit their friends in the boarding houses. A strength of the provision is that all pupils in the school are treated in the same way. Pupils feel they have equal status, regardless of whether they are boarders or day pupils.

The previous inspection, carried out by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate in January 2005, judged that all the required standards were met and many exceeded. Since that report there have been significant improvements in such areas as healthy food provision and security. All other aspects have either been maintained or improved; the school fully meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

What the school should do to improve further

- Enhance the focus on work related learning and become increasingly responsive to future 14-19 curriculum developments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are outstandingly high in national tests and GCSE at the end of Years 9 and 11. They have shown a consistently marked improvement year on year. Pupils make very good progress throughout the school, meeting or exceeding the challenging targets set for them.

Results in Years 9 and 11 put the school amongst the best both locally and nationally. In Year 9 results in English, mathematics and science are all exceptionally high, boys' attainment is slightly above that of girls but there are no significant differences between groups. Almost all pupils (96%) achieve 5 grade A* - C at GCSE and the value that the

school adds to pupils' progress from the time that they enter the school is commendable. Many subjects, such as art and design, design technology, drama, French, geography, mathematics, physical education and physics, reflect a significantly high number of A* and A grades at GCSE.

Assessment data and effort grades are used to monitor pupils' progress closely and to identify those in need of support or at risk of underachievement. Intervention strategies have been used to effectively raise standards, not only for the less able, but also for gifted and talented students. The consistency in which assessment strategies are applied at all levels is a strength in maintaining standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy their life at Gordon's School. This is shown in many ways for example, excellent attendance and concentration and attitude in lessons, which indicate a real determination to learn. Most of all, it is shown in the genuine enthusiasm with which the pupils describe their school and the opportunities and care it offers. The pupils feel safe and secure and succeed in both academic and extra curricular endeavours. The behaviour around the school is exemplary and pupils behave in a courteous and respectful way to teachers, other adults and their fellow pupils.

The school has adopted wholeheartedly the maxim that Every Child Matters and has incorporated relevant activities into schemes of work and the curriculum, which are carefully monitored. The understanding of other faiths and cultures, as well as moral and social education are developed well in both personal, social and health education and religious education.

The quality and variety of food served at all three meals in the school dining room is excellent with healthy options always available. Pupils are involved in the food committee and have made many suggestions, which have been implemented. The recent opening of the baked potatoes and pasta bars are examples of this responsiveness.

The outstanding work of the school in this area is well illustrated by the following pupil's words: 'Since I have attended Gordon's I have gained a huge sense of independence and I have matured greatly at both academic work and sport.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teaching and learning are outstanding and pupils consistently exhibit a zest and enthusiasm for learning. A key characteristic of lessons is the excellent planning which takes into account the needs of all pupils. In most lessons learning intentions are shared with pupils and a range of teaching styles used to engage and challenge them. In an

English lesson on writing a newspaper report a variety of small group discussion, paired work, role play, focused questioning and silent independent work was used to engage pupils and maintain pace. In lessons teachers' enthusiasm and understanding of their subject spills over into pupils' learning. This combined with excellent pupil-teacher relationships and high expectations enables the pupils to make good and often outstanding progress.

Teachers frequently check learning and understanding and pupils receive regular feedback on how well they are doing. In many lessons pupils are guided and encouraged to develop their ability to assess their own work. In a Year 11 music lesson pupils used examination criteria for coursework to assess and discuss an anonymous composition before further development of their own compositions. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively and pupils are encouraged to use it to research and present their work.

Teachers' professional development is highly valued. For example the English department has drawn inspiration from the Prince of Wales Summer School at the University of Cambridge which provided the focus for their 'Great Stories' initiative. As a teacher commented, 'this will engage staff and pupils in a debate that will ultimately enrich both the curriculum and pupils' experience of English'.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum provision is outstanding. The option choices for Years 10 and 11 are traditional but very good provision is made for pupils who need further support in English, mathematics and science, which considerably enhances their academic success. A small number of pupils who have particular learning difficulties attend appropriate vocational courses at a nearby college. The school considers the needs of the gifted and talented pupils well and they are provided with more challenging work in lessons as well as many opportunities beyond the school day. Pupils have the opportunity of studying a second foreign language after school.

The quite exceptional range of extra curricular activities that take place in a compulsory lesson after school complements the academic studies to produce well rounded and confident individuals. For example, the opportunity to be part of the marching band, the excellent fitness suite activities, a range of sports and the animal club. An outstanding proportion of pupils engage in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and many attain bronze, silver and gold awards. The requirement to provide sufficiently robust work related learning is not fully in place, however, many pupils do undertake school or personally organised work experience. Although the school contributes to a local area group deliberating on the future of the 14-19 curriculum, it is at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care provided by the school for the pupils is exceptional. All procedures for child protection are in place and the house system is a very effective method for providing support for all pupils. Bullying is handled both firmly and sensitively and pupils are involved in a variety of support groups. Pupils are confident that support is always available and know how to access this support. The school emphasises that its relatively small size means that all the pupils are

known and valued and this is evident from both observation and conversations with staff and pupils.

Pupils with special needs are given very good support and the individual education plans for these pupils are thorough, constantly reviewed with involvement of the pupils themselves. There are excellent relations with parents and they can see a head of house at any time. Again the house system is proved to be invaluable in this respect. The headteacher is always available to the pupils through his open door policy.

The school has recently developed a system of target setting, which is helping to guide pupils in their studies by identifying specific improvements. Although the work related learning programme needs to be extended and developed the overall care, guidance and support provided by the school is outstanding.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. There has been a relentless focus on raising achievement that has been successful in improving an already high performing school. The leadership provided by the headteacher, complemented by his senior management team, is excellent and provides clarity of direction and purpose, which is exemplary. The senior management team is aware of what is required to develop the school still further, and have well formulated plans to ensure that past improvements are consolidated and continued.

The school has a clear focus on developing the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are regularly observed both formally and informally and a system of peer observation of identified effective teaching is undertaken by all staff.

Managers have an accurate view of the quality of provision which is supported by a beneficial staff development programme. The value placed on all members of staff has created excellent teamwork and real commitment to the school. As one member of staff explained 'working at Gordon's is sometimes intense, often demanding, always challenging but never dispiriting. It has allowed me to grow as a person and as a professional within a community that I enjoy and am proud to be a part of'.

The school is well served by its governing body which has an excellent knowledge of its strength and gives it robust support. Financial governance is good and resources are well deployed throughout the school. Recent investment in ICT has led to considerable enhancement in most curricular areas.

The school has a real sense of community and this is one of its great strengths, and it is clear that the vision, standards and ethos promoted by the senior management team are enthusiastically supported by staff, pupils and their parents.

'Gordon's is a school where expectation is high, hard work is rewarded, community is key and people smile (a lot)'.

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Annex A to the inspection report

Inspection Judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	NA
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	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.

Annex A to the inspection report

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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	2

The quality of provision

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

Annex A to the inspection report

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B to the inspection report

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

24 January 2007



Dear Pupils

Gordon's School, West End, Woking, GU24 9PT

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently I should like to thank you for the very polite and helpful way you welcomed us. We very much enjoyed discussing with you the work that you were doing and looking at the progress that you were making. You talked enthusiastically about how much you gained from being a student at Gordon's School and in particular about its sense of community. We thought you would like a summary of the inspection findings but we hope that you and your parents will take the opportunity to read the whole report.

Your school is outstanding with very many strengths, the main qualities are:

- Gordon's School provides you with an exceptional quality of education, which enables you to make excellent progress academically and achieve outstanding examination results in Year 9 and Year 11. You also achieve highly in other areas of school life for example the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, sports and in your commitment to the local community and through your charity work. You leave Gordon's as well rounded responsible young adults.
- The quality of teaching is good and often outstanding, helping you to succeed in your studies. You take pride in your work, are developing good skills in assessing your own work in many subjects and you take responsibility for reaching the targets set for you.
- Teachers support and guide you very well and provide you with a safe environment in which to learn. The boarding provision and the support from your house parents are outstanding. All pupils whether boarding or day pupils play an equal part in the life of the school.
- The relationships between teachers and students are exemplary and your behaviour and respect for each other is excellent.
- The leadership and management of your school by the Headteacher, senior staff and governors are exemplary.

We have asked the school, with your help, to develop the following one area:

- Continue to focus on providing all pupils with sufficient work related learning and become increasingly involved in new curriculum developments for pupils aged 14-19. We know that many of you organise your own work at the end of Year 11, we would like the school to consider if this meets your needs in relation to work experience.

The inspectors would like to wish you all every success for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Smith,
Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools.