

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Tonbridge Grammar School

Deakin Leas, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 2JR

Inspection dates:

3 and 4 December 2024

Outcome

Tonbridge Grammar School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Rebecca Crean. This school is part of a single academy trust of the same name, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Nigel Stratton.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend and represent Tonbridge Grammar School. A sense of purpose and intent permeates the school. Pupils are keen to learn, engage with deep thinking and be challenged. They are respected and listened to by staff when expressing increasingly mature and well-considered opinions. Relationships across the school are strong.

Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils conduct themselves well because of the culture of high expectations fostered throughout the school. Sixth-form students are excellent role models for younger pupils. Parents and carers extol the virtues of a school that 'cares about the students as whole individuals', is characterised by 'supportive and respectful' relationships and engenders pupils who are 'freethinkers who have confidence'.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well in this school, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This is as a result of the high-quality teaching they experience, and the aspirations they have to develop beyond the classroom. Here, pupils have a voice, and one that matters. They create their own societies and projects, such as the Diversity and Inclusion Alliance, which celebrates the cultural diversity in the school. Others include the Marvellous Meadows project to design a wildlife haven in the school, the debating society and the student newspaper.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Staff have strong subject expertise. Their explanations are clear and precise. Staff know the typical misconceptions that exist in their subjects and teach them pre-emptively. This supports pupils in developing their understanding.

Teaching activities are carefully considered to elicit the intended learning. Staff are adept at supporting pupils to develop increasingly complex understanding across subjects. Carefully selected activities foster a sense of achievement in pupils and an increasing independence. Staff ask probing questions that encourage pupils to think deeper still and develop critical thinking skills. This consistent practice supports pupils in developing not just a significant body of knowledge, but also the confidence to apply it in a range of situations.

The school supports pupils with SEND especially well. Needs are identified quickly and shared with staff, so that they can make effective adaptations to their lessons. This ensures that pupils with SEND access the same, rich curriculum offer as their peers. Where needs are more significant, bespoke support is put in place to ensure they thrive.

Reading is made a high priority in the school. The library is an inviting space that is well used by pupils. Wider initiatives to celebrate reading include a writer in residence who runs workshops for pupils, and a reading club.

Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next steps. They perform especially well in examinations, meaning they have the requisite skills to access the next stages of learning or education. The school has carefully mapped out pathways to an increasing variety of different career opportunities. This is further supplemented by outside speakers as part of their 'In Conversation' programme, such as a recent discussion on women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). Additionally, the school's provision ably supports their pastoral and social development, knowing that this too is essential in creating well-rounded pupils that can take on the world. For example, sixth formers access a 'cooking at uni' club at lunchtimes to prepare them for when they move away from home. Ongoing well-being and mental health support ensures that pupils not only feel supported in school, but also develop a toolkit of strategies to help support them beyond the classroom. The school deploys past alumni well in supporting pupils to think about their lives and careers beyond the school. Current pupils also aspire to maintain these connections with the school when they move on to their adult lives.

The school also makes strong connections with the local community. For example, local primary pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds access the school's Horizons programme. This helps to support them academically and prepare them to access secondary education successfully.

Behaviour in the school is outstanding. Pupils treat one another and staff with respect and care. Movement in corridors is purposeful and calm. Pupils are keen to get to lessons and begin learning, enthused by the interesting and appropriately challenging work they

undertake there. They take a leading role in creating and contributing to the calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school.

Leaders, including trustees, are reflective and astute in their assessment of the school. This approach is characteristic of their work. They implement changes with care, considering staff workload in their plans. They monitor the impact and progress of their actions carefully to make sure they are having the intended impact. Staff benefit from precise and specific training to further support their practice and their career goals. This research-informed practice is carefully woven through the school's priorities for development.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in October 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136417
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10341671
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,164
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	266
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nigel Stratton
Headteacher	Rebecca Crean
Website	www.tgs.kent.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	16 and 17 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been some changes to the leadership of the school since the last inspection, including the headteacher.
- The school currently uses no alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers and pupils. The inspector met with the members of the trust board, including the chair of trustees.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plans, school policies and governing board minutes.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils about their experience of the school. They took account of parents' and staff views through conversations and responses to Ofsted's surveys.

Inspection team

Marian Feeley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Potten

Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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