

Inspection of a good school: Borden Grammar School

Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4DB

Inspection dates: 23 and 24 November 2021

Outcome

Borden Grammar School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel very safe at school. They trust their teachers and know that adults will help them if they have a problem. Pupils are settled and happy at school as a result. Relationships are strong and supportive, which helps everyone's confidence and sense of security.

Staff have high expectations of their pupils. They want pupils to achieve well and to have ambition for their futures. Teachers carefully guide pupils in their learning. Their advice and support mean pupils are highly motivated to always do their best.

Pupils say that one of the many strengths of the school is the way staff deal with bullying. They know that if they report bullying, it will be dealt with decisively. It seldom happens but when it does, staff are quick to act. Similarly, standards of behaviour are high both in lessons and at social times. Pupils are keen to learn and respectful to all.

The community at Borden Grammar School is harmonious. Parents are overwhelmingly complimentary. As one parent wrote, 'Both my boys are thriving there, being able to develop and grow to their full potential. The staff are amazing. There is no other school I'd rather send my children to'.

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

The curriculum at Borden Grammar School has breadth and balance. At key stage 4, most pupils take up English Baccalaureate subjects. Leaders have focused on reviewing and redrafting the curriculum so that it is very clear what teachers should deliver to each year group. In many plans, leaders have sequenced the curriculum content carefully and pinpointed how pupils should consolidate and build on their learning. Pupils' learning is strong because teachers know what to teach and when.

However, some curriculum plans do not set out precisely enough what important subject knowledge pupils should gain. It is not clear how that knowledge should build in strength

and complexity over time. Where this is the case, pupils' learning is not as strong. Leaders have not, as yet, made useful cross-curricular content links to further deepen and consolidate pupils' learning.

Teachers are specialists in their subjects. They use their knowledge well to support and challenge their pupils. Some teachers are particularly skilful in the way they draw all pupils into the learning. They do this through effective use of questioning and resources. They also make deft adaptations to their teaching. Elsewhere, the delivery is capable but not as expert. At present, teachers do not have systematic opportunities to learn from each other.

All pupils throughout the school, including in the sixth form, receive helpful advice about how to improve their work. Teachers use this information to carefully plan future learning. As a result, most pupils develop detailed knowledge over time. They can remember well what they learn. Teachers encourage pupils to read regularly, which they do. This helps broaden pupils' wider knowledge.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are carefully supported. Staff identify their needs early on. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) makes sure that teachers have useful information about pupils with SEND. This means that staff can use the right strategies to ensure these pupils learn well. The SENCo regularly checks to make sure that all pupils with SEND receive the right support in class.

Pupils behave very well. They show great maturity in the way they approach their learning. Teachers have high expectations of even the youngest pupils. Year 7, for instance, are as ready to concentrate and articulate their ideas as older pupils. Low-level disruption is almost unknown in the school.

The COVID-19 pandemic has limited what additional activities the school has been able to offer. Leaders have now reinstated a range of extra-curricular clubs. However, pupils' participation rates are still below where leaders would like them to be. A great deal of thought goes into the personal development curriculum. Pupils find the topics they cover both interesting and relevant. Inspectors saw mature and thoughtful discussions covering topics such as testicular cancer and how to cope with peer pressure.

Leaders are ambitious and determined to improve pupils' learning further. Trustees are enthusiastic and well informed. They focus on making the school as strong as it can be. Staff are fully supportive of the way forward. Most staff feel that leaders are considerate of their workload and well-being. A few say that pressure of work has been greater this year. Nonetheless, they also say that they can talk with leaders about any worries they have.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding at the school is strong. Staff are watchful and make sure they pass on the slightest concern. They are knowledgeable about local safeguarding risks.

Leaders ensure that staff are well trained. They are also tenacious in securing the right help for any pupil at risk.

Leaders, overall, carry out all the necessary recruitment checks. However, leaders had failed to carry out some important checks for trustees. These were quickly dealt with during the inspection. Nonetheless, trustees and leaders need to be more thorough in their practice so that systems work without fail.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum is planned with sufficient precision in all subjects. As a result, not all pupils learn to best effect across the curriculum. Leaders should ensure that curriculum plans articulate the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn and how knowledge and skills should build over time.
- Leaders have not made the most of linking learning in different subjects. As a result, pupils do not always make important connections. Leaders need to align specific curriculum topics so that pupils can make the right connections at the right time in their learning to deepen their understanding overall.
- Leaders have not put in place a systematic process by which teachers can learn from each other and share the best practice in the school. This means that teaching and learning across the school are not as consistently high as they could be. Leaders should ensure that teachers can learn from each other and develop their pedagogical skills so that they deliver the curriculum to the highest possible standard at all times.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in November 2013.

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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can complain to Ofsted.

Further information

You can search for published performance information about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	137800
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10200396
Type of school	Grammar
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	826
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	200
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sarah Mendoza
Headteacher	Ashley Tomlin
Website	website.bordengrammar.kent.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	22 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a smaller than average secondary school.
- The school selects from the top 25% of boys by ability using the Kent test to determine admission into Year 7.
- The school's headteacher has been in post since September 2020.
- Some additional A-level courses are taken by sixth-form students at Fulston Manor School and Highsted Grammar School. This is so that these students can follow courses that are of particular interest or relevance to them.
- The school currently makes use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, geography and physics. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also reviewed other curriculum plans.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding arrangements. They looked at relevant documentation, staff recruitment checks and training. They also considered how well adults in the school act on emerging concerns about pupil welfare.
- Meetings were held with leaders and trustees, including the chair of the trustee board.
- The team spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. They considered 237 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, including 135 free-text responses. Inspectors also took account of 57 responses to the staff survey. There were 154 replies to the pupil survey which were also considered by inspectors.

Inspection team

Yasmin Maskatiya, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Anne Cullum

Ofsted Inspector

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