

Tomlinscote School and Sixth Form College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125261
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	359870
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Helen Hutchings

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1569
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	276
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Colonel Keith Steel
Headteacher	Mr Anthony Ryles
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2008
School address	Tomlinscote Way Frimley Surrey GU16 8PY
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons involving 37 teachers and observed tutorial sessions. They held meetings with the chair of the governing body and representative governors, staff, groups of students and a representative of the local authority. They observed the school's work, and looked at planning documents, assessment information and students' work. In addition, inspectors received and analysed questionnaires from 367 parents and carers, and scrutinised others from staff and students.

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

- The accuracy with which the school tracks students' achievements and uses the information to promote their attainment, given that this is an area which the school has been developing.
- The level of challenge for students in lessons, particularly for students attaining average standards.
- The effectiveness of the school's planning for improvement in enabling staff at all levels to understand and make a contribution to school development.
- The quality of the curriculum in the sixth form in meeting students' needs, particularly in Year 12.

Information about the school

The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It has an allocation of up to 15 students with a statement of special educational needs in the Speech, Language and Communication Specialist Provision. Students in the Specialist Provision receive specialist teaching, but are mostly supported in mainstream lessons. Otherwise, the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is that speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low.

The school has been a specialist language college since 1996 and gained an additional specialism for applied learning in 2009. It is a member of the Surrey Heath Partnership for Education (SHAPE), in addition to the Surrey Heath Confederation of primary and secondary schools. Linked to the school's specialist status of applied learning, a building is nearing completion on the school site to increase access to vocational provision within SHAPE.

In April 2010, the school entered a federation with a local school to provide support for that school's development. The headteacher became the executive head of both schools and a head of school was appointed to Tomlinscote in September 2010 to manage the school on a day-to-day basis. The current executive head retires at the end of the academic year and his successor has been appointed. Shortly before the inspection, the local authority began a consultation for the future organisation of secondary education in Surrey Heath which includes the possible expansion of Tomlinscote School and Sixth Form College on the closure of the other school in the federation. The implications of this issue do not form part of the inspection.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Tomlinscote School and Sixth Form College is an outstanding school which has strengthened almost all aspects of its work since its last inspection. As a result, students attain very high standards because they make outstanding progress during their school careers, giving them a very strong basis for their future working lives. The school is a purposeful and happy place with a strong commitment to ensuring that all students have an equal chance to succeed. Students have excellent attitudes to school and their learning, as can be seen in their high attendance and mature attitudes towards their work. They manage their own behaviour exceptionally well and show a high level of respect for others and the school's surroundings.

The impact of specialist status permeates the school's whole existence, philosophy and ethos. Students' enjoyment of school is attributable to a curriculum which is increasingly responsive to their needs, evidenced by the wider range of vocational options offered this year. This is also the case in the sixth form. The school has made excellent use of additional funding through its language specialism to promote an extensive take-up of a range of languages, including European and non-European, and to promote language teaching in local primary schools. As a result, a large majority of students gain five or more good grades in GCSE subjects including English, mathematics, science and a modern foreign language, which is significantly higher than the national average. These high standards have been maintained over the last three years. The school's contribution to pupils' understanding of other cultures is outstanding, with an impressive range of visits, including those with particular interests in further study of languages and those with other interests. All groups of students make outstanding progress overall, including students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, because of the very effective support they receive from learning support staff. Although students with less complex special educational needs progress excellently through the school, in some lessons their progress is slower than it might be because some teachers do not use a sufficiently wide range of approaches to address their specific needs.

Much of the school's success is due to a focus on improving teaching and monitoring students' progress regularly, so that immediate action is taken if a student is seen to fall behind the expected levels. The school's data are accurate and the information is used successfully to plan work appropriate to students' ability and prior attainment, and to give them a clear understanding of the quality of their work. Although highly successful within the school as a whole, senior leaders are aware of some inconsistency in assessment approaches and have a coaching programme in place to support those teachers who need to develop their practice further and thereby give students more written guidance about how their work could be improved.

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The executive headteacher, head of school, governing body and staff share an ambitious vision for the school and how to continue to improve students' attainment. The school has many effective systems, including electronic mail, to communicate with parents and carers and seeks their views regularly. However, a minority of parents and carers indicated in the questionnaire that they do not feel that their suggestions and concerns are taken into account sufficiently. The strong focus on improving teaching is seen in an overall improvement since the last inspection. Leaders at all levels in the school have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses because they are involved in evaluating the impact of initiatives. They have good opportunities to reflect on the school's work with external consultants and through their work with staff in other schools, most particularly in the support plan for the federated school. Senior and middle leaders are skilled and thrive on their accountabilities. Priorities are well planned and relevant and senior leaders have very coherent strategies for future development. The highly effective improvements made since the last inspection give the school an exceptionally strong basis for improving, giving the school an outstanding capacity for sustaining improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that even more teaching reaches the quality of current best practice by:
 - developing teachers' skills in understanding the needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and widening the range of approaches to meet those needs in all lessons
 - disseminating the most effective assessment practices already being used successfully by other teachers within the school.
- Review and develop the range of ways in which the school communicates with parents and carers further, with a particular emphasis on using new technologies.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

One of the key factors in students' outstanding achievement overall is the consistency of their performance across subjects. The school is highly effective in analysing students' progress and taking prompt action when possible underachievement is identified, both for individual subjects or departments. Lessons are a buzz of purposeful activity. Students' excellent attitudes to their learning mean that they work successfully together in pairs or small groups, discussing their work, challenging one another and deepening their understanding. They work well independently also, questioning sensibly when there is something they do not understand. Students are fully aware of their targets and current levels of attainment, because of regular teacher assessments and frequent opportunities to evaluate the quality of their work in lessons and plan next steps. Students respond well to teachers' enthusiasm and clear expectations, for example by their prompt arrival for lessons so that not a moment is wasted.

Students acquire a wide range of personal skills as they progress through the school, giving them an excellent understanding of the world of work and how to make informed choices about the next stage of their education. For example, they have opportunities to develop communication and leadership skills through their involvement in a rich range of extra-curricular activities, such as being members of the Young Chamber, developing their

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financial and economic awareness in addition to making presentations to large groups of adults and other students. Students' enjoyment of school is shown in consistently high attendance in each of the previous three years. Students feel safe in school and, because they have excellent relationships with staff, are confident to seek help if it is needed. Students with identified behaviour problems are supported well by the school, ensuring that the learning of others is not disrupted. Students understand how to maintain a healthy lifestyle. A large proportion undertake regular exercise beyond timetabled lessons and groups promote healthy lifestyles as sports leaders in primary schools. They understand wider issues relating to their health and well-being and know how to manage risks for themselves. Students cooperate well with others because they understand the consequences of their actions and how communities operate successfully. They develop a good understanding of people in Europe and the Far East through the school's specialism. However, students do not have enough first-hand opportunities to strengthen their understanding of life in multicultural British society.

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	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is outstanding. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and high expectations, which they use very well to plan lessons that are relevant and engage students. Where possible, teachers use computers and well-chosen software to illustrate learning and plan active learning tasks that motivate students. Teachers plan challenging activities and share

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the intended learning systematically so that students are able to gauge for themselves how effectively they are learning. Classrooms are well organised and behaviour management is clear and consistent. Only rarely do students need reminding to sustain their concentration levels. Despite difficulties in recruiting appropriately qualified and experienced staff, particularly in mathematics, the school is managing this situation in a way to minimise any loss of progress for those groups involved.

Specialist staff use a comprehensive range of strategies to support the needs of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, particularly ensuring that those with the most complex needs are given excellent support. Teachers deal sensitively with the needs of all students, but some do not use a wide enough range of approaches to support those students who have less severe learning difficulties. The current assessment systems have developed very well since the last inspection and there are many outstanding examples of questioning, self and peer assessment, marking and target setting which give students a strong understanding of how to improve their work. However, there are still some inconsistencies in approaches, for example in marking which does not give sufficient advice for improvement.

The excellent range of courses and other activities cater well for the needs of all. The curriculum is constantly reviewed and changed to meet students' needs and interests, for example leading to the new vocational building, and the school has increased its range of vocational programmes this year. Extra-curricular provision is extensive and includes sport, the arts, additional access to foreign languages. Programmes are in place to provide additional support for specific interests and needs. For example, there is very good enrichment for academically gifted students who have support from a local independent school and there is extra coaching for elite athletes. The range of activities, with many opportunities for foreign travel, enriches students' experience of school significantly.

The school works very closely with agencies and families to support students who may face challenging circumstances and provides a warm, welcoming and supportive environment because of the attention to detail. Transition arrangements are excellent at all stages through students' school life, including work experience and careers guidance. Overall, support is immensely effective, with compassionate support and care for potentially vulnerable students. As a consequence, a student leaves the school without immediate entry to further education or training only occasionally.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

The key to the school's success is largely due to the skilled and astute approach of the executive headteacher and the head of school in setting a climate of high expectations. The climate is reinforced well by strong middle leaders and is subscribed to consistently by other staff. A structured monitoring programme ensures that strengths and weaknesses are identified in teaching and expert support, often involving external advice and expertise, is provided to bring about the desired improvement. The governing body gives a strong, strategic steer to the school's work, which is combined with an attention to detail and a perceptive understanding of the school's work. Individual governors use their expertise very well on committees, which monitor rigorously and challenge all aspects of the school's work and ensure the highest possible value for money.

The school operates highly effectively as a cohesive community where discrimination is challenged robustly and everyone has equality of opportunity. Personal, social and health education promotes an understanding of human rights, when issues of individual responsibility and discrimination are discussed in all year groups. The school is equally successful in promoting community cohesion because provision has been audited and amended to ensure that students' awareness is promoted systematically. The school operates as a highly cohesive community, where the student voice is listened to carefully, promoting a strong sense of responsibility and vigilance. The array of links with other communities internationally is impressive and promoted through the school's specialist provision. It is reflected in the International School Award, just one of many awards held by the school, for activities such as exchange visits and a European-Union-funded project linking with schools in Germany and Hungary which has resulted in all partners working with local businesses to produce a recipe book. Safeguarding requirements are robust and kept under review.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

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Sixth form

Students make outstanding progress during their time in the sixth form. Student numbers and their achievement have risen over the last three years, with A-level results above the national average, including the proportion achieving the highest A/B grades. Performance at AS level has been less strong, but the January 2011 results indicated significant improvement, reflecting the impact of changes made to monitoring students' progress and the identification of underachievement at an early stage and rigorous follow up by tutors and subject staff. The proportion of students returning to Year 13 is high, reflecting students' appreciation of all the school offers, for example the excellent guidance in Year 11 about sixth-form pathways and consequently students having their first choice courses being the norm.

Students develop very good core skills, especially oral, information and communication technology and presentation skills, in addition to academic achievement, because of high-quality teaching which enables students to use these skills regularly. Teaching is often in a tutorial, pre-university style, which encourages students to debate, discuss and challenge one another's views and opinions very effectively. Teachers have a very good understanding of examination requirements, which is used to develop students' confidence in self and peer assessment. During the inspection, subject expertise was used highly successfully to cover a wide range of material during revision lessons. As in the main school, students have access to an exceptionally wide range of activities to develop their personal and leadership skills. They are aware of personal safety within school in preparation for higher education and of how to protect their health and fitness.

The significant improvements made since the last inspection are the result of focused and highly effective leadership and management. Excellent use has been made of external advice and support to guide developments. Plans are in place to implement further agreed changes, based on an accurate evaluation of strengths and weaknesses. The success is reflected in increased sixth-form numbers, with students sharing leaders' vision for high expectations and achievement.

These are the grades for the sixth form

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

Views of parents and carers

The response rate to the questionnaire is higher than usually found in secondary schools. Most parents and carers who returned the questionnaire are positive about the work of the school. However, many written responses related to parental concerns about the school's future following the local authority consultation about a proposed merger with another secondary school. This issue is beyond the remit of the inspection.

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School records confirm that the outcomes of the questionnaire indicate that currently parents and carers have more concerns than previously expressed in recent years. A very large majority of parents and carers are positive about the safety and the enjoyment of their child at the school. A small minority of responses indicated dissatisfaction with how the school helps parents and carers to support learning at home, the way in which the school takes account of parental concerns, how students are helped to have a healthy lifestyle, and the leadership and management of the school. These concerns are not borne out by inspection findings, which find that many of these aspects are outstanding. There are many ways for parents and carers to understand their children's achievement, through consultation evenings, reports, academic reviews and to give their views through the Parent Forum. However, inspectors recognise that some parents and carers do not believe that their views are listened to carefully and are recommending that the school reviews its processes for gaining parental views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Tomlinscote School and Sixth Form College 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 367 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1598 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	100	27	238	65	24	7	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	108	29	245	67	12	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	68	19	232	63	59	16	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	21	225	61	47	13	11	3
The teaching is good at this school	78	21	227	62	52	14	4	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	58	16	218	59	78	21	9	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	9	215	59	99	27	11	3
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)	67	18	230	63	33	9	14	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	86	23	221	60	39	11	8	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	85	23	202	55	54	15	18	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	8	197	54	60	16	50	14
The school is led and managed effectively	78	21	187	51	49	13	39	11
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	95	26	215	59	48	13	5	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 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 2010/11 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.



18 May 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Tomlinscote School and Sixth Form College, Frimley GU16 8PY

This letter is to let you know the outcomes of the recent inspection. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team and for giving your time to talk to us and share your views about the school. We were impressed by your positive attitudes and maturity.

Tomlinscote is an outstanding school. Since the last inspection, results have improved steadily and your achievements are excellent and examination results high by national standards. Other improvements are evident in your attendance, changes to the curriculum and teaching. This means that your learning has become even more effective and you can select courses which you enjoy and suit your needs very well. The school's specialist status is used well to provide you with a very wide range of additional activities, opportunities for foreign travel and experiences which prepare you exceptionally well for your working lives. Staff care about you and you get on well with them. They provide you with exemplary guidance and support. All of these excellent aspects are down to the outstanding leadership of the school under the executive headteacher and the head of school.

Although outstanding, there are always areas of the school's work that leaders are trying to improve further. This includes making more teaching outstanding by developing the skills of teachers to use a wider range of approaches to helping students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and by making sure that the good assessment strategies you see in many lessons are used more widely across the school.

A small number of your parents and carers indicated that they had some concerns about how the school listens to their view. We have asked the school to review how it does this and to develop its links with your parents, particularly emphasising how new technologies could be used to give them more and better information.

The school has shown that it will continue to improve and we wish you well in your studies.

Yours sincerely

Helen Hutchings

Lead inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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