

Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118840
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291269
Inspection dates	15–16 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Stuart

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	772
6th form	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ursula Fuller
Headteacher	Anthony Stanton
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2001
School address	Old Dover Road Canterbury CT1 3EW
Telephone number	01227 463711
Fax number	01227 458363

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Girls are selected to attend Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School through the local authority's selection processes. The school acquired specialist status in music and information and communication technology (ICT) in September 2005. A new director of music takes up her post this September. It is an average-size school but has a large sixth form. The vast majority of girls are White British but the number from minority ethnic groups is growing. Few come from disadvantaged backgrounds or are entitled to free school meals. The number of girls with learning difficulties or disabilities is low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

'Langton girls are recognised for their individuality, resourcefulness, integrity and interpersonal skills as well as their academic prowess'.

This sentence appeared in the recent advertisement for the new headteacher. It is an apt and accurate description of this outstanding school where the holistic development of the girls, academically and personally, is central to its ethos. Standards are very high and the girls are also achieving exceptionally well. Many girls are especially gifted and talented but all are equally exceptionally well catered for because each girl's progress is very carefully monitored in all subjects and in all year groups. Virtually all girls make outstanding progress, including those from ethnic minority groups. Their achievements go well beyond conventional examination results as the school encourages the girls' creativity and intellectual curiosity in nearly all they do. As a result, the depth of their understanding is often profound and is an excellent preparation for their future lives.

High achievement is promoted through high quality teaching. Whilst there is scope for more sharing of exemplary practice and for some teachers to take more risks in their teaching to bring out the very best in the girls, learning is exceptionally good. Learning is also promoted through the outstanding curriculum, which is particularly well suited to the school's commitment to the all-round development of the girls. The school's specialist status in music and ICT is adding strength to the creative elements of the curriculum. The school is now actively looking at ways of building further flexibility into the curriculum, partly by co-operation with other schools and colleges. Enormous strengths of the school's provision are the enrichment activities and the excellent links with the business community. Together, these are crucial elements in widening horizons and opening opportunities, which are seized with alacrity by many girls.

Girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and all aspects of their personal development and well-being are outstanding, as a result of the exemplary provision for care, guidance and support. Girls are given every encouragement to take responsibilities and are trusted and respected. This trust is a hallmark of the outstanding leadership and management of the headteacher and his senior colleagues. There are well-understood parameters which emphasise excellence, but, within these, other leaders and the girls themselves are trusted to get on with things without overbearing supervision. As a result, leadership and management throughout the school are excellent. Similarly, governors call the school to account but in a supportive way, sharing a vision for the future direction of the school. Funds are well managed, although the school is aware that it needs to take a more imaginative and creative look at the buildings to enhance the learning environment of the older buildings. The responses of the overwhelming majority of parents are very supportive of the school. A small number of concerns, including a perception by some parents that the school does not sufficiently consult them or take their views into consideration, have been brought to the headteacher's attention. The school has made excellent progress in recent years and is very well poised to continue to provide an outstanding education for its girls in the years ahead.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Excellent leadership and management ensure that the sixth form is highly effective and very well integrated into the life of the school. Girls achieve outstanding examination results, which

match the best schools both locally and nationally. Within the curriculum the high proportion of girls studying mathematics and the sciences is both notable and commendable. Sixth form girls play significant and responsible roles within the school. As with the rest of the school, the sixth form provides an all-round education, with many activities such as the 'Challenge of Management' conference to enrich experiences. The sixth form is a supportive and challenging environment in which girls flourish and mature as fine young women.

What the school should do to improve further

- Encourage further ways for teachers to take risks in their teaching to draw out the very best in the girls.
- Find ways to achieve even more flexibility in the curriculum.
- Take an imaginative and creative look at enhancing the buildings.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards at all stages, including the sixth form, are very high. From already high starting points when they join the school, the girls make exceptional progress so that their achievement is outstanding. A particularly impressive feature of the girls' performance is the consistency of high achievement between all groups, including the many gifted and talented girls and the smaller number who find the fast pace of learning more difficult. A major reason for this consistency is the school's excellent monitoring system, which clearly identifies every girl's strengths and weaknesses so that action can be taken to support each girl, whatever her capabilities. There are very few that 'fall by the wayside', and the small but increasing number of girls from minority ethnic groups are achieving equally well. There have been some relatively small variations in recent years between results in different subjects, usually as a result of staffing difficulties, such as illness. Where there have been other factors, such as relatively weaker teaching, the school has taken steps to rectify the position.

In this high-performing school, achievement goes far beyond examination results. The school is excelling in challenging and stimulating its girls to reach their full potential. Achievement is both deep and broad, with the emphasis on quality rather than quantity. This results in very high standards of intellect and creativity throughout the school, which reach their pinnacle in the sixth form.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school is highly successful in promoting the personal development of its girls. Their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development lies at the heart of the school's work. Girls learn to value and respect themselves and all other members of the community. Behaviour is excellent and girls have exemplary attitudes to learning, enabling them to make the best use of all the opportunities given to them. They enjoy coming to school and attendance is high compared with most schools. Girls say that they feel happy and a sense of belonging from the moment they enter in Year 7. They report that bullying is extremely rare and very quickly dealt with if it does occur. Safe practices are adopted and girls are well aware of how

to live a healthy lifestyle. Most take full advantage of the many sporting activities and choose the healthy food in the dining hall at lunch time.

Girls' leadership roles develop outstandingly throughout the school, starting in Year 7 when they play a leading role in the open evening for primary schools. Sixth form girls take responsibility for younger ones on many occasions, including roles in form groups and clubs and supervising bus queues. Girls are prepared extremely thoroughly for the next stages of education and the workplace. They make formal applications for responsible posts and take part in many enterprise activities, such as 'Welcome to Work'. The outstanding development of basic literacy, numeracy and ICT skills also makes a huge contribution to this preparation.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching is exemplary in a large number of lessons and at least good in all major respects. As a result, the girls' learning is outstanding at all stages. Teachers are very well-qualified experts with a deep love of their subjects. Lessons are very well prepared and tightly planned with a strong intellectual content. Well-directed questions broaden girls' understanding effectively. In the best lessons, teachers encourage the girls to take the initiative. Skilful groupings ensure that able girls act as catalysts for others, resulting in rapid progress. They speak appreciatively of the enormous amount of help and time their teachers give them. Teachers steer the girls through a variety of exercises to enable them to grasp complex concepts well. They value contributions from the girls and use them to build discussion and debate. Homework is set regularly and marking of work is excellent. Girls know exactly what it is they are supposed to achieve by the end of the lesson and, as a result of careful assessment conducted both by staff and the girls themselves, know what they must do to improve. In a small number of lessons teaching is less strong because teachers are unwilling to take risks to draw out the very best from able girls.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school offers a broad academic curriculum for all year groups, including the sixth form. Designed around the needs of intellectually able girls, it provides a wide range of opportunities in the earlier years and increasing flexibility in later years. Using languages as an example, girls study two languages in Year 7, with Latin added in Year 8. From Year 10, Arabic, Japanese, Chinese and classical Greek are available additionally, mainly in after-school sessions. The school's specialist ICT status has been used well to increase both time and resources for the subject. Specialist music status has helped to make imaginative provision for girls who arrive at the school with little in the way of a musical background. Although girls have a very good range of options in Years 10 and 11, the school rightly recognises the desirability of creating more flexibility from Year 9 onwards to give more choice in areas such as science, physical education and ICT. A notable feature of the very wide choice of academic subjects in the sixth form is the taking of a science subject by almost half of the sixth form girls.

Girls are very well prepared for further stages in their education and their future careers. Extra-curricular opportunities are exceptional and greatly enhancing the girls' all-round educational development. Many club, sports and cultural activities are arranged and a huge variety of visits enhances learning and broadens horizons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding care, guidance and support are highly valued and appreciated by the girls. Inspectors endorse their comments that they are well looked after by adults and, in the case of younger girls, by older girls, particularly sixth form 'guardians', and that there is always someone to turn to if they need help. Girls are known well by their form tutors, year heads and the staff who teach them. Vulnerable girls, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, receive sensitive support, which enables them to succeed in achieving as highly as the rest. Assemblies and personal, social, health and citizenship lessons are important vehicles for developing the school's positive social and learning ethos and strong community spirit.

Girls' academic and personal progress is very thoroughly tracked throughout the school. They are encouraged to play a full role in setting their targets, assessing their own progress and providing evidence to support their judgments. Girls preparing for university or the workplace are given excellent guidance, which includes mock interviews and mentoring by governors and other adults. Careers advice and guidance are exemplary. Great care is taken to provide girls with support, guidance and appropriate work experience. All the necessary requirements for safeguarding girls, including health, safety, risk assessment and child protection, are fully met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding because they are very successfully promoting both high academic standards and also the broader development of qualities such as independence and responsibility in the girls. Clear vision and direction from the headteacher and other leaders, and very effective management procedures, are particularly strong features of the school. Senior leaders monitor teaching and performance of the school in public examinations closely, and take appropriate action when necessary to bring about improvement. Subject and pastoral leaders play key roles in monitoring girls' progress and are supported by detailed information from subject teachers and form tutors. Benefits from specialist status are being increasingly exploited.

A key feature of the leadership of the school is the extent to which girls' opinions are valued and used to influence decision making. The headteacher sets the tone for this with regular 'question time' assemblies, and girls appreciate this approach. School leaders actively seek out and plan opportunities for girls to take responsibility both within school and the wider community. At times they are willing to take calculated risks in order to foster the qualities of independence and self-reliance. Similarly, teachers are given encouragement to experiment and develop initiatives that will take the school forward.

Governors know the school very well and recognise its many strengths. Nevertheless, they also play a strong role in probing its performance and identifying broad goals for future development. The school's grounds and its newest buildings are very attractive, but the learning environment in much of the older buildings does not match the aspirations which the school has for promoting creativity. Whilst there are displays, including girls' work, in classrooms and corridors, the overall ambience of the buildings does not do justice to the fine work that goes on in the school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	1	

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Simon Langton Girls' Grammar School, Canterbury, Kent CT1 3EW

Thank you for your extremely warm welcome when we visited your school.

Your school is giving you an outstanding education. As you have been selected to attend a grammar school, you should get good results. In fact, you are doing even better than expected. Your achievements at all stages, including the sixth form, are very high. You deserve much credit for this because your attitudes to work are excellent. As a result, you get on very well with each other and your teachers and you enjoy the challenges that interesting work presents. The other main reason for your success is the high quality teaching in nearly all lessons from dedicated teachers who love their subjects and do all they can to help you.

Equally impressive is the way you are developing into fine young people and as outstanding ambassadors for your generation. This does not happen by chance. It happens partly because of the work the school does to prepare for your futures and partly because of the atmosphere of trust and respect that exists in the school. Your excellent headteacher, ably supported by his senior colleagues, other staff and governors, has ensured that nurturing the growth of well-rounded young women is central to everything the school does. Most of you take full advantage of the splendid opportunities open to you and the considerable responsibilities you are given.

Can an outstanding school get even better? Of course it can and, with your help, it will! Whilst much of the teaching in the school is really excellent, some teachers could make some lessons a little more stimulating to get the very best out of you all the time. We also think there is scope to make the curriculum even more flexible to give further choice and opportunities from Year 9 onwards. Finally, we think the older buildings do not do you and your teachers justice for the fine work that goes on. We believe that, with some imagination and creativity, the buildings could be become more interesting and stimulating places in which to work.

We think the school has a bright future ahead of it, and wish you all good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely, Ian Stuart Lead Inspector