

The Skinners' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118890
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291282
Inspection dates	7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	David Butler HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	769
School	557
6 th form	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Major-General J Moore-Bick CBE DL
Headteacher	Mr S Everson
Date of previous school inspection	14–18 October 2002
School address	St John's Road Tunbridge Wells Kent TN4 9PG
Telephone number	01892 520732
Fax number	01892 549356

Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	7 June 2007
Inspection number	291282

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The school was visited for one day. Inspectors investigated the following issues in detail: achievement and standards, teaching and learning, leadership and management and the science specialism. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF), national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records, curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and students and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The Skinners' is a selective school for boys, with specialist status in science. Most students come from West Kent but a significant number come from East Sussex. The school works in partnership with two other local grammar schools in the provision of post-16 courses. Slightly less than 10% of students come from ethnic minority groups. Sixty-four students have learning difficulties or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Skinners' School provides an outstanding standard of education and care for its students. Students have excellent attitudes to learning and are very proud of their school. The school is very inclusive and is focused on encouraging both academic excellence and the personal and social development of all students. The relatively small size of the school means that students are well known to staff and there is a very strong emphasis on meeting their individual needs. Students feel safe and well cared for and many commented on the friendly nature of the school and the good relationships they enjoy with each other and their teachers. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. This comment was typical of a number of others received from parents: 'We are very happy with Skinners', our son has thrived in the five years he has been there, he is constantly encouraged and challenged and his academic and social development has been superb'.

Students enter the school with well-above-average attainment. They make excellent progress and attain examination results at the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form that are exceptionally high. The great majority of students reach or exceed the challenging targets they are set. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is at least in line with that of other students. The outstanding achievement of students results from a combination of high quality teaching and excellent care, guidance and support. The tracking and monitoring of students' progress are very rigorous and there is rapid and effective intervention when there is evidence that they are underachieving. Parents are very complimentary about the frequency and usefulness of the reporting on students' progress.

Most teaching is good and some is outstanding, but this is not consistent across all subjects. Managers are well aware of where there are weaknesses and take appropriate steps to bring about improvement. Teachers have good subject knowledge and lessons are well structured. Most teaching includes an appropriate range of tasks and activities that actively engage and challenge students, but this is not the case in a small minority of lessons. There has been a strong emphasis on making better use of assessment information to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This is starting to have an impact but is not yet fully embedded in the work of all teachers. The quality of marking is generally good but a minority of teachers do not provide sufficient advice to students on how to improve. The untidy and poorly presented written work of some Year 7 students is not always sufficiently challenged.

The curriculum in the main school and in the sixth form meets the needs of the great majority of students well. Accommodation and resource difficulties have limited the provision in design and technology, and some students regret the lack of a GCSE drama course. Provision for outdoor physical education is excellent but restricted indoor facilities place restraints on activities during inclement weather. The school has well-advanced plans in place to address this. Students value the wide range of extra-curricular activities they are offered in sport, music and other cultural areas. Large numbers of students are involved in the school's Combined Cadet Force. The science specialism is having a very positive impact on the work of the school in terms

of improved accommodation and resources, the take-up by students of science courses in the sixth form and at university, and the provision of extra-curricular activities, such as the very active environmental club. The specialism has also led to the addition of options such as electronics and statistics and enhanced work in existing subjects. The school is meeting its specialist targets and is providing effective support to primary schools and a local special school. This work provides good opportunities for older students to contribute to the local community.

The personal development of students is outstanding. Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Students support each other and respect the right to be different. The very rare incidents of bullying and other forms of harassment are dealt with swiftly and appropriately. The overwhelming majority of students enjoy their education and this is reflected in high levels of attendance. Students know how to lead safe and healthy lives and are supported in this through a strong programme of physical education and personal, social and health education and the provision of healthy food in the canteen. Students have strong moral values and a good understanding of other cultures. The programme of careers education and guidance prepares students well for future employment and education. The school recognises there is more to be done in developing the programme of enterprise education and work-related learning. The science specialism has contributed to very productive links with a large number of businesses and other organisations. Students have a good range of opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life of the school. Students' views are taken into account through the student council and other means but some feel they would like a greater involvement in making decisions that directly affect them.

The leadership and management of the headteacher and other senior managers are excellent. Governors provide strong support and use their very good knowledge of the school to monitor and evaluate the school's performance. Managers at all levels have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their areas of responsibility. Since his appointment in January 2006, the headteacher, supported by the senior leadership team and governors, has been highly effective in bringing about improvements in accommodation, the tracking and monitoring of students' progress and ensuring greater accountability of middle managers. Much more rigorous self-evaluation and strategic planning by middle managers have been introduced and this is helping to raise achievement. The school has made very good progress in addressing the issues identified in the last Ofsted inspection. Managers are not complacent and recognise where further improvement can be made. The evidence is that that they have strong capacity to achieve this.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The provision for sixth form students is outstanding. The overwhelming majority of Year 11 students stay on in the sixth form, where they are joined by students from other schools. Students make excellent progress and achieve examination results that are well above those found nationally. The proportion of students completing their courses and continuing from Year 12 to Year 13 is exceptionally high. Almost all students go on to university, including gaining places at Oxford and Cambridge. A

key factor behind the effectiveness of the sixth form is the very high quality individual academic support and guidance students receive. Sixth form students are very actively involved in the life of the school and provide excellent role models for younger students. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities to enrich students' experiences. The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent and the cooperative arrangements with other schools to widen the range of courses offered to students work well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on the good and outstanding practice that already exists to ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching, particularly in relation to the use of assessment and strategies to actively engage students in lessons.
- Seek ways of further developing the curriculum, particularly in design and technology.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall	16–19
---	-----------------------	--------------

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
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	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	
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?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	

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 insufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Annex B



9 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Skinners' School, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 9PG

Thank you for assisting us with the recent inspection of your school and for making us feel so welcome during our visit. This letter summarises our findings, but the full report will be made available to your parents and published on the Ofsted website.

Our view is that your school provides you with outstanding education and that you are right to be very proud of it. The great majority of you enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning. This is reflected in your very good attendance and excellent behaviour. We were particularly impressed by the way you care for and support each other. You make excellent progress in your learning because you are well taught and provided with very high quality care, guidance and support. Your teachers know you very well and do their best to meet your needs and ensure you achieve as well as you can.

Skinners' aims at achieving academic excellence but also attaches equal weight to developing your personal and social skills and preparing you for adult life. We feel that your school is highly successful in achieving these aims. You are well aware of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Many of you are involved in team sports, including Saturday fixtures, and value the very wide range of other extra-curricular activities available to you. Very substantial numbers of you benefit from being involved in the CCF. You have many opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life of the school. You can make your views known through your school council and other means but some of you feel the need to be more involved in making decisions that directly affect you.

We have suggested some improvements to make your school even better.

- We feel the school should build on the many examples of good and excellent practice to ensure that teaching is of a consistently high quality. In particular, some teachers need to do more to actively engage you in lessons and make better use of assessment to help you improve your work.
- The curriculum you are provided with is good but the school needs to seek ways of improving the provision made for design and technology.

We believe that the headteacher, senior managers and governors provide excellent leadership and management and are very capable of bringing about further improvements. We hope you will play your part in this. We wish you every success in the future.

David Butler
Her Majesty's Inspector