

Dr Challoner's Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110514
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	310342
Inspection dates	12 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Dr Lynn Bappa

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	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1291
6th form	380
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Lawson
Headteacher	Dr M Fenton
Date of previous school inspection	08 December 2003
School address	Chesham Road Amersham HP6 5HA
Telephone number	01494 787500
Fax number	01494 721862

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. They evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- achievement
- teaching and learning in Years 7 to 13
- the impact of the school's specialist status on the curriculum; the curriculum in the sixth form
- personal development and well-being
- leadership and management.

Evidence was gained from lesson observations, from discussions with leaders and students and from evaluation of a range of documentation. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Dr Challoner's Grammar School has recently been designated as a High Performing Specialist School in science and mathematics and has just successfully applied to add languages as an additional specialism. It also has Leading Science School status. The school is very popular and is heavily over-subscribed. Most students come from advantaged backgrounds. Around one in five are from minority ethnic backgrounds, though very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is very low.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Dr Challoner's provides an outstanding quality of education and care. It is held in high regard by the vast majority of its students and their parents and rightly so. As one parent commented, 'If only all the schools could be of the same standard. This is an exceptional school.' One of its strongest features is the amount of responsibility that is given to students. The Student Researchers Group, for example, has recently investigated school policies on assessment and advised teachers on the most effective strategies to use in lessons. Students are also involved in interviewing new staff and attend meetings of the governing body where appropriate. One student summed up the view of many when he said, 'This school respects students, gives them responsibility and trusts them.'

Standards are exceptionally high in all key stages and are improving over time. Students enter with standards that are well above average and results in the national tests for 14 year olds are exceptionally high. Performance in science and mathematics is particularly strong, with almost all students gaining the highest level. Standards at 16 are also exceptionally high, with 64% of students achieving five or more A*-A grades. The school has targeted the highest GCSE grades as an area for improvement in a very small number of subjects. Although standards are still high in these subjects, the proportion of students who gain A* and A grades is not yet as high as the school believes it could be. There is no significant difference in the standards of students from minority ethnic groups, while the small percentage of students with learning difficulties make excellent progress because of well-targeted support. Despite these very high standards, the school is constantly trying to drive them even higher and regularly meets or exceeds its challenging targets.

Achievement overall is outstanding and compares well with other selective schools nationally. This is because the school's ethos of 'excellence with integrity' motivates students to perform to the best of their ability. As one sixth-form student commented, 'Academic standards are very high but they are built on the bedrock of very good relationships.' Teachers build on students' well above average prior attainment very successfully through excellent teaching which encourages the boys to think for themselves and develop an enthusiasm for learning. Teachers have high expectations of their students, lessons are conducted at a fast pace and there are high levels of intellectual challenge. 'They teach us a lot, yet they keep it fun' was a typical student comment. As a result, students are completely involved in their work, whether it is designing a website for a local nursery, using string to show the links between the different causes of the English Civil War or learning about financial management through the medium of French.

High academic standards have not been achieved at the expense of students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which are also outstanding. Students show high levels of confidence and maturity. They have a genuine zest for learning and display excellent attitudes in all aspects of school life. Their attitudes and behaviour are first class. Students show a good understanding of how to keep healthy. The school council, for example, has implemented incentive schemes to encourage students to buy healthy lunches. This is a safe and welcoming school where students develop into articulate and thoughtful young men who are exceedingly well prepared for their future lives.

Students are proud of their school's specialist status. This is having a positive impact on their academic achievement as well as on curriculum enrichment and community provision. Standards in sciences and mathematics are particularly high, for example. Teaching is enhanced by excellent cross-curricular projects involving the imaginative use of 3D animation. One such project involved students producing an animated science fiction film set to music. The recent success of the school's bid to add languages as a second specialism is already beginning to have an impact. 'Earworms', for example, is a recent initiative that teaches languages to both students and parents through the use of musical

rhythms. The school has also extended its community provision and developed excellent links with local schools. Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is a strength of the school. Students are working in teams to produce adverts aimed at reducing cyberbullying in a project set up in collaboration with a prominent advertising company, the local college and a neighbouring school, for example.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The headmaster's excellent leadership underpins the success of the school. As one parent commented, 'Dr Challoner's is a great school led by an excellent headmaster.' School leaders at all levels share his vision of 'excellence with integrity'. The school has no significant weaknesses and has an excellent capacity to improve even further. Governors know the school well and provide an effective balance of support and challenge to the headmaster and senior managers. Management of the school's work as a specialist college is of high quality. The school works very well with a wide range of partners, including local schools and businesses. Relationships with parents are very positive and good account is taken of their views.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an excellent sixth form. Standards are high, with a very high proportion of students achieving grades A and B at A level. Sixth form students make excellent progress during their time in the school. Those who join from other schools settle quickly and achieve as well as their classmates. Retention rates are excellent, with very high numbers of Year 11 students staying on into Years 12 and 13. Almost all students leave the school to study in higher education, with very many being accepted into the most prestigious universities. Sixth form lessons typically feature challenging questions and a variety of interesting activities. Students clearly relish working in such a stimulating environment. Their personal development is outstanding and they play an impressively active role in the life of the school. Sixth form students lead drug education lessons for younger students, for example. They have also introduced 'worry boxes' where younger students can raise any concerns and obtain help from older boys. Students praise the teachers for their level of dedication and support both in lessons and outside normal hours. The academic curriculum meets the needs of the vast majority of students, although the school plans to extend provision to provide a greater choice of courses through a consortium arrangement with other local schools and colleges. The curriculum is enriched through an excellent range of cross-curricular and extra-curricular provision. Year 12 students, for example, are working in small groups as consultants to local charities and companies in need of business expertise. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. Leaders have a clear sense of purpose and high expectations of work and commitment from students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of the highest grades in a very small number of GCSE subjects.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest 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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	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	

Annex B



Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

21 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Dr Challoner's Grammar School, Amersham, HP6 5HA

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently, I should like to thank you for the warm welcome that you extended to us. Thank you particularly to members of the school council, the Student Researchers Group, the sixth formers who showed me around and the students who talked with me about some of their work in 3D animation and website design. We very much enjoyed discussing with you the work that you were doing and looking at the excellent progress you are making. You talked impressively about how much you gained from being students at Dr Challoner's and about why you think it is such an outstanding school. We thought you would like a summary of the inspection findings, but also hope that you and your parents will want to read the whole report. We agree with you that you attend an excellent school and we think that you help to make it such a fantastic place to be. This is because you work hard and enjoy lessons. You do extremely well in your national tests and examinations and make excellent progress during your time in the school. You have outstanding attitudes to all that the school offers and play a very significant part in the wider life of the school and community. You are a credit to yourselves and to your school. We agree with you that the headmaster and staff lead the school very well indeed and are constantly striving to improve it even further. Your teachers work very hard to make sure that lessons challenge and motivate you and are always ready to 'go the extra mile' to help you. We do not think that your school has any significant weaknesses but have asked the headmaster to continue using the school's improvement plan to raise the proportion of the highest grades in a very small number of GCSE subjects.

We wish you well and hope that you continue to make the best of your time at Dr Challoner's.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lynn Bappa
Lead Inspector