

Inspection of Sir William Borlase's Grammar School

West Street, Marlow, Buckinghamshire SL7 2BR

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 May 2024

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
The quality of education	Outstanding
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The headteacher of this school is Ed Goodall. This school is part of Marlow Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Kevin Ford, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sarah Elizabeth Cooper.

Until November 2020, the school was exempt from routine inspection because it was judged as outstanding at its previous inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The school has not been inspected under section 5 of the Act since June 2012.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's mission is to 'inspire, empower and shape the future'. Pupils and staff understand that this only happens by focusing as much on personal development as on academic results. The highly ambitious curriculum is designed so that pupils from Year 7 onwards study each subject broadly and deeply. Thanks to consistently high-quality teaching, pupils achieve exceptionally well, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The impressive extra-curricular programme also allows pupils to enrich their learning outside the classroom but also to develop and discover interests and talents.

The school is a vibrant and generous community, where pupils display excellent behaviour and manners. Pupils' very positive attitudes to learning can be seen in classrooms and in their independent and group activities. They are very respectful and highly supportive of each other, regardless of any differences. Neither staff nor pupils tolerate bullying and so it is extremely rare. Any issues are reported to staff and addressed.

Parents, staff and pupils appreciate the school's traditions, ethos and inclusivity. Staff value each pupil in their own right, and pupils feel safe and happy here. As one student said, 'It is a school where you can be who you want to be.'

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

The curriculum is very thoughtfully and ambitiously sequenced. Pupils gain excellent results. However, the curriculum is far more than examination preparation. Pupils enjoy placing their learning in a bigger picture. For example, pupils spoke of discovering new styles and instruments in music and valuing language-learning. Others enjoyed discussing abstract mathematical theory. One sixth-form student reflected on being inspired by 'walking in the footsteps of poets' while on a trip to Venice.

Teachers understand that pupils arrive at the school with a rich range of prior experiences. Staff take great care to help all new pupils settle to learning and school life quickly. Consequently, pupils become resilient and skilled learners, regardless of their starting points. Reading for pleasure is woven into the school's culture, and pupils routinely explore a range of texts linked to their subjects. If pupils need help with this, they receive appropriate and effective support.

The curriculum delivery is extremely strong across all subjects. Teachers explain new content and concepts skilfully and clearly. They regularly clarify understanding and address any misconceptions directly. Teachers carefully select materials and tasks so that pupils practise applying what they have learned to increasingly complex problems. Pupils relish the feelings of confidence and independence this brings. They are strikingly eloquent and reflective about their learning. They are very proud of their achievements and continuously want to improve. Consequently, they are very responsive to feedback. For pupils with SEND, staff identify their needs swiftly

and precisely. Teachers target adaptations and ensure that these pupils learn successfully and happily alongside their peers.

The school's ethos is positive and joyful. Pupils and staff nurture warm and kind relationships, based on mutual respect. Pupils know that their opinions matter, and they feel listened to. There is strong pastoral support available to pupils, should they need it. Pupils have a deep pride in the school's traditions. For example, sixth-form students are extremely mindful of their potential legacy. Consequently, they are excellent role models and take seriously their custodianship of the school's culture for younger year groups.

The school's personal development and careers programmes are both excellent. They are carefully organised from Years 7 to 13, and staff put in place thoughtful adjustments for individuals, where necessary, so that all pupils benefit. Pupils learn how to navigate the modern world safely, including online. They enjoy exploring social issues and discuss them maturely and sensitively. The careers programme opens their minds to a raft of possibilities for when they leave, through regular exposure to varied partners from the world of work, education and training. To help pupils develop confidence and character in practice, they participate in enrichment experiences ranging from sports and performing arts to interest groups, such as 'Fem-Soc'. There is also a very popular Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme. Many of these activities come from 'pupil voice' activities and are led by sixth-form students.

The school values highly its 'Borlasean traditions' but also understands the importance of providing a modern and relevant education. Governors fully support these priorities. They also discharge their statutory responsibilities diligently. Staff feel respected and know that workload and well-being are taken seriously. They particularly appreciate the school's collaborative approaches. Parents are hugely supportive of the school's rounded education approach. They feel it means their children flourish and are exceptionally well prepared for the future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136781
Local authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	10296360
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,189
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	444
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Sarah Elizabeth Cooper
CEO of the trust	Kevin Ford
Headteacher	Ed Goodall
Website	www.swbgs.com
Dates of previous inspection	27 and 28 June 2012, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Sir William Borlase's Grammar School is part of Marlow Education Trust.
- The school currently does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with school leaders. The lead inspector met with the chair of the board of trustees and some local governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, geography, languages and music. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke to a wide range of pupils and observed their behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- Inspectors considered a range of documentation provided by the school. This included the school's self-evaluation, published information about pupils' performance and minutes of trustees' and governors' meetings.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including free-text responses. They also took account of the responses to the staff and pupil surveys and gathered the views of parents, staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Mary Davies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Morrison	Ofsted Inspector
Mike Serridge	Ofsted Inspector
Jason Philipsz	Ofsted Inspector
Jane Cartwright	Ofsted Inspector

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