



George Abbot School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 125265
LEA Surrey LEA
Inspection number 293241
Inspection dates 3 October 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Barry Jones

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

Type of School	comprehensive	School address	Woodruff Avenue, Guildford
School category	community		GU1 1XX
Age range of pupils	11-18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01483 888000
Number on roll	1924	Fax number	01483 888001
Number on roll (6th form)	404		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of Governors	Mrs V Johnson
		Headteacher	Mr D C Moloney
Date of previous school inspection	09 December 2002		

Age group	Inspection Date(s)	Inspection No.
11-18	3 October 2006	293241

(c) Crown copyright 2006

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 or in prescribed cases on payment of such fee as they think fit (not exceeding the cost of supply), to any person who asks for one.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

George Abbot is a large comprehensive school and is very popular. It serves an area that is more advantaged than most and pupils enter the school with attainment that is above average. The school has a unit for 15 visually impaired pupils who are mainly taught in mainstream classes. It is a specialist school for the visual arts. It takes the lead in working with other Guildford schools on four specific projects. Since 2000, the school has been a training school for trainee teachers and is an accredited provider for the graduate teacher programme. It also enjoys International School status and has strong links with many other countries.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

George Abbot is an outstanding school that gives excellent value for money. It is a specialist school for the visual arts and richly deserves the accolades that it receives for this area of its work, both locally and nationally. The quality of the pupils' artwork is stunning and the teachers are very much involved in sharing their expertise with the wider community. The school is rightly highly praised by parents and as one wrote, 'We are privileged to be able to send our son to such an exceptional state school.'

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is above average. They consistently attain exceptionally high standards at Key Stage 3. Standards at GCSE level have been consistently above average and provisional results for 2006 indicate that they are now also exceptionally high. This shows that, from high starting points, pupils make good progress and this is due largely to the outstanding teaching they receive. The school has also devised an excellent curriculum and the rich range of experiences underpins the pupils' high enjoyment in their work. Pupils' progress is boosted in Key Stage 4 by their excellent achievement in arts subjects. However, achievement is only good overall because too many more able pupils do not make the progress they should in mathematics. For instance, pupils make much better progress in English than they do in mathematics. The school is committed to allocating more time to the teaching of mathematics in Key Stage 4. This is a reasonable strategy as pupils in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form make good, and sometimes outstanding progress, in classes taught by the same teachers of mathematics.

A key factor in the school's success is its excellent leadership and management. The school strives for excellence in all areas and benefits from its openness and self-critical approach to improving the school further. It has excellent links with other partners. The International links have been used to develop the curriculum and, through its role as a training school, new ideas and staff have been introduced to the school. The school is very innovative and partnerships are used very well to provide excellent care to pupils and means that every pupil is included in the life of the school. The very high quality of provision is crucial to the pupils becoming, mature, confident young people who have a good understanding of right and wrong. They readily accept the many opportunities to take on responsibilities and carry out their duties very well. Their personal development and well-being are outstanding.

Since the previous inspection, standards have continued to rise and the curriculum has been enhanced in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to make more vocational routes available to pupils. The school's self-evaluation is excellent and the school is held to account well by a very involved governing body. The capacity to improve is therefore excellent.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding. It is large and is able to offer a very wide range of courses that are very well matched to the needs of the pupils. Leadership and management are excellent and have made significant improvements to the procedures and operation of the sixth form in the last two years. Teaching is rigorously monitored. Any weaknesses are dealt with through a comprehensive staff training programme. Tutors now have extended time to guide and counsel students towards demanding targets. Staying-on rates are high and the vast majority of students complete their course.

The proportion of students attaining the highest grades (A/B) rose sharply in 2006 to 66% from 44% in 2005. Consequently, standards and achievement have risen significantly and are now outstanding. Although not a general pattern in other years, girls did very much better than boys in these examinations. The school aims to improve further by assembling the wealth of data it has on individual students to enable patterns in the performance of groups of pupils to be more easily established.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that pupils make good progress in mathematics in Key Stage 4.
- Bring the achievement of boys up to the level of the girls in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are very high in the school. In national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, results are exceptionally high and they are well above national averages at GCSE level. There was a gradual decline in results at GCSE from 2003 to 2005 but this has been reversed in 2006 and the school met its challenging targets.

Pupils' attainment on entry is above the national average. Given their starting points, the pupils make good progress and achievement is also good. There are no underachieving groups and pupils with learning difficulties and those in the visually impaired unit make excellent progress. These pupils receive well-targeted support. Pupils make better progress overall in English than in mathematics because provision for English is better in Key Stage 4. Although pupils initially make slow progress in English, this is more than compensated for by their very rapid progress in Key Stage 4. Progress in science is at least satisfactory but is below the average for other subjects. There is an acceleration in pupils' progress in Key Stage 4 and the high standards attained in the arts subjects is a major contributor to this. There is some variation in the quality of results at GCSE level. For instance, pupils do consistently very well in art and design and design and technology and relatively less well in business studies.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. For instance, they gain a greater appreciation of other cultures through the residential trips to other countries that are arranged through the school's international links. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they say that the rare incidences of bullying are dealt with effectively by the adults in the school. Pupils' positive attitudes to school are shown by their very good attendance and their evident enjoyment. One parent summed this up when she recorded that her daughter had observed while on holiday that, 'I can't wait to get back to school.' The parent added, 'What a wonderful thing to hear your daughter say.' Pupils make an excellent contribution to the community. They say they feel very safe in the school. The pupils have an excellent understanding of healthy-living issues and lead active lives. They are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their careers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school's monitoring of teaching quality is accurate and reveals that three quarters of the teaching is good or better throughout the school, including the sixth form. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan exceptionally well; they use the information gained from assessments to closely match work to individual pupils' needs. They use a good range of resources and teaching methods and this adds to the interest for the pupils and makes lessons more fun. In an excellent Year 12 lesson, students were learning how to develop a repeated silk screen print. The teacher had high expectations, checked students' understanding and helped to develop their critical thinking. The school has used their own monitoring and staff from the local authority to check on the quality of teaching of mathematics in Key Stage 4. This confirmed that the quality of teaching in this key stage was the same as for mathematics in other key stages where pupils make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Pupils are very well served by a constantly developing, well-planned curriculum. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been redesigned to include more vocational courses and meets the needs of pupils. There are clear routes which enable pupils of differing abilities and interests to progress smoothly into the sixth form. Consequently, because of this and its high reputation, staying-on rates are high. The school's gifted and talented programme offers a wide range of enrichment opportunities. A full-time arts coordinator ensures a full programme of activities after school and there is good take up for these. The school has worked very hard and successfully to develop all aspects involving the creative skills of pupils. However, the expansion in the number of courses on offer to pupils has meant that mathematics has been allocated less time in Key Stage 4 than in most schools. The school has identified how this can be rectified next year.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. There is exemplary working with other agencies and the tracking of the progress made by pupils is very thorough. The pastoral system in the school is very strong and parents comment that the staff are very responsive when they raise concerns. They deal with the issues raised quickly and effectively. This means that vulnerable children who are at risk of underachieving are identified early and appropriate support given. The effectiveness of this support is shown by the very low level of exclusions, there are no underperforming groups and pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make excellent progress. The academic guidance provided to pupils is of a very high quality. However, in 2005, a small number of pupils gained no GCSE passes as a result of their poor attendance despite the best efforts of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership and management have been very effective in raising standards and maintaining a high level of care for pupils. This has been a major factor leading to a very positive ethos in the school but it has been a team effort and the teachers, governors, parents and pupils have all played their part. Standards have been consistently high. This has been due to the vigilance of the headteacher and his very able senior leadership team. Where there have been dips in performance, the school has analysed the issue thoroughly, developed a carefully-designed strategy and then ensured that it is consistently implemented. The performance management procedures are a model of good practice. Processes are very clear and understood by staff and are closely linked to the school's continuing professional development policy. This is enhanced by the school's very active links with Higher Education institutions and its own involvement as a training school. The governors hold the school to account exceptionally well and ensure that parents are suitably consulted in the decision-making process.

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 to the inspection report

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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	NA	
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?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	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.

Annex A to the inspection report

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 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

Annex A to the inspection report

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	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	No

Annex B to the inspection report

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.



12 October 2006

Dear Pupils

George Abbot School
Woodruff Avenue
Guildford
GU1 1XX

Thank you for making us so welcome when we inspected your school. We spoke to some of you in small groups and others around the school. You told us how much you enjoy coming to school, that you feel very safe there and are very well prepared for the next stage in your life. You are very proud of your school and rightly so. Our main finding is that George Abbot is an excellent school.

- There are many ways in which we find that your school is outstanding:
- The standards you attain in external examinations.
- The achievements of students in the sixth form.
- The quality of teaching that you receive.
- The rich range of experiences on offer to you, both inside and outside the classroom.
- The level of care, particularly for those who have particular difficulties at any time.
- The leadership of your headteacher and his senior staff.
- The way in which the governors check and oversee the work of the school.
- The way in which you develop into confident young people, readily take on responsibilities and make a very valuable contribution to the community.
- You produce high quality artwork.

The school strives for excellence and you can help it to improve further by keeping up the very good work. We have asked the school to ensure that you do as well in mathematics in Years 10 and 11 as you do in other subjects such as English and the arts. In the sixth form we would like to see the boys match the excellent progress made by the girls in their A level subjects.

We wish you and the school every success in the future.

Barry Jones
(Lead inspector)