

Inspection of The Rochester Grammar School

Maidstone Road, Rochester, Kent ME1 3BY

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 January 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade

Ofsted has not previously inspected The Rochester Grammar School as an academy school under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspections, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils and students at The Rochester Grammar School respect the high standards that the school sets for them. They share leaders' ambition for them to thrive academically and succeed as global citizens. Pupils believe in the school motto, 'Transforming Life Chances', and speak passionately about how important the school has been in shaping their future. As one sixth-form student said: 'Being here has built my confidence and helped to develop my character.'

Pupils respect each other's differences and celebrate the school's diverse community. Bullying is rare and dealt with swiftly if it happens. Pupils feel safe at school. Behaviour in class and around the school is very calm, courteous and respectful. Most pupils enjoy their time at school. Consequently, they attend well, are punctual to lessons and work hard.

Pupils enjoy the wide range of activities that extend the curriculum beyond their academic studies. Many pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Clubs and opportunities inspire pupils to develop their own interest and hobbies. Sixth-form students take the lead in a number of these activities and benefit from the leadership opportunities to develop their character and confidence.

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

Leaders have an aspirational vision for providing pupils with a high-quality education. The curriculum is well designed to give all pupils the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life. In almost all subjects, the curriculum is broad, ambitious and well planned, enabling pupils to develop knowledge and skills as they move through the school.

Most subject leaders have identified the knowledge that pupils must learn and have thought carefully about the order in which this knowledge should be taught. This helps pupils to build their learning securely over time. However, in a very small number of subjects, leaders are continuing to refine the curriculum to ensure that all subjects are as well sequenced.

In most subjects, teachers make regular checks on pupils' learning. Over time, teachers revisit topics and concepts to help pupils to remember more of their learning. Teachers have thought carefully about assessment and use this well. This supports pupils to embed and use knowledge fluently.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Teachers weave subject-specific and technical vocabulary skilfully into conversations they have with pupils. Students in the sixth form appreciate the learning environment that the school offers. They enjoy the depth of discussions and debates that are central to their International Baccalaureate courses.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) follow the same curriculum as other pupils. Teachers use the provided information to ensure that the needs of pupils with SEND are met and that teaching is adapted appropriately. However, the school's strategy to support disadvantaged pupils is not implemented consistently across all subjects. As a result, some disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

The school's offer for pupils' broader development is comprehensive. Pupils benefit from the diverse choice of activities available. The personal, social and health education curriculum is well planned. In lessons, and during tutor times, pupils are confident to express their views and respectfully listen to views of others. While relationships between staff and pupils are mainly positive, some pupils would welcome the opportunity to be more involved in decision-making in the school. In the sixth form, there is a clear focus on helping students to mature into young adults. They are given opportunities to think broadly about global issues and to develop inquiring minds.

Leaders understand the importance of reading and assess pupils on entry into the school. There are opportunities for pupils to read, including a weekly session dedicated to reading in tutor time. Students in the sixth form enjoy the challenging texts and articles that they are required to read for their courses. However, leaders acknowledge that there has not been a clear enough strategy to provide support for pupils who need help with reading and are therefore putting in plans to address this.

A new well-planned and sequenced careers programme has recently been introduced. This is structured to address pupils' desire for more and earlier advice with options choices. Pupils talked about how much they are learning at the newly established 'Careers Club'. Older students value their careers education and how it helps them make informed choices about their future education, apprenticeship or employment options.

Leaders are mindful of staff's workload. Teachers appreciate the range of bespoke professional development opportunities available to them. The vast majority of staff who responded to the staff survey feel proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Throughout the school, there is a strong safeguarding culture. All necessary pre-employment checks are made on adults working at the school. The designated safeguarding lead is very knowledgeable and provides regular safeguarding training and weekly safeguarding bulletins for staff. Staff know how to spot the signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They are prompt in sharing any concerns with leaders. Records are detailed and demonstrate the school's approach to keeping pupils safe. Pupils feel safe and say that they have a trusted adult in school that they can go to if they have any concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, the support for disadvantaged pupils is not implemented consistently well. As a result, some disadvantaged pupils do not achieve as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that their improvement strategies are consistently applied across all subjects.
- Some pupils do not feel that their views are taken into account by staff and leaders. Leaders should consider how they engage effectively with pupils to enable them to become more actively involved in the school community.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136313
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	10242409
Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1182
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	184
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Stuart Gardner
Principal	Clare Brinklow
Website	www.rochestergrammar.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Rochester Grammar School opened as an academy in 2010 as part of the Thinking School Academy Trust.
- When the predecessor school, known by the same name, was inspected by Ofsted in 2008, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, the leader responsible for pupils with SEND, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with governors and the trust's chief executive officer.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, art, modern foreign languages and history. Inspectors met with subject leaders, visited lessons and spoke to teachers. They looked at curriculum planning and pupils' work. They met with pupils to discuss their learning.
- Inspectors also visited a range of lessons in other subjects. During visits to lessons, they sampled pupils' work and spoke to them about their learning.
- The lead inspector scrutinised safeguarding arrangements, including the school's central record of recruitment checks. Inspectors spoke to a variety of staff to discuss safeguarding arrangements and how well referrals and systems work.
- Inspectors observed pupils around the school site during lunchtimes and at break.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils and groups of staff, to hear their views.
- Inspectors considered the 128 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to Ofsted's confidential surveys for staff and pupils and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

Ann Fearon, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Keith Pailthorpe	Ofsted Inspector
Mary Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Roessler	Ofsted Inspector
Mary McKeeman	Ofsted Inspector

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