

Inspection of Gillingham School

Hardings Lane, Gillingham, Dorset SP8 4QP

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 May 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 Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Gillingham leaders expect the very best for every pupil. The school motto is 'through teaching we learn'. Leaders and staff make sure that every pupil experiences 'friction-free' learning. They remove barriers to learning to ensure pupils succeed. This is particularly true for pupils with additional needs.

Through a well-planned curriculum, pupils learn about and understand the school values. These include treating everyone with kindness and dignity. There are positive relationships between pupils and their teachers. The classroom environment is focused and purposeful. Pupils value and take an active role in their learning. Mostly, pupils' behaviour around the school site is calm and purposeful. However, pupils do say that some pupils use inappropriate language, which is not always challenged by staff.

When leaders are aware of cases of bullying, they take swift action to resolve it. Pupils know who to report an issue to, but some are reluctant to do so. Leaders have recognised this and have been proactive in explaining to pupils what constitutes bullying. They have instigated alternative ways to encourage pupils to speak up about this issue.

Pupils enjoy and make good use of the wide range of clubs and activities available. These include sports, music, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and a snake club. They particularly value the many opportunities for pupil leadership, such as being part of the school council or by becoming head students. Pupils can see how these enable them to contribute to the further development of the school.

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

Leaders have developed a curriculum that is ambitious for all pupils. The knowledge that pupils need and the order in which they learn it are carefully considered. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to support and challenge pupils. Pupils' understanding of key knowledge is checked before they move on to the next stage of learning.

Pupils who are still at the early stages of reading are well supported to catch up. However, too many pupils do not read for pleasure. Furthermore, in English, pupils study a narrow range of literary texts, which means that pupils do not read a range of culturally diverse books.

Leaders expect nearly all pupils to study a modern foreign language to the age of 16. As a result, most pupils study for the English Baccalaureate. This includes those pupils who are disadvantaged. The qualifications available to sixth-form students are well suited to their interests and future plans.

Staff know the individual needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. The curriculum is carefully broken down into small, achievable steps, and teaching is adapted effectively. This supports pupils to successfully progress through the curriculum.

Most pupils engage well with their learning, and they attend well. However, during break and lunchtimes, a minority of pupils' behaviour is not always mutually respectful. Leaders take deliberate steps to eliminate discriminatory behaviour and language. There is a 'restless determination' to create a culture of equality and mutual respect. Those pupils who find this difficult are supported to understand the impact that their behaviour has on others.

Students are extremely positive about life in the sixth form. They take an active part in school life. For example, they support younger pupils as 'red coat' supervisors at lunchtime.

Pupils follow a well-designed curriculum for personal, social and health education. The curriculum is responsive to current and contextual issues. Leaders identify and respond to patterns of pupils' behaviour. Pupils learn about tolerance, respect and the importance of understanding how other people live. For example, some sixth-form students have worked with pupils across the school to raise awareness of those with protected characteristics.

Pupils in all years take part in a rich and varied set of extra-curricular clubs and activities. Leaders support pupils with SEND and those who are disadvantaged to take part. There is a well-planned careers programme, which provides pupils with information to support their next steps.

Leadership at all levels is a strength of the school. Those responsible for governance know the school well. They provide an appropriate balance of challenge and support to leaders. There is a shared and clear moral purpose to provide every pupil with the best opportunities in life. Leaders prioritise actions that will have the greatest impact on pupils. They have created a culture of continual reflection, which is leading to sustained improvement. Staff feel valued and are supported to implement changes successfully.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know their pupils well, and pupils feel safe. Pupils are included in discussions about how to further improve the culture of the school. This has strengthened the whole-school approach to reduce bullying and other harmful behaviours.

The safeguarding team works with external agencies to ensure that vulnerable pupils and their families receive the help that they need.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some pupils do not demonstrate respectful behaviour towards others. This leads to a minority of pupils displaying discriminatory attitudes, which can result in incidents of bullying. Leaders must ensure that the strong work they have already started in this area continues to be a whole-school priority.
- Many pupils do not read widely or for pleasure. Their exposure to a rich and diverse set of literature is limited. This means their knowledge and understanding of the world are not broadly developed. Leaders should encourage pupils to develop a love of reading, particularly of authors from a range of different backgrounds and cultures.

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	113882
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10256677
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
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	1,743
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	363
Appropriate authority	Governing body
Chair of governing body	Guy Lowton
Headteacher	Paul Nicholson
Website	www.gillingham-dorset.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 July 2017

Information about this school

- The school uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provider.
- 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.

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 has received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken this into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, curriculum leaders and members of the governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, looked at curriculum planning, 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 lead inspector examined school records. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leader and spoke with a range of pupils and staff about safeguarding.
- An inspector spoke to the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. Inspectors also viewed the responses to the pupil survey and the staff survey.

Inspection team

Simon Tong, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
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