

# Ripon Grammar School

## Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Unique Reference Number</b> | 121694             |
| <b>Local authority</b>         | North Yorkshire    |
| <b>Inspection number</b>       | 380305             |
| <b>Inspection dates</b>        | 8–9 February 2012  |
| <b>Lead inspector</b>          | Honoree Gordon HMI |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

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|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                            | Secondary                             |
| <b>School category</b>                           | Community                             |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                       | 11–18                                 |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                          | Mixed                                 |
| <b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>        | Mixed                                 |
| <b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>       | 854                                   |
| <b>Of which number on roll in the sixth form</b> | 255                                   |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>                     | The governing body                    |
| <b>Chair</b>                                     | Richard Marsden                       |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                               | Martin Pearman                        |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b>        | 3 June 2009                           |
| <b>School address</b>                            | Clotherholme Road<br>Ripon<br>HG4 2DG |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                          | 01765 602 647                         |
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|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Boarding provision</b>                  | Ripon Grammar School                |
| <b>Social care Unique Reference Number</b> | SC007944                            |
| <b>Social care inspector</b>               | Lucy Martin Her Majesty's Inspector |

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## Introduction

### Inspection team

Honoree Gordon  
Peter Evea  
Colin Scott  
Nancy Walker  
Lucy Martin

Her Majesty's Inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector  
Additional inspector  
Her Majesty's Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 34 lessons and saw 34 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, governors and with some senior and middle leaders. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at documentation, including the school's plans for development; minutes of meetings of the governing body; records related to students' welfare and progress; and a sample of students' work. The boarding inspector spent time in both boarding houses, including in the evening, and held discussions with staff and students. Inspectors read the questionnaire responses from 231 parents and carers and questionnaires from students, including from boarders; and from staff. The proportion of parents and carers who replied to the questionnaire was higher than is usually found.

## Information about the school

Ripon Grammar is a smaller than average-sized secondary school. The school selects students for entry by ability through an examination held at age 11. The vast majority of students is White British and there are very few students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, compared to national figures. Three students have a statement of educational needs and a significant minority of students has been identified by the school as having an additional learning need, within the overall intake of high-ability students. These are typically medical needs or are related to literacy difficulties.

Nearly all students attend as day students, coming from the town and surrounding rural areas. There is a small boarding department comprising two boarding houses, one for boys and one for girls. Sixty-three students are boarders; of these, 11 students board termly.

The school has exceeded the floor standards in 2011, which sets minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

The school has specialist status for engineering and holds the Artsmark and Sportsmark awards, and Healthy School status.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate**  
 Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

|                                       |          |
|---------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Overall Effectiveness</b>          | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Achievement of pupils</b>          | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Quality of teaching</b>            | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b> | <b>1</b> |
| <b>Leadership and management</b>      | <b>2</b> |

## Key Findings

- Ripon Grammar is an outstanding school.
- Students’ attainment and achievement are high, at both GCSE and A-level.
- Students’ behaviour and safety overall are outstanding. Students show excellent attitudes to learning. Attendance is high, reflecting students’ enjoyment of school.
- Teaching is outstanding, representing an improvement since the school’s previous inspection. Lessons are challenging and intellectually stimulating.
- The school offers an outstanding curriculum that includes a wide range of optional subjects at both GCSE and A-level and which meets students’ needs exceptionally well. Students are well-rounded, confident individuals.
- The sixth form is outstanding; students attain high grades at A-level and leave school very well prepared for further study or training.
- Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders have a clear vision for the school and have secured further improvement to the overall quality of teaching. The skills of middle leaders are clearly improving but are not yet all of the same high quality.
- The overall effectiveness of boarding is good. The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools. The leadership and management of boarding are good.
- The safety of boarding students is good. However, there is some inconsistency in how the two houses operate.
- Boarding and educational aspects of the school do not operate in a fully integrated way. Oversight of policies and plans for both are not always sufficiently coordinated.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the systems for planning and monitoring the work of the school, to ensure that:
  - plans and actions for the school’s development consider boarding and education in a more integrated way, including the part all staff can play in this

- practice and procedures across the boarding houses are consistent
- the effectiveness of the contribution middle leaders make to sustaining high-quality outcomes for all students is further strengthened
- the oversight of matters related to health, safety and welfare across the school is clear
- the operation of termly boarding is kept under review, to see that there are sufficient boarders remaining at weekends.

## Main Report

### Achievement of pupils

Students' attainment is high at both GCSE and A-level. Students enter the school with attainment that is above the national average and most students' attainment is well above this. Through a stimulating curriculum and challenging teaching the school adds high value to this, so that by the time students leave, normally at age 18, many have gained top grade passes. The proportion of students attaining the top grades A\*/A at A-level has increased since the previous inspection and is now high, with many subjects showing around three quarters of students attaining these grades. Parents and carers are rightly very happy with the progress their children make and their questionnaire responses included many glowing comments.

There are no subjects where students' performance is weak, either at GCSE or at A-level. Indeed examination results show many strengths, especially in mathematics and sciences, but also in other subjects, such as art, history and geography. Nearly all students progress on to higher education to courses of their choosing, with a number opting to study engineering or engineering-related degrees, as befits the school's specialism. The specialism's direct impact is currently more noticeable in the lower years of the school, but is also felt in the high uptake and successes in mathematics and sciences at A-level.

AS-level results showed a slight dip in 2011, but this does not detract from students' overall high achievement. Very occasionally students' achievement falls below that expected but the school has good systems in place to identify students who may be at risk of underachievement and to offer support where this is needed. For example, the school offers support in literacy as not all students have high literacy skills on entry. The school tests students after entry so that it can spot where assistance may be needed. Overall, students' skills in numeracy and literacy are outstanding by the time they leave school. They speak, read and write confidently and accurately, drawing on sophisticated language.

The school has identified a suitable strategy to promote literacy more widely across the school. It has yet to do the same for numeracy, although it is clear that the absence of a whole-school strategy is not a barrier to highly-effective learning. There is appropriate provision to support those students who the school has identified as having additional learning or other needs so that they, too, achieve in line with their peers. The gap between boys' and girls' achievement identified at the

time of the previous inspection has largely disappeared. Students with medical needs are suitably supported to achieve very well.

Learning and performance in the classroom are at least good, and often excellent. Students are self-motivated learners who take an active part in their lessons, seeking to push the boundaries of what they know and can do. Students in Year 10 took part in a lively discussion in a classical civilization lesson regarding how they might stage an ending to the Greek tragedy 'Medea' and what the limiting factors were at that time in history. In mathematics, science and design and technology lessons, students' portfolios of work and their participation in groups, reflecting and challenging their own assumptions showed how well teachers were extending their learning across all key stages.

### **Quality of teaching**

Teaching is outstanding. Half of the lessons that were observed during the inspection were judged to be outstanding. These covered a wide range of subjects. The questionnaire responses from parents and carers and from students show overwhelmingly that both groups feel that students are well taught.

The school has implemented well the suggestions made at the time of the previous inspection, for example by improving the range of teaching strategies and by encouraging more independence on the part of students. Teaching has a noticeable impact on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in promoting confidence and self-belief, a thirst for learning and the capacity for hard work. Teaching is characterised by high-quality, warm relationships between students and staff; teachers' strong subject knowledge and passion for teaching; a fast pace; and high levels of challenge. Students respond very well, asking questions and joining in debate. The best lessons were indeed made 'fun', such as a Year 7 beginners' French lesson working out telephone numbers. Many lessons require students to apply higher-order thinking skills, such as in an AS-level psychology class where students, individually and in pairs successfully applied their recently learnt knowledge about different thinkers' views to the concept of fear. They responded eloquently to the high expectations of their teacher.

Only very occasionally, in less effective lessons, teachers talk too much; or forget to include some members of the class when addressing questions to students.

The rich curriculum offers excellent opportunities for academic study, including a wide range of optional subjects such as three foreign languages and classics; three sciences at GCSE; and many A-Level choices. The curriculum is well balanced also, with excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities and the development of creative skills, and offers a strong programme for the arts and for sport. The high levels of intellectual challenge underpin students' enjoyment of school. The curriculum fosters students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students' social and moral development are strong; students are well-rounded, confident and relate very well one to another.

Students' progress is monitored at regular intervals and appropriately challenging targets are set. Parents and carers are highly satisfied with the quality of teaching and inspectors agree with them.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Students' behaviour in lessons, around school and over time is excellent. They are highly attentive in class and highly-motivated learners. Students state clearly that any bullying, including homophobic and other types of bullying, should it occur, is swiftly dealt with. Inspectors found no evidence to the contrary, despite one negative comment from a parent. This was discussed with the headteacher, while protecting the student's confidentiality. Students themselves are self-critical and raise any concerns about behaviour, or seek to resolve differences when they arise. Students make exceptional contributions to their own learning, for example through their individual work in lessons and through researching homework.

Students work together highly cooperatively and in discussions, and in their conduct, show acceptance of others and their differences. Attendance is high and exclusions are hardly ever necessary. Students feel well supported in school and comment favourably on the range of activities they can take part in.

Students' behaviour and safety are very strong overall. The behaviour of boarders is also excellent. Boarders say that they feel safe and also report that bullying is rare and dealt with promptly. Boarders do, however, comment that systems for behaviour and safety vary between the two houses. Inspectors agree.

Inspectors noted that the systems leaders and managers have for checking on how well procedures and policies for health and safety matters are being implemented are at times too informal. Nevertheless, systems to promote health and safety have served the school very well thus far.

### **Leadership and management**

The school has made good improvement since its previous inspection, notably in improving the quality of teaching and in enhancing students' attainment. In this, the drive and tenacity of the headteacher have been crucial and have led to the school's overall effectiveness now being outstanding. There is good capacity to improve further: the headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a clear vision for the further development of the school and an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. There is a suitable programme to support professional development.

However, overall leadership and management are good. The skills of middle leaders in monitoring and evaluating are still building up. The contribution they make to the school's development is being strengthened effectively, although their understanding still varies as to how best to secure improvement in their subject area.

Governors support and challenge the school well. Leaders and governors promote equality and tackle discrimination very well. Good arrangements are made for

safeguarding students. The school conducts all the checks that are currently required on the staff it employs and notes these on a single central record, as specified.

The curriculum is outstanding. It meets the needs of these high-attaining students exceptionally well. It promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Since the previous inspection the school has enhanced students' awareness of cultures other than their own.

The overall effectiveness of boarding is good; the school has a continuous programme of improvement to premises. Currently systems and plans for the school consider boarding and education separately. The two elements do not seem to form a cohesive whole as a school, for example to be able to see clearly what boarding adds to a student's personal development or how it promotes their individual achievement. There is some inconsistency in how systems operate between the two boarding houses.

Students feel safe at school and parents and carers say the same. Inspectors agree that there is a calm atmosphere for learning that promotes excellent behaviour and safety and that in most respects the school fulfils its duties regarding safeguarding well. However, oversight by leaders, managers and governors of how effectively matters related to health, safety and welfare are attended to is at times too vague. For example, inspectors noted a number of minor concerns regarding the premises and had difficulty finding out how the risk to students from the building work on site was being managed. It was reported to inspectors that a written plan had been drawn up with contractors, as for building work in the past, but this was not to hand during the inspection. Effective controls were, nevertheless, seen to be operating.

## **Boarding provision**

The overall effectiveness of boarding is good. The school meets all the national minimum standards for boarding. The experience of boarding makes a positive impact on the lives of boarders and enhances boarders' personal, social and educational development. However, the school does not formally evaluate this impact.

There is a good quality of care, which meets the needs of individual boarders well. Boarders say that they feel that boarding helps them to get on with others, and they are tolerant of each other. The vast majority of boarders enjoy their experience of boarding and are appreciative of the support provided by staff. Relationships at all levels are good; boarders feel that staff are usually fair, but they would like a more consistent approach from some boarding staff.

Accommodation is well-furnished and well-maintained. A significant amount of work has been undertaken to upgrade accommodation in both houses since the previous inspection and further work is planned.

The safety of boarders is given a high profile and, in most respects there are effective procedures for safeguarding their welfare and promoting good health. However, procedures and practice vary across the two boarding houses. There is a



sense of community in each boarding house but no real sense of a boarding community across both houses. Boarders say that the food provided is of good quality.

The behaviour of boarders is excellent. Behaviour is well managed. Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with swiftly and effectively if they do take place. Boarders say that they feel safe. Boarding facilities are well organised and staff are keen to develop their practice further. Staff know boarders well and offer good levels of support to individual boarders. Boarders' support needs, for example their physical difficulties or personal family circumstances, are documented clearly.

Boarders enjoy the activities on offer and can develop skills, interests and new talents. They have use of school facilities such as the swimming pool and gym. Activities are organised in boarding houses and trips off-site arranged regularly. However, there are few boarders present at weekends.

## National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

*These are the grades for the boarding provision*

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness of the boarding experience</b> | <b>2</b> |
| Outcomes for boarders                                   | 2        |
| Quality of boarding provision and care                  | 2        |
| Boarders' safety  | 2        |
| Leadership and management of boarding                   | 2        |

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

| Grade   | Judgement    | Description  |
|---------|--------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.  |
| Grade 2 | Good         | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.  |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.  |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. |

### Overall effectiveness of schools

| Type of school       | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) |      |              |            |
|----------------------|---|------|--------------|------------|
|                      | Outstanding   | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools      | 46  | 46   | 8            | 0          |
| Primary schools      | 8   | 47   | 40           | 5          |
| Secondary schools    | 14  | 38   | 40           | 8          |
| Special schools      | 28  | 48   | 20           | 4          |
| Pupil referral units | 15  | 50   | 29           | 5          |
| All schools          | 11  | 46   | 38           | 6          |

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

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## Common terminology used by inspectors

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| Achievement:               | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.   |
| Attainment:                | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.  |
| Behaviour                  | how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.   |
| Capacity to improve:       | the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.                    |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.                            |
| Learning:                  | how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.  |
| Overall effectiveness:     | inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.  |
| Progress:                  | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started. |
| Safety                     | how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.             |

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



10 February 2012

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Ripon Grammar School, Ripon, HG4 2DG**

#### **Dear Students**

I am writing to thank you for your help when I came with Mr Eeva, Ms Martin, Mr Scott and Mrs Walker to inspect your school recently. It was good to hear your views. We also read the questionnaires you filled in and those that your parents and carers completed. You told us that you enjoy being at Ripon Grammar, that you feel safe there and that the staff teach and support you very well. Your parents' and carers' questionnaire responses were overwhelmingly positive about the education you are receiving.

We agree with your views. Here is what we found.

- Ripon Grammar is an outstanding school.
- Your attainment and achievement are high, at both GCSE and A-Level.
- Your behaviour and safety are outstanding. You have excellent attitudes to learning. Your attendance is high.
- Teaching is outstanding. This is an improvement since the school's previous inspection. Your lessons are challenging and intellectually stimulating.
- The school offers a rich curriculum that meets your needs exceptionally well.
- The sixth form is excellent; you attain high grades at A-Level and leave school very well prepared for further study or training.
- Leadership and management are good. Senior leaders have a clear vision for the school's further improvement.
- The overall effectiveness of boarding is good. The school meets all the national minimum standards for boarding.

We have suggested one or two points for the school's leaders to consider as the school develops further.

On this inspection we looked at the boarding houses as well as the education the school offers you. Boarders told us that there could be more consistency in how the two boarding houses operate. We agree with this view.

We also suggest that there are ways in which boarding and educational aspects of school life could be more integrated, so that plans for the school as it develops include both aspects more clearly. We know boarders value being treated in school the same as day students, and that makes sense. However, we also think that being a boarder offers extra opportunities for personal development and achievement. The school could reflect on what this means for each boarder a little more.

There is room for some improvement in the way leaders and managers, together with the governing body, monitor some policies and duties in school. The school is increasingly involving subject leaders in checking the work of their departments and we would encourage this further.

We enjoyed visiting your school and we wish you all well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Honoree Gordon  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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