

The Queen Katherine School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112431
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	363792
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Sally Kenyon HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1418
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	257
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Pooley
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 41 lessons, taught by 41 teachers. One inspector did a learning walk with an assistant headteacher. Inspectors held meetings with two representatives of the governing body, the School Improvement Partner, a school advisor, senior school staff, middle leaders, teachers, support staff and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at samples of students' work in lessons across a wide range of subjects and different year groups. Inspectors looked in detail at documents relating to the school's monitoring of its performance and undertook a detailed analysis of students' attainment and progress. They also scrutinised minutes of meetings, improvement plans and safeguarding procedures. The responses from parents and carers on 118 questionnaires were considered, together with replies from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well do all students achieve, particularly those who have special educational needs and/ or disabilities?
- Is the quality of teaching and assessment outstanding?
- Is the curriculum highly tailored to sufficiently meet the needs of all pupils and ensure all groups are making at least good and often outstanding progress?
- How effective is leadership and management across the school in striving for improvement?

Information about the school

The Queen Katherine School is a larger-than-average secondary school and has been a Specialist Technology College since 2001. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. A small minority of students are from minority ethnic heritage. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is less than half the national average. The school is a foundation school and part of the South Lakes Federation of Schools. It is an extended school and is at the centre of the Kendal Community Partnership which comprises two secondary schools and 15 primaries. The school has recently been successful in its bid to become an academy and will take on academy status from 1 April 2011.

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

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

The Queen Katherine School provides its students with an outstanding education. Under the dynamic leadership of the headteacher and, through the dedicated teamwork of all staff, provision and outcomes have improved considerably since the previous inspection. A group of students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable reported 'everyone is pushed to do as well as possible.' Staff work as a highly effective team to identify, nurture and develop the potential of each student. Students say they enjoy school and participate fully in the extensive range of curricular and other opportunities it provides. The multitude of partnerships fostered by the school serves to enrich the extensive curriculum further. For example, one student was awarded the Nuffield Bursary for research into fuel cell technology after a local firm had provided lectures for students in research strategies.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a substantial strength of the school. As a result, they become mature, self-confident individuals with high aspirations. They are extremely well prepared for life beyond school, so much so that last year every student who left the school entered some sort of education, employment or training.

Attainment is high. The school's relentless drive to increase the proportion of good or better teaching since the last inspection has paid dividends. As a result, students' learning and progress are outstanding. All groups of students make at least good progress and, for many, progress is outstanding. The quality of teaching overall is outstanding with the strongest teaching seen in the sixth form. Highly informative and effective feedback given to students about their work helps them to know exactly what they need to do to improve. In many classes students were deciding upon their own learning outcomes as a group, taking full ownership of their learning and tailoring it, with the guidance of the teacher, to suit their own needs. The sixth form is outstanding overall due to excellent strategic management, dynamic teaching and superb care, guidance and support, all of which promote exceptional outcomes for students.

The school's specialist status in technology is flourishing and the quality of students' learning has been enriched by the facilities and opportunities this affords, particularly in the provision of cross-curricular information and communication technology (ICT). Students make an outstanding contribution to the community in a variety of ways: they are ambassadors for the school, exemplified by their contribution to performing arts, charitable work, technology projects and work with primary school children.

The school meets fully the statutory requirements for safeguarding, pupils feel very safe and parents wholly endorse their children's views. However, risk assessment, whilst satisfactory, is not always subject to the same high level of scrutiny and intensive monitoring as other aspects of the school's work in this respect.

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The school has outstanding capacity to improve. Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the school, including the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Improvement plans are well focused. Since the last inspection there have been many improvements, most notably in attendance which was average and is now high. Senior and middle leaders have successfully embedded a culture of improvement. There is a purposeful atmosphere of collaboration and consultation focused entirely on the outcomes for students.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen procedures around risk assessments by:
- – monitoring and evaluating them more rigorously
- – reviewing them with increased regularity at senior leadership level and by the governing body.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

From broadly average starting points, students' achievement is outstanding overall. Over the past two years attainment has remained well above the national average and achievement has increased significantly. Projections for 2011 indicate this trend continues, with 66% of students attaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. Students make at least good and sometimes outstanding progress in their lessons and achieve well. Students learn at a good rate because of their teachers' expert subject knowledge and highly effective planning for all groups of students. In many lessons students are seen to take the lead in directing their own learning, which results in high motivation, challenge and result. In English, mathematics and science the number of students reaching A-A* and A*-C grades is significantly above the national average. The school has exceeded its Specialist school targets for the last three years.

Current tracking and observations in lessons show that students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities are now making at least good and often outstanding progress. This was seen, for example, in a Year 9 drama lesson about dramatic tension where the teacher had clearly planned activities linked to previous learning, taking into account students' starting points and tailoring work specifically to meet this group's needs.

The school sets challenging targets. It monitors and tracks students' progress very effectively so that any students at risk of underachieving can be identified and supported quickly. An example of this was a group of students in a Key Stage 4 English lesson. They had been identified by their class teacher as at risk of becoming disengaged and so were taught as a discrete class and were now observed to be making very good progress. Students known to be eligible for free school meals and students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress overall. This is because they are well motivated and engaged in their learning and are provided with very good provision and support.

The overwhelming majority of students say they feel safe in school and are very clear about how to keep themselves and others safe. Students behave well in lessons and around the school. They are confident that the few incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively by staff and all feel there are a number of staff they could approach for help or advice. A few instances of low-level disruption were seen in some lessons but this was

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addressed quickly and effectively by the class teacher and senior leaders who 'drop in' to lessons on a rota basis.

The extent to which students adopt healthy lifestyles is outstanding and can be seen from their high rates of participation in sporting activities; the take-up of extra-curricular sport is above the national average. The school meets the Healthy Schools nutritional standards and has a high take-up of school lunches. This is also due to the fact that the school has a 'stay- on-site' policy at lunchtime for all but sixth form students.

Students make a very positive contribution to the life of the school in their roles as members of the school council and school leadership group. They are involved in a range of community and leadership activities in local primary schools and charitable activities within and beyond the school. Students' preparation for their future lives is extremely well developed through their high level of skills in basic literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered very well through an effective assembly programme, religious education and personal, social and health education. There are also excellent examples of its cross-curricular promotion; for example, a Year 9 science class was observed debating the moral and ethical issues surrounding cloning.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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How effective is the provision?

The very large majority of teaching is at least good and much is outstanding. In the outstanding lessons teachers show expert subject knowledge and relate learning directly to examination criteria or national curriculum levels. Teachers model answers so that students know what high-quality work looks like and deep questioning really challenges the most able. A fast pace and regular, high-quality feedback make learning progress quickly. When teaching lacks this exceptionally sharp focus, and students are not as highly challenged by the work, the pace of learning slows to good rather than outstanding. Students are, however, often encouraged to assess their own and other students' work and learn how to improve it further.

The curriculum is outstanding and is kept under constant review to ensure that it meets the full range of aspirations of all students and is continually enhanced. Since the last inspection the school has introduced a series of BTEC qualifications and students can access diplomas through a partnership with the South Lakes Federation. The school provides students with an impressive range of enrichment and educational activities beyond the normal school day. High participation rates, closely monitored and evaluated by the school, indicate that these activities are enjoyed and appreciated. Furthermore, the school has been pro-active since the last inspection in guiding and encouraging those students who would not normally participate in activities after school, to do so. The result has been increased levels of engagement for students and improved outcomes. All students do a week of work experience in Year 10. This involves having mock interviews with employers, writing a formal letter of application and Curriculum Vitae, and completing a health and safety qualification.

The outstanding quality of care, guidance and support is reflected in the positive relationships that exist between staff and students and the very strong sense of community in the school. These relationships motivate students to want to learn and contribute to the positive and nurturing ethos within the school. One parent commented, 'My child has got Asperger [syndrome] and although she hasn't got a statement she has gained so much confidence through the support she's received that she is planning to take part in a major school trip in the near future.'

Highly effective transition arrangements enable new students to settle quickly into school. Students know whom to turn to if they need support. The progress of all students is carefully and regularly monitored. Any underachievement is swiftly identified and tackled. Students meet regularly with staff to review their progress. Consequently, students know the levels they are working at, what their targets are and generally what they must do to improve. Preparation for future work and study options is excellent. Further to work experience, the school holds enterprise days and has many work-related aspects to the curriculum. Students take part in Young Enterprise, the CBBC Young Apprenticeship programme and work in partnership with local businesses.

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The strategic leadership of the headteacher is innovative and based upon core values of inclusion and sustainability. Staff morale is high because they work as a team and feel empowered to bring about positive outcomes for students. Middle leadership is strong and influential. One middle leader reported that he analysed how he could improve achievement in his department and decided it was through more independent learning. With a strong focus on this for one year, he improved the department's results by 20%.

Middle Leaders work collaboratively to share intervention strategies and help support students who are underachieving in more than one subject in a coherent way. They make a significant contribution to whole-school planning and evaluation. Senior leaders and advanced skills teachers work collaboratively with other leaders in the federation.

The school communicates very effectively with parents, through regular newsletters and use of the internet. Parents and carers are heavily involved in monitoring students' progress and setting targets for achievement. The school has just launched an on-line parent portal in response to the fact that many parents now prefer this form of communication. Partnerships for learning and well-being are a thread that runs through so many things that the school does. Partnerships are built to be purposeful and sustainable and are often mutually beneficial.

The governing body is extremely effective not only in holding the school to account for its performance but in being an essential driving force in school improvement. Its members have used their expertise and business acumen to help the school realise its ambitious plans. For example, a local school for students with special educational needs and/ or disabilities is soon to be co-located on the school site. The governing body was pivotal in bringing the plans for this to fruition through its members own skills and knowledge. They play an very active part in school life, working with the senior leadership to monitor, evaluate and review the school development plan and linking with middle leaders to be their 'voice' at meetings of the governing body. They really value the views of students and have 30 students who are associate governors and thus entitled to attend meetings of the full governing body. Some governors also take part in the Year 7 trip to Conway: one governor said this helped him keep in touch with students' views and experiences.

Safeguarding procedures and policies meet statutory requirements and are satisfactory. However, senior leaders and the governing body do not focus sufficiently upon regularly monitoring and evaluating risk assessments. Equality of opportunity has a high priority and everything possible is done to ensure that all students are able to gain the most from the outstanding range of opportunities available to them. Policies and procedures to tackle

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and deal with discrimination are in place and are regularly monitored, but very few incidents occur.

The promotion of community cohesion is embedded in school practices and constantly reviewed. It has a very positive impact on the personal development of students and the local community. Some years ago the local community identified a rise in anti-social behaviour around the time of Bonfire Night. The school worked in partnership with many stakeholders to deliver a full week of assemblies and activities to promote consideration and safety. The result was a significant reduction in incidents. The school provides outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Overall, the sixth form is outstanding. Students display excellent skills for learning, both independently and in groups. High-quality outcomes have been maintained since the last inspection. Students speak highly of the excellent advice and guidance given to them. Leadership is rigorous. Leaders set high expectations and challenging targets.

Teaching is outstanding because leaders have focused on using data analysis to personalise learning. Teachers regularly ask deep, probing questions to test students' perceptions and enhance their critical thinking. Detailed feedback is personal and constructive. The curriculum has changed since the last inspection to provide an even more personalised provision. Students' progress is assessed regularly and in-depth. Students are supported by mentoring and other interventions to allow them to make outstanding progress. Due to the progress made and sustained since the last inspection the capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires say that they are happy with their children's experience at the school. They are pleased with the quality of teaching and care that their children receive and feel that the school is well led. One parent commented, 'This is an outstanding school on all fronts. My child is in a learning environment which will allow her to maximise her potential.' Inspection findings uphold their views. A very small minority feel that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour and bullying. Inspectors took particular note of this view in observing behaviour in lessons, on corridors and in the grounds. They spoke to groups of students, including those whose circumstances make them vulnerable. They found behaviour to be consistently good and its management to be effective. Students reported that there were many different adults they could turn to if they experienced bullying and that incidents were dealt with swiftly. A small minority of parents and carers questioned said that they did not feel that the school helps them to support their child's learning. Inspectors explored this issue with the senior leaders at the school. In response to parental requests the school has just launched a parental portal where parents can check their children's progress and further support them in their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Queen Katherine School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 118 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1418 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	63	53	49	42	3	3	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	77	65	40	34	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	69	58	40	34	9	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	62	53	44	37	9	8	3	3
The teaching is good at this school	68	58	42	36	3	3	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	47	40	54	46	13	11	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	52	44	56	47	6	5	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	66	56	41	35	3	3	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	59	50	46	39	9	8	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	44	51	43	3	3	5	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	50	42	50	42	8	7	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	89	75	21	18	3	3	2	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	77	65	35	30	3	3	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



18 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The Queen Katherine School, Kendal, LA9 6PJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Many of you gave up your time to speak to us and to complete questionnaires. You and your parents say that you feel very safe in school. We found what you said interesting and thought-provoking and your comments helped us arrive at our judgements. We were particularly impressed with the friendly and caring atmosphere in the school and your good behaviour. We recognised that you play a very important part in making The Queen Katherine School a friendly, safe and inclusive place to learn.

To summarise, we found that:

- your school, including the sixth form, is outstanding
- you achieve outstanding outcomes, make outstanding progress and attain high results in your end of Key Stage 4 examinations
- the outstanding care system supports all of you and is particularly effective in helping those of you who experience difficulties from time to time
- teaching is outstanding and is helping you learn successfully
- you are very caring, make a positive contribution to your school and local community and like to help other people by raising money.

We have asked senior leaders and governors to monitor the assessment of risk as thoroughly and regularly as they check on other aspects of the school's work.

Best wishes and keep up the good work!

Yours sincerely

Sally Kenyon

Her Majesty's Inspector

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