

Kingsdown School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	137265
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	397472
Inspection dates	2–3 July 2012
Lead inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,245
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Reverend David Gray
Headteacher	Wendy Conaghan
Date of previous school inspection	15 October 2008
School address	Hyde Road Stratton St Margaret Swindon SN2 7SH
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jonathan Palk

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ian Bryant

Additional inspector

Ann Short

Additional inspector

Neil Gillespie

Additional inspector

Judith Goodchild

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 43 lessons taught by 40 teachers. Nine of the lessons were jointly observed with members of the school's leadership team. One inspector undertook a learning walk comprising a number of short visits to lessons to look at provision for the students with autism. Inspectors joined students at their tutor classes. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and different groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents and students' work. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection and analysed 113 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, as well as questionnaires completed by a sample of students from each year group and 48 staff.

Information about the school

Kingsdown School is a comprehensive secondary school with a specialist status in technology for nine years. This school is larger than average in size. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average, as is the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, including those who speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, who are supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is similar to that of most schools. The school is the designated centre for secondary-aged children in Swindon with autism. The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress. The school holds the Quality in Study Support award, has achieved National Healthy Schools status and is an accredited Investor in People. The school converted to an academy in August 2011. There is a privately registered before- and after-school care provision on the school site that is subject to a separate inspection.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is improving quickly as a result of good leadership and management at a senior level. It is not a good school because improvements have not accelerated learning to the point where students make consistently good progress and the impact of middle leaders is variable. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory because they leave school with broadly average standards having made satisfactory progress from their average starting points.
- Teaching is satisfactory, with an increasing proportion that is good and, occasionally, outstanding. While lessons are well structured with good reference to expectations as to what students should learn, teachers do not always challenge the students sufficiently and the pace of learning does not always maintain their engagement. Marking gives students helpful feedback on how they can improve their work.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school. Students respond very well to teachers' consistent expectations of behaviour. The few parents and carers who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire and the students agree that the school is a very safe place. Good behaviour and positive relationships result in an orderly and effective climate for learning.
- The school is being driven forward by a strong senior leadership team. Checking on the quality of learning in lessons by subject leaders is not always rigorous enough. Important improvements have been made to systems for assessing and tracking students' progress. This ensures leaders and teachers can regularly check on their progress towards challenging targets. Self-evaluation has accurately identified the areas for improvement in the school's development plan. Performance management is robust and professional development is well matched to the school's needs.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons where learning is good, in particular by:
 - ensuring that all learning activities are closely tailored to meet individual needs and stretch and challenge all students
 - using questioning and dialogue during lessons to deepen understanding, extend thinking and raise expectations
 - applying consistently the proven strategies for engaging all students in lessons.

- Strengthen the role subject leaders play in strategic school improvement by ensuring that they are more rigorously assessing the impact of teaching on learning in lessons.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The variations in students' achievement in subjects are closing quickly and the majority of students now make at least satisfactory progress. Girls are still outperforming boys in a minority of subjects but inspection evidence indicates strongly that these in-school gaps are narrowing. Assessment criteria are increasingly used to support learning. The school's stronger focus on target setting has led to students making faster progress in the current school year. Attainment is continuing to rise across the core subjects and is likely to meet the challenging targets set by the school in relation to the proportion of students gaining five GCSE A* to C passes, including English and mathematics. Most parents and carers feel their children makes good progress at the school, but the inspection findings indicate that progress is satisfactory when compared to that of students nationally.

While attainment on entry is average overall, around a third of students join the school each year with above-average attainment. In previous years, only a few of this group have made the progress required to attain A* or A grades in English or mathematics or both. The school's reliable assessment information and work seen in lessons show that these students now make better progress in all year groups, due to better teaching and adjustment to the curriculum that enables some of these students to start GCSE courses earlier.

Students known to be eligible for free school meals make satisfactory progress, as do students registered to the autistic resource base, together with disabled students and those with special educational needs. An increasing proportion of middle-ability students are on course to achieve expected grades in English, mathematics and science due to some effective interventions in these departments. The most recent analysis of progress between Years 8 and 9 shows greater consistency between different groups of learners, due to timely interventions and improving teaching.

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Cooperation, keenness, enthusiasm and the ability to learn independently were key features of the most effective learning observed during lessons. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, open questioning helped move along group discussions on imprisonment and encouraged students thinking at a high level.

Quality of teaching

Most students, and their parents and carers, were positive about teaching in their responses to the inspection questionnaires. Although inspectors saw examples of good teaching, teaching is satisfactory overall because the attention given to how well students learn is inconsistent across subjects and the school. In a minority of lessons, students are not purposefully engaged with their learning.

The most effective teaching is the result of thorough planning in which lessons are carefully structured and learning objectives clear. Relationships between students and teachers are generally purposeful. In many good lessons, students used assessment criteria well to focus on how to achieve target grades. For example, in one good geography lesson for Year 7, students made good progress because the level of response required of different-ability students was well illustrated. Teachers make good use of their knowledge of students' different starting points and prior learning, and build on this through smart questions. Marking is thorough in most subjects, and feedback seen in students' work helps students understand what they need to do to improve their work. Students value the regular and detailed feedback they received on their progress and the next steps in their learning.

In satisfactory lessons, the pace was slower and the planned activities were not sufficiently challenging. Teachers' questioning did not always extend students' thinking as some required students only to give a short answer without explaining their reasoning. Students relied too heavily on their teacher in these situations and were not able to develop the skills they need to work independently and take responsibility for their learning. In addition, where teaching is satisfactory, teachers do not check on the learning of particular students or groups of students as the lesson proceeds to assess if they are keeping up or could be challenged to think more deeply.

The teaching of disabled students and those with special educational needs shows similar variation to that of other students. Although, in some cases, activities were matched closely to students' needs, teachers did not do enough to tailor their questioning to engage students effectively, and some support did not follow the strategies set out in students' individual education plans. The support in lessons for students to develop their literacy skills is inconsistent and not always effective. There is emphasis on new vocabulary but this is often delivered with insufficient exemplification. Teachers often provide time to reflect and this supports the spiritual aspect of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are positive about behaviour in the school, and the majority felt that it is good in lessons. In discussions, they noted recent improvements in behaviour, and linked this to the impact of a consistent application of the new system of rewards and sanctions. A minority of those parents and carers returning the questionnaire were less positive about students' behaviour but the school's own recent survey and inspection evidence supports students' views, as inspectors found students to be calm, friendly and respectful. The school's 'Behaviour for Learning' facility has had a good impact on students who were previously not engaged with learning, with its focus on achievement as well as reintegration into mainstream classes when behaviour has improved. Exclusion rates are low, with no permanent exclusions this school year. The students' attendance is consistently high and they are punctual to school.

Students recognise different forms of bullying and are well aware of the school's strong stance on bullying. In discussions, they generally felt this is dealt with well and that only a limited amount takes place. Parents and carers had a similar view. Students are well aware of the risks associated with the internet and are aware of how to keep safe when surfing the web. They feel that any racist behaviour is dealt with swiftly by staff and that the use of inappropriate language of any sort is not tolerated. As a result, students feel safe in school; a view echoed by the large majority of parents and carers.

Leadership and management

Since the last inspection, the headteacher, senior and subject leaders, and the governing body have focused successfully on raising achievement and improving the curriculum. At all levels, they strike a good balance between accountability and supporting development. Efforts to improve teaching are now bearing fruit in terms of raising the achievement of middle and higher attainers. Examination results have improved satisfactorily over time. The weaker performance last year in foundation subjects has been tackled robustly and departmental differences are beginning to close because of effective cross-departmental monitoring of students' progress data by senior leaders. Consequently, the school has the capacity to improve.

All leaders are held accountable for students' achievement and reviews provide a good balance of support and challenge. Ensuring equality of opportunity for all students is a high priority and school leaders do not tolerate discrimination. Systems for monitoring the performance of students and subjects have been significantly strengthened recently and assessment information is being used assiduously to identify and address quickly any underperformance. The school has embarked on a programme to address some students' weaker literacy skills in Years 7 and 8, and subject leaders are developing subject schemes of work, to identify where literacy skills need to be developed in lessons. The effectiveness of the implementation in lessons is variable. Strategic and departmental planning is based on regular monitoring and evaluation that has led to well-targeted professional development for

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staff. However, not all subject leaders are rigorous in their review and monitoring processes, particularly in checking on the quality of learning in lessons. The school has already identified the priority to strengthen this work and fully embed it into the departmental accountability cycle to ensure consistent practice across the school.

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the needs of most students well. There are fewer differences in the progress of groups of pupils, and a gap between boys and girls is closing. Provision now meets the higher-attaining students' needs as effectively as it is currently doing for those of other students. There are good opportunities to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding through clubs and enrichment days. Parents and carers are kept very well informed of their children's progress through regular reports and are very supportive of the homework and intervention programmes set up by departments. They hold very positive views of the school. The governing body is well informed, challenging and ensures safeguarding requirements are fully met.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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).

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.

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.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
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.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



4 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Kingsdown School, Swindon SN2 7SH

Thank you for the help that you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up time to join discussions and share your work with the inspectors, and to those of you who completed the questionnaire. We judged your school to be satisfactory overall. A number of things have improved since inspectors last visited, particularly the processes for accurately assessing your progress. This helps improve your learning in some, but not all your lessons. Consequently, examination results are improving in most subjects. The very positive relationships you have with adults and with each other make school a supportive place where everyone strives to succeed and you feel very safe. Your good behaviour and obvious enjoyment of learning show in your continuing excellent attendance and punctuality. You generally work hard and make an important contribution to the running of the school, through, for example, the student council and the anti-bullying prefects.

The good leadership means the school is well placed to improve further. It is evident from our inspection that the most important thing for the school is to continue to improve the quality of teaching and, in particular, your learning in lessons, so we have asked the school leaders to ensure that:

- that there are more lessons in which your learning and progress are good; we have also asked that subject leaders play a greater role in ensuring that learning is the best it can be in their departments.

We are confident that all of you will continue to work with staff to achieve these things and we wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jonathan Palk
Her Majesty's Inspector

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