

Kirkby Stephen Grammar School

Christian Head, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria, CA17 4HA

Inspection dates 15–16 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The achievement of students is good and it is improving because of the drive by the senior leaders and governors to improve teaching. As a result, the school continues to improve overall.
- Attainment across subjects is rising and the trend of improvement over time is good. This includes those students with special educational needs. Different groups of students do well and the gap between those for whom the pupil premium applies and their peers is closing steadily.
- Teaching is mostly good and some is outstanding. There are very strong relationships between staff and students, which help to develop a positive learning environment.
- Students have extremely positive attitudes to learning and strive to do their best. They are well supported in their learning by a rich and diverse curriculum which is very well matched to their aspirations and needs.
- Students' behaviour is good. They feel safe and secure and proud of their school. They are both courteous and respectful of themselves. They respond well to the same courtesy and respect shown to them by their staff.
- The sixth form is good. The wide range of subjects offered, through established and developing partnerships with other schools, meets the needs of students well. Achievement is good overall at A level and standards at AS level are improving rapidly.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A small amount of teaching requires improvement and not enough teaching is outstanding in its impact on students' achievement. Some aspects of teaching, including marking and assessment, are not yet consistently applied across the school or within subjects, and in some lessons students need time to reflect more on their learning.
- The wealth of information available to senior leaders and teachers regarding the achievement of individual students is not always used effectively to effect more rapid and sustained progress across many subjects. It is not applied consistently to set more challenging targets for some students.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of 30 lessons across all three key stages. Two observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Students' work in their books and folders was scrutinised during lessons as well as separately for the key subjects of English and mathematics.
- Meetings were held with leaders, governors, staff, the local authority and three groups of students from Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- Documents looked at included the school's evaluation of its own performance and those relating to safeguarding. Information on students' attainment, progress, attendance and behaviour were also analysed.
- Parents' views were considered through the 33 responses to the Ofsted online survey (Parent View) and the school's recent surveys, as well as from a telephone call and an email from other parents.
- The views of staff were taken into account through the 36 questionnaires received during the inspection.

Inspection team

Colin Scott, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Gillian Salter-Smith

Additional Inspector

Bernard Robinson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Kirkby Stephen Grammar School converted to become an academy school in August 2011. When its predecessor school, Kirkby Stephen Grammar School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding.
- The school is situated in the Upper Eden Valley of Cumbria. It is much smaller than most other secondary schools. Students come from a wide rural area covering 400 square miles.
- Most students are of White British backgrounds and there are very few students for whom English is their second language.
- The school specialises in Sports and Applied Learning. Through its Sports College Status the school has developed sports partnerships offering a range of activities to the Eden Valley community.
- The school is part of a number of collaborative partnerships across the Eden Valley including the Eden Association of Headteachers, which is working towards a teaching alliance to the benefit of all ages.
- Education is additionally supported for two days a week for a small number of Year 10 and Year 11 students through an engineering course provided by the Appleby Training Heritage Centre.
- The proportion of those eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding provided by the government to support students known to be eligible for free school meals, those in local authority care and the children of service families.
- The proportion of students with special educational needs supported through school action is above average. The proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards that set the minimum standards expected for students' attainment and progress.
- Following the retirement of the headteacher, in December 2012, the school is currently led by an acting headteacher and deputy headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be consistently good or outstanding by:
 - ensuring marking consistently informs students as to how to move to the next stage of learning
 - using assessment procedures more effectively to guide the planning for future lessons
 - giving students more opportunities to reflect on their learning and to make decisions about how they learn.
- Make sharper use of information already gathered about individual students and their progress by creating highly challenging targets that inspire and motivate all students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students are keen and committed to their personal success and, as a result, they are able to achieve well over their time at the school. They enter the school in Year 7 with attainment that is broadly average and leave Year 11 with the proportion of GCSE results for five A*-C grades, including in English and mathematics, being above average. This shows good progress and compares favourably with national figures. However, there are not enough students exceeding those figures for achievement to be judged as outstanding.
- Attainment overall across all subjects is better than the national average and improving over time. Slightly more students than is found nationally achieve the expected three levels of progress in English and mathematics.
- In the few subjects where progress has been weaker in the past, leaders have been rigorous in making improvements in teaching that have resulted in better achievement. For example, attainment has risen in geography and Spanish and performance has improved in these subjects.
- The performance in GCSE examinations of students known to be eligible for free school meals has improved over time. There is still a gap in attainment between those in the school who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are not, but the gap is closing over time. To help this, pupil premium funding has been spent wisely in support of these students through extra staffing support in and out of lessons and in a special Year 7 catch-up lesson.
- Reading is actively encouraged across the school. During the inspection a group of Year 7 boys were observed reading, and the support they have received through pupil premium funding has boosted both their confidence to read and their basic literacy skills.
- The gap in achievement between boys and girls is closing. Tracking of progress has improved and there is very good emphasis in recognising any underperformance of individuals.
- Staff know individual students' needs well overall and those identified as having a special educational need make broadly the same progress as their peers.
- The school does not enter students early for the key subjects of mathematics and English.
- Achievement overall in the sixth form, particularly in Year 13, is good. There has been variation in achievement between courses in Year 12 but the leader of the sixth form and senior leaders are clear about the need to drive standards even higher and, specifically, about how they can do this. Improvements are already evident in this area.
- Students who access engineering courses off site are making good progress.
- The school's own data show clearly how individual students are achieving and their progress has continued to quicken this year. As a result, students' attainment is set to rise further. The close attention the school pays to the progress of individual students illustrates a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching across the school is usually good with some that is outstanding. During the inspection no lessons observed were inadequate. In the sixth form all lessons observed during the visit were at least good.
- Teachers know their subjects well and are enthusiastic in their approach to lessons. In lessons that were good and outstanding they provided a range of interesting and challenging tasks that ensured that students were fully involved and learned at a good rate.
- Good teaching overall has ensured that attainment is steadily rising across all subjects and progress is most rapid when teachers:
 - skilfully use information about the progress of students to plan activities that closely match their needs
 - have high expectations

- make constant checks throughout the lesson on students' progress and adapt their teaching to take account of the learning
- set tasks that motivate and involve students and encourage them to think more critically.
- In the best lessons students were challenged to make the best possible progress. They were encouraged to reflect on how they were learning and on what they needed to do to improve. This was also supported by the very good relationships teachers had built with their students. For example, in one business studies lesson observed, Year 12 students were confident in being able to openly question the theories being explained by the teacher, resulting in a very purposeful discussion which led to a deeper understanding by the group as a whole.
- In the few lessons that required improvement, this was mainly due to:
 - lack of challenge for some students, particularly the most able
 - planning that did not take into account the learning that students had previously made
 - marking which did not inform students about what they needed to do to progress.
- Responses from Parent View and from staff questionnaires showed that students are taught well. The students themselves agree and they say that their teachers are always supportive and helpful to them.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students are extremely courteous and respectful of each other and of the staff. Similarly, the relationships built up by staff with students are exemplary. This results in a generally purposeful environment for learning, both in the classroom and around the school. However, in a few lessons observed, students were more passive and compliant learners and this resulted in slower progress.
- The students interviewed during the inspection were overwhelmingly positive about their school and felt valued by the staff. This view was supported by the responses from parents in Parent View, in which over 90% would recommend the school to others. Students feel safe and secure and that they are well informed about the different types of bullying, including cyber-bullying. They say that bullying rarely happens but that, when it does, it is dealt with quickly and firmly by the school.
- Students are skilled in recognising how to stay safe around the school, in practical lessons and in using new technologies. This has been developed through a strong programme of assemblies and is further supported by teachers within lessons.
- The vast majority of staff who returned questionnaires say that behaviour is good across the school. This is generally supported by parents who responded to Parent View, where 85% believed that behaviour was good. However, this still left some parents who felt that behaviour could be improved. During the inspection inspectors found no evidence to support the view that behaviour was less than at least good.
- Students speak highly about the Issues, Values and Beliefs (IVB) lessons they receive and feel this prepares them well to understand the issues surrounding faiths, communities and the diversity of the population.
- Exclusions are low and have been falling over time. This has been driven by leaders, including the governing body, who have initiated successful policies to tackle any disruptive behaviour.
- Attendance is above average and improving. The school has successfully used pupil premium funding to help support rising attendance by the students, who live in a very wide geographical area and often have difficulties in getting to school.
- Sixth-form students have been used effectively to mentor and support their younger peers both in subjects and in general behaviour. This has increased their confidence and feeling of responsibility to their school and community.

The leadership and management are good

- Senior leaders and governors have an accurate understanding of how well the school is performing. They know what needs to be done to sustain improvement across all aspects of the school.
- Leaders apply rigorous performance management processes that have improved teaching by staff to the benefit of all students. However, they recognise that there is a need to improve teaching further in order to ensure it is at least consistently good or better.
- The school is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders are kept informed about its activities, its policies and its successes. This is supported by a very thorough sharing of information through its excellent website. The school's use of technology to support learning is evident and having a positive impact on the progress of students.
- Regular and systematic checks on the progress of individual students help to identify quickly where early support might be needed. However, these systems are not yet used consistently well by all teachers in order to always set work that challenges all students to make excellent progress.
- The sports and applied learning specialisms have supported the school's drive to enhance both provision and outcomes for young people. For example, students are explicit about their use of, and need for, the availability of high-quality sporting facilities which they believe this provision gives both them and their local community. This has supported their belief that their school works hard for them and helps them to engage further in the school as a whole.
- The acting headteacher has been instrumental in ensuring that the school and its students have been able to work positively with purpose and maintain improving standards during a transitional leadership phase whilst the school awaits the arrival of a new headteacher in September.
- Despite having a small number of teaching staff, the school has created an extremely wide-ranging and exciting curriculum offer to its students. Emerging partnerships between schools from across the valley mean that all students are able to access the widest possible curriculum that matches their needs well.
- Students speak highly of the opportunities on offer to them from the school and this is due to a very strong commitment by school leaders to maintain the widest possible range of activities and subjects available to all. For example, excellent use is made of Appleby Heritage Centre to support an important engineering course for GCSE students.
- The school receives challenge and support for school improvement from Cumbria local authority. The school values this as a way of seeking a regular and independent evaluation of its performance. This support helps to keep the governors and senior leaders focused on what they need to do to sustain progress for students.
- All statutory requirements relating to safeguarding are met, both on and off site.
- Performance management of staff is regular and informative. It appropriately helps staff to identify key areas of success and development, and is used by school leaders to effectively manage responsibilities.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are supportive of the school and its leaders. They know the school and its functions well and use this skill to challenge all leaders effectively to support the progress of students. They have a good awareness of the quality of teaching across the school and of data relating to students' performance.
 - The governing body has been instrumental in supporting the school through recent financial challenges and has worked diligently with the Education Funding Agency to ensure sustainability of the school into the future. They have a good knowledge of how the pupil premium is being spent to bring about positive outcomes for students.
 - Governors ensure that teachers' pay is linked closely to their performance and are able to hold school leaders to account for the school's effectiveness.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137107
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	412130

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	400
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Linda Walker
Headteacher	Christine Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01768 371693
Fax number	Not applicable
Email address	admin@ksgs.cumbria.sch.uk

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