

John Ruskin School

Lake Road, Coniston, Cumbria, LA21 8EW

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement, particularly in mathematics, has not been as good as it should have been since the previous inspection. Boys have not achieved as well as girls over the past two years.
- Over time, teaching has not ensured that students made good or better progress.
- Work and activities in lessons do not always challenge students, particularly those of average prior attainment, to reach the standards of which they are capable.
- The accelerated reading programme is not yet developed well enough to increase the engagement of boys in their learning.
- The links between departmental and whole-school development planning are not close enough.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used effectively enough to ensure that information on students' personal and academic progress is more readily available to staff.
- The opportunities for members of the governing body to become more informed about performance in subject departments are not as formalised as they could be.

The school has the following strengths

- The dedicated headteacher and talented senior team have established well-thought-out strategies which have improved teaching quality and which are leading to an acceleration in students' achievement.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and have improved markedly since the previous inspection. Students are proud of their school, feel safe within its walls and have a high regard for their classmates and the adults who work with them.
- All parents who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) believe their children are happy, safe and well looked after in the school.
- Students' achievement in humanities subjects, and in the range of activities within performing arts, is outstanding.
- The governing body has a good awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development, supports the school to the full and holds the leadership rigorously to account.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons or part lessons. Three observations were undertaken jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors met with three groups of students, including members of the student council. They also held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body, heads of subject departments and members of the senior leadership team. In addition, they had a phone conversation with a representative of the local authority and an informal discussion with the community police officer.
- They took account of the 38 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and of the 19 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed the school at work and looked at students' files and exercise books, internal and external students' progress and attainment data, school development planning and the school's view of its own performance. They also considered minutes of governing body meetings and a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Inspection team

James Kidd, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Catherine Laing

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a much smaller-than-average secondary school. It is an active member of the South Lakes Federation of Schools.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is well above average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is just above that usually found.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those from service families and students looked after by the local authority) is below average.
- Most students are White British; there are very few students from minority ethnic heritages and who speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- Small numbers of students attend off-site provision at Kendal College and at a pupil referral unit.
- There have been several changes to the teaching staff since the previous inspection.
- John Ruskin School holds the prestigious and nationally accredited Geography Mark and is also a Bronze Eco-School. It is now working towards the Silver award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Embed the good and exemplary classroom practice which already exists in order to accelerate achievement further, particularly in mathematics, by:
 - implementing the accelerated reading programme across the whole of Key Stage 3 to increase the engagement of boys in their learning and raise their achievement in both key stages
 - ensuring that challenge in the classroom, particularly for those students who entered the school with average levels of prior attainment, is always good enough to enable them to reach the standards of which they capable.
- Continue to develop the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that there are closer links between departmental and school development planning
 - further developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT), in order to ensure that information on students' personal and academic progress is more readily accessible to staff
 - ensuring that heads of subjects report the performance of their departments to the governing body on a more formal basis.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Relatively small numbers of students make an evaluation of attainment and progress data rather difficult. Nonetheless, although levels of prior attainment on entry to year 7 are declining, students generally enter the school with broadly average standards.
- The percentages of students reaching five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including in English and mathematics, have improved each year since the previous inspection, and attainment by the end of Year 11 is now broadly average. This demonstrates that, although it is now beginning to accelerate, students' achievement requires improvement overall.
- Following a decline in students' achievement in mathematics in 2012, the proportions making and exceeding the progress expected of them improved markedly in 2013. Inspection evidence, including lesson observations, scrutiny of their work in books and a close consideration of the school's internal tracking data, shows that students in the current Years 10 and 11 are on course to reach higher standards in mathematics than ever before.
- The percentages of students reaching the higher grades of A* and A in their GCSE examinations are increasing rapidly and the progress of the most-able is accelerating. The school recognises, however, that the progress of those students who enter Year 7 on National Curriculum levels 4C and 4B is improving more slowly.
- The school places considerable emphasis on reinforcing students' literacy skills across the curriculum. As a result, students understand and use a range of subject-specific terminology accurately and in context. The accelerated reading programme, including resources to motivate and engage boys in their learning, is effective overall but has not yet been fully implemented across the whole of Key Stage 3, with a view to extending it to Key Stage 4.
- Achievement in humanities subjects is outstanding. In both history and geography, well above average percentages of students continue to reach GCSE grades A* to C and also the higher grades A* and A.
- Similarly, students take part in a wide range of activities within the expressive arts umbrella. Drama, dance, music and art are popular subjects and primary schools are invited to take part in dance clubs at John Ruskin.
- Wise use of 'catch-up' and pupil premium funding, to support students individually and in small groups, ensures that lower-attaining students and also those known to be eligible for free school meals make at least the same progress as others. In 2012, for example, students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium achieved and attained at higher levels than their peers.
- Focused support in the classroom for disabled students and those with special educational needs results in these students making the same progress as their classmates.
- The small numbers of students who follow off-site courses are safe, attend well and make good progress in their studies.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because it has not been good enough over time to ensure that students made good or better progress in their studies. However, the quality of teaching is now better than at the time of the previous inspection. Indeed, during the inspection, no inadequate teaching was observed and a majority of good and outstanding teaching was seen in both key stages and in a range of subjects.
- All groups of students achieve well, or even better, when the challenge they receive in the classroom is closely matched to their abilities, to the progress they have already made and to the levels of attainment they have already reached. In a Year 9 French lesson, for example, excellent planning and teaching enabled students to work at their own pace and those with average levels of prior attainment were enabled to make the same outstanding progress as all

other groups. In a Year 8 ICT lesson, in which teaching and learning was judged to be outstanding, students showed that they were able to think for themselves. However, in a minority of lessons, challenge comprises a 'one size fits all' approach and students of broadly average ability do not do as well as they could as a result.

- Marking is good and is now more regular and consistent than at the time of the previous inspection. Students receive accurate and often detailed advice on how they can improve their work.
- Relationships between students and between students and the adults who work with them are a major strength.
- The accelerated reading programme has a positive impact on students, particularly boys' motivation to want to learn, and it also supports students' learning in subjects other than English. It is, however, not yet fully implemented across Key Stage 3, to give boys that extra impetus to make the progress they should.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students show immense pride in their school and have the highest regard for their teachers and teaching assistants. They feel safe because, in their words, 'The staff are always around and we can talk to them if we have problems: the school is actually like one big family.' Parents hold the same views and all who responded to Parent View believe their children are happy, safe and well cared for. Indeed, most would recommend the school to another parent.
- Students behave well and often outstandingly well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous to visitors and are delighted to talk to them and to tell them how much they enjoy school life. They speak highly of their teachers and teaching assistants and mutual respect abounds in the classroom. They display good and often exceptional attitudes to learning.
- They are of the opinion that bullying is rare and that when it occurs, it is dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff. They display a good understanding of the many different forms bullying can take, including cyber bullying and bullying based on prejudice; they say that racism and homophobia have no place in the school. They are also fully aware of how to use the internet safely and of the possible dangers of social media websites.
- The school promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Students are delighted to take on a variety of responsibilities as members of the student council, prefects, peer mentors and paired readers with Year 7. The student council, for example, played an important part in expressing its constituents' views when the school uniform was modified. Older students comment, 'A key role we play is to ensure that the new Year 7 students are fully integrated into school life as quickly as possible.' Students are also proactive in their support for a range of charity appeals.
- Students recognise, as members of a mainly White British school, that it is important for them to become aware of cultures and religions that are different to their own. They, therefore, value the Hindu workshop and the visit to the Jewish Museum in Manchester.
- Attendance continues to improve and is now broadly average.

The leadership and management are good

- As a result of a more accurate view of how the school is doing, the committed headteacher and senior leadership team have been able to establish a range of strategies to ensure that teaching continues to improve and that students now have much better attitudes to learning. Students' progress is now beginning to accelerate and standards are rising.
- However, senior leaders are not complacent and recognise that departmental planning is not linked closely enough to the whole-school development plan. In addition, they are aware that the use of ICT to enable staff to gain more rapid access to data in relation to students' academic and personal progress is not fully developed.

- Heads of subject departments now have a greater understanding of their particular roles and are in no doubt that the continuous improvement in teaching, in order to raise standards, lies at the heart of their responsibilities. They hold senior leaders in high regard and value the advice they receive, as well as the many and varied training opportunities they have to improve their classroom practice. In their view, 'We are challenged by the senior team, but they also support us and appreciate what we do.' Students' progress is emphasised strongly in performance appraisal arrangements.
- The curriculum meets the needs of students well. There is no early entry for GCSE. There is a small number of vocational courses and students particularly value the recently introduced environmental studies programme. There is a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including sport, and students have many opportunities to visit a range of European countries, including France, Italy and Austria.
- Child protection and safeguarding policies and practice meet requirements. The school promotes equality of opportunity soundly and rejects discrimination in all its forms.
- The local authority provides 'light-touch' support but the school benefits from its membership of the South Lakes Federation of Schools, through which it receives support in relation to middle leadership, subject development and pastoral care. The school also takes part in peer reviews of how well member schools are performing and in training activities to improve the quality of teaching.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors know the school well and have an accurate view of its strengths and areas for development. Although they have good links with academic departments, they recognise that opportunities for heads of subjects to outline performance in their areas are not as formalised as they could be. Nonetheless, they visit the school regularly and observe teaching and learning in the classroom.
 - Governors have a keen awareness of trends in students' achievement over time and evaluate both internal and external data about attainment and progress with accuracy. They monitor the spending of 'catch-up' and pupil premium funding and ask searching questions of the school's leadership in relation to the impact of this spending on students' personal and academic progress.
 - The governing body keeps a close eye on performance appraisal arrangements and ensures that teachers only receive financial reward if they meet their targets for the progress of the students in their care.

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	112384
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	428829

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	156
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Culley
Headteacher	Miriam Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2012
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