

Kennet School

Stoney Lane, Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 4LL

Inspection dates	11–12 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher provides dynamic and experienced leadership focused on rapid but sustainable improvement in all aspects of the school's work. The headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body have high expectations for all pupils, and an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Standards are high. Pupils' achievements across a range of subjects place the school in the top 5% of all schools nationally for pupil progress.
- Pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability make outstanding progress given their starting points. Their progress is significantly better than that of other pupils nationally.
- Teaching, learning and assessment have continued to improve year on year. Teachers demonstrate exceptional subject knowledge, excellent planning and effective questioning as well as providing valuable feedback which reinforces pupils' understanding and leads to their outstanding progress.
- Pupils are safe in the school and they feel safe. The school's 'house' system is highly regarded. Pupils' academic success and personal welfare are equal priorities for all staff. The work that the school does to keep its pupils safe is excellent.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and their attendance is above average and improving. Pupils engage enthusiastically in lessons and show respect and tolerance for each other.
- The curriculum is effective in both key stages and in the 16 to 19 provision. Pupils' personal, social, health education is developed well. Pupils feel well prepared for their next steps in education and for life in modern Britain. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely well supported.
- The library is an excellent resource for the school and the school's work to develop reading skills is very effective. Pupils needing extra support make impressive gains in their reading.
- Leaders of the sixth form are highly ambitious and make increasingly good use of available information to track learners' achievement. Strengths and weaknesses are well known and the sixth-form development plan is sufficiently detailed and successful in identifying further development.
- Governors are knowledgeable, experienced and ambitious for the school. Regular meetings and visits to school enable them to hold the school to account. Governors check the use and impact of the pupil premium funding, and the provision for pupils who have special educational needs. They also ensure that only the very best teaching is rewarded with pay increases.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes on 16 to 19 study programmes by ensuring that:
 - teaching takes sufficient account of the spread of ability and aptitude of those in the class
 - feedback helps learners to appreciate exactly what they need to do to improve.

- Ensure that all teaching, learning and assessment is as highly effective as that found in the best practice across the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher's exceptional leadership has led to rapid improvements in all aspects of the school's work. He leads a dedicated and professional senior team who are highly committed to ensuring that all pupils achieve to the very best of their abilities. A culture of excellence pervades all of the work of leaders and managers. As a result, pupils flourish because they receive highly effective teaching, challenge and support. As one teacher commented, 'better never stops'.
- Locally, the school is highly regarded and oversubscribed. It has steadily built up its reputation for helping all pupils to achieve, especially those who have special educational needs or disability and those with complex additional needs. Leaders make very good use of pupil premium and catch-up funding to support pupils and ensure that they catch up with their peers.
- The school's resource provision for physically disabled pupils and the hearing impaired unit makes a significant difference to the life chances of those young people who attend. The work carried out in this area of the school is exceptionally well led and managed. Pupils are sensitively integrated into the main school as soon as they are ready.
- The school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Senior leaders have had a significant impact on improving the quality of teaching. Outcomes for pupils continue to rise and pupils currently in the school are making strong and sustained progress across all subjects and all years. Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability are making exceptional progress in comparison with other pupils nationally.
- Improved whole-school tracking is proving effective in offering an overview of the quality of assessments used by each subject and the progress that pupils make from their different starting points. As a result, leaders, including middle leaders and pastoral leaders, accurately monitor the progress of all groups of pupils and target support and interventions where necessary. This has been particularly successful for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability.
- Middle leaders are an enthusiastic and committed team who value greatly the support and challenge that senior leaders bring to their role. Working together has ensured that teaching is highly effective and available information is used much more efficiently to continually improve standards. A culture of collaborative learning and professional dialogue has led to improved teaching and learning. Continuous training and management of teachers' performance have supported improvements in this area.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and responsive. Transitions, between primary and secondary and across key stages, are managed well so that pupils feel supported and informed. The curriculum is constantly evaluated by leaders to ensure that it reflects pupils' interests and aspirations. School assemblies and personal, social health education foster a well-rounded understanding of life. All these aspects of the school's work, including the promotion of British values and supporting the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils, support pupils very effectively.
- The school actively encourages all pupils to learn a different language. Early-entry mathematicians follow an A-level mathematics course in Year 11, encouraging high numbers of pupils to take mathematics in the sixth form. The curriculum in the sixth form offers a range of opportunities for learners to study both academic and vocational programmes, with high retention rates confirming the appropriateness of the courses. Pupils fully engage in the life of the school and are keen to involve themselves in extra-curricular activities.
- Careers advice and guidance is very well organised and effective. Pupils in key stage 4 feel well informed about the range of opportunities open to them, including the qualifications required to support their future goals. Learners in the sixth form are given an effective programme of support and guidance to assist them to progress to their chosen universities and other destinations.
- The school works closely with a range of other schools including partner primary schools. Good liaison and close working relationships with these schools have led to better leadership and outcomes across a range of subjects. Staff have benefited from their involvement in local authority working parties and from feedback and reviews of their work. External support from the academy trust has included training, reviews and challenge.
- Leaders work effectively with parents and other stakeholders to ensure their support and commitment for the benefit of pupils.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have a breadth of experience and skills which enable them to support and challenge leaders

at all levels. Governors' and leaders' ambitions for the school are equally high. The governing body has successfully challenged leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and reduce the gaps in performance for different groups.

- Regular meetings and visits to school enable governors to hold the school to account for all aspects of provision including safeguarding, pupil premium funding and the support for pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Governors carefully scrutinise the arrangements for the management of teachers' performance so that only the best teaching is rewarded with pay increases.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective. Staff are regularly trained in child protection and safeguarding. The school makes thorough checks on staff and these are recorded in line with current requirements. Parents and pupils agree that there is a clear culture of safety across the school. This was confirmed during the course of the inspection.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teaching, learning and assessment across the school is of a very high quality and much is outstanding. This is because there is a shared drive to improve teaching so that teaching and learning are always at the heart of the school's work. Leaders and teachers see themselves as professional students and seek to improve and develop their practice continuously.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge. This helps them to address common errors and misconceptions as well as to ensure that pupils are well prepared for external examinations. Pupils' books and lessons observed confirmed that teaching promoted rapid learning in a range of subjects including English and mathematics.
- Teachers' planning is effective and ensures that very little time is wasted in lessons, especially at the start of the lesson. Teachers and teaching assistants work cooperatively together as a highly effective team to support pupils who have special educational needs or disability so they make similar progress to others in the class. Disadvantaged pupils are identified in planning and their needs are skilfully targeted to ensure that their progress is not compromised.
- Teachers know their pupils' strengths and weaknesses very well and this ensures that teaching is well matched to pupils' abilities, especially in key stages 3 and 4. Expectations are high and, as a result, all pupils make very good progress and the most able pupils excel as a result of challenging tasks and extension work. Additionally, teaching in the physically disabled and hearing impaired unit is particularly strong and well focused.
- Teachers use questioning very effectively to probe pupils' understanding and decide when to move learning on. For example, in a Year 9 geography lesson, questioning was used very effectively to draw out and reinforce pupils' understanding of the topic. Follow-up questions were used skilfully to challenge the most able pupils to think more deeply.
- In line with school policy, teachers provide detailed oral and written feedback on what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Teachers assess pupils' progress frequently and this information is analysed closely to identify and support pupils who have fallen below their target. Reports to parents are highly regarded and the targets offered are realistic and helpful. Homework is set and marked in line with school policies.
- Literacy is very well supported across the curriculum, with a strong emphasis on the accurate use of subject-specific vocabulary. The school's work to develop reading skills is very effective. The library is well used and pupils who need extra support make impressive gains in their reading skills as a result of timely interventions. Numeracy is supported particularly well in science and in geography lessons.
- In a very small minority of lessons, including in science and languages, insufficient challenge by teachers means that the pace of learning is slower than is found elsewhere. Leaders are well aware of the situation arising from staff turnover in those areas. Training and support is being used effectively to tackle any inconsistencies.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are safe in the school and they feel safe. They have considerable confidence in the school's ability to prevent

different forms of bullying, discrimination and extremism. Any concerns are followed up thoroughly. The pastoral support of the school's 'house' system is much appreciated by pupils and their families.

- The school enjoys extensive links with partner primary schools so that transition from primary to secondary is sensitively and successfully supported. Transition between key stages, as well as into the sixth form, is also managed well, with additional support offered to those who wish to follow apprenticeships rather than academic courses.
- Tutor and assembly time are used well to reflect on current affairs and explore issues such as recognising and reporting radicalisation and extremism. Pupils are taught about healthy eating through science, food technology and the personal, social and health education programme. Healthy lifestyles are extensively promoted through sport and a range of extra-curricular sporting activities.
- Leaders are clear that pupils' welfare is paramount and good systems are in place to offer help and support, involving external agencies where appropriate. Vulnerable pupils are identified and additionally supported by the highly regarded 'house' system and the use of mentors. Parents report that their children are well looked after and feel happy.
- Attendance remains high as a result of the concerted approach by the school to show the value of good attendance and responding to persistent absence quickly and decisively. Various activities promote learning and personal development as well as social inclusion, including an extensive range of extra-curricular activities which are well attended and much appreciated.
- High-quality careers advice and guidance is well organised and effective. Pupils in key stage 4 are able to speak with confidence about the range of opportunities open to them for the future, including the variety of courses, institutions and qualifications needed to support their aspirations. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education, employment or training.
- Good communication between the school and other providers ensures that the welfare needs of pupils who are educated off-site are met. In addition, regular reviews and updates are provided on their attendance and progress.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils, staff and parents are very positive about behaviour. Their views were confirmed through the inspection, where no evidence of poor behaviour or disruption was seen inside classrooms or outside. Pupils demonstrate high levels of courtesy and respect for adults and visitors to the school.
- Pupils are confident learners and demonstrate high levels of engagement in their studies. They are polite, courteous and friendly towards each other and support one another without prompting. They are proud of their school and look after it well. They take pride in their appearance, arrive punctually for lessons and demonstrate an eagerness to learn; this has a very good impact on the progress they make.
- Levels of attendance are consistently above the national average, including for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability. Persistent absence is similarly below national averages, with little difference between different groups. The school carefully monitors the attendance of disadvantaged girls, supported with challenge plans, personalised targets and home visits.
- The proportion of pupils excluded from school is low, with only one permanent exclusion during the last academic year. The school's inclusive ethos and the consistent application of the schools' behaviour policy ensure that pupils make the progress they should. Internal exclusion, where used, is effective with few repeat offenders.
- The small number of pupils who receive home tuition or attend alternative provision elsewhere benefit from programmes which are well suited to their individual needs. As a result, their attendance and progress are good.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Since the previous inspection, outcomes have improved steadily. Typically, pupils enter the school with attainment in line with national averages. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils achieving five good GCSEs, including English and mathematics, is well above the national average. Outcomes are consistently high across most subject areas, with particular strengths in English, mathematics, computing, electronics, textiles, food technology and art and photography.
- Teachers monitor pupils' learning well and make use of regular analyses of information to identify and address any underperformance and offer a wide range of focused support and guidance for those who lag behind. In 2015, at the end of key stage 4, the proportions of pupils who made expected and better than

expected progress in English and mathematics were well above national figures. Across their best eight GCSE subjects, pupils' progress was in the top 5% of schools nationally.

- The gaps in attainment between pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs or disability and their peers are narrowing. The progress for these groups is significantly better than that of other pupils nationally. Leaders and teachers have worked very effectively to ensure that these pupils are recognised and supported in the classroom as well as provided with further help through additional classes, revision programmes and booster sessions.
- Lessons observed, data offered and work samples reviewed confirm that pupils are on track to meet their challenging targets in 2016 and improve further on the 2015 outcomes. Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are doing as well as their peers. The progress of disadvantaged pupils remains high, especially in key stage 3, where they are performing better than their peers. This is as a result of targeted intervention and the highly effective catch-up programme supporting English and mathematics.
- The most able pupils are well supported in class with challenging content, extension materials and master classes. The school is not against entering these pupils early for examinations where this is appropriate. For example, the top mathematics set were all entered for their GCSE at the end of Year 10 and achieved 24 grade A*s and 6 grade As. This arrangement allowed these pupils to pursue GCSE statistics in Year 11 and start on their A-level mathematics course.
- The few pupils that attend alternative provision receive personalised teaching and support. The school has robust systems in place to check on their attendance and progress. As a result, these pupils attain relevant qualifications and make good progress from their starting points.
- The excellent provision of careers support and guidance ensures that all pupils know what qualifications they need in order to pursue their chosen pathway. As a result, pupils move on to appropriate further education, employment or training at the end of key stage 4 and at the end of their 16 to 19 study programme.
- The school promotes literacy very strongly and the vast majority of pupils read widely and often. This is very well supported by book clubs, book weeks and regular visits by authors, poets and storytellers. The development of reading skills is further enhanced by the vibrant and welcoming library, where pupils can undertake homework, research and private study. Support for numeracy is similarly strong but not as well organised.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leaders of the sixth form are highly aspirational and aware that progress in the sixth form is not as strong in as the main school. They make very good use of available data to track learners' achievement and progress across a range of study programmes. The sixth-form development plan is well considered and carefully focused on areas for development and improvement; this includes support for Oxbridge and 'competitive courses' applications.
- The school provides effective transition from Year 11. There is a well-considered programme of careers advice and guidance supported by work experience which is carefully matched to learners' aspirations. The curriculum is very well considered, with a breadth of pathways including an increasing vocational offer. Staying-on rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are high and applications to highly regarded universities are increasing. Learners appreciated visits to the school from external speakers, including politicians and health workers. Support for mental health and exam anxiety issues was also valued.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is strong. Teachers have very high expectations of learners and use their expert subject knowledge well to provide learning activities which engage and challenge them. In a small number of lessons, teaching does not take sufficient account of the spread of ability in the class and feedback does not always help learners to recognise exactly what they needed to do to improve.
- Learners exhibit excellent attitudes to their learning and they are diligent and focused in the classroom. There are many well-planned enrichment opportunities for learners to develop wider experiences and leadership skills. Sixth formers act as good role models for younger pupils. Their well-being and welfare is well supported. Excellent monitoring ensures that any underperformance is quickly identified and addressed.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good and improving. Overall, learners make expected progress across different subjects and attain standards similar to those seen nationally. The very small number of learners

joining the sixth form without GCSE passes at grade C or above in English or mathematics make good progress in retaking these subjects.

- The work in learners' books and folders confirms that they are making good progress across their different subjects. The school's most recent tracking information indicates that learners in the current Year 13 are on course to attain high standards at A level in 2016. The school meets the minimum standards for 16 to 19 study programmes.

School details

Unique reference number	136647
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10012252

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1779
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	356
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Bennet
Headteacher	Paul Dick
Telephone number	01635 862121
Website	www.kennetschool.co.uk
Email address	office@kennetschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 February 2014

Information about this school

- Kennet School is a significantly larger than average mixed comprehensive school serving the town of Thatcham and surrounding villages.
- The school converted to be an academy in April 2011. It is part of the Kennet School Academies Trust.
- The school was judged to require improvement at the previous inspection in February 2014.
- The very large majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, with smaller numbers of Any other White background. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is below the national average. The proportion of those who speak English as an additional language is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is below the national average. This funding is for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after. Fifty pupils were eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding for those who did not attain Level 4 in either English or mathematics at the end of their primary schooling.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below the national average and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is well above the national average. The school has a physical disability unit and a hearing impairment unit on-site, with pupils fully integrated into the main school.
- The school was awarded a Sportsmark by Sport England, an Artsmark Gold by the Arts Council and the Challenge Award by the National Association for Able Children in Education in recognition of its efforts to support able, gifted and talented pupils.

- One pupil is educated at the pupil referral unit in Thatcham and a small number of pupils are home educated as a result of health problems and anxiety disorders.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress from key stage 2 to key stage 4.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors undertook observations of pupils' learning in 37 lessons or parts of lessons, including 10 joint observations with senior members of staff. They reviewed the work in pupils' books covering English, mathematics, science and the sixth form to check attainment, progress and feedback.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders and middle leaders. The lead inspector spoke with members of the governing body and the academy trust. He had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors held meetings with pupils from both key stages and the sixth form. They spoke informally to pupils in lessons and breaktimes. They looked at the school's website and a range of school documentation, including governor's minutes, safeguarding records, self-evaluation and development plans.
- Inspectors considered 105 questionnaire responses completed by members of staff and 195 completed by pupils and learners. They also considered the views of 195 parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, as well as additional written comments provided by them.
- Inspectors were aware during this inspection that a serious incident that occurred at the setting before the last inspection, but which did not come to light until after that inspection, is under investigation by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate incidents of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the incident were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Inspection team

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Susan Derrick	Ofsted Inspector
Zoe Eades	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Swan	Ofsted Inspector

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