

Samuel King’s School

Church Road, Alston, Cumbria CA9 3QU

Inspection dates

14–15 March 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The inspirational leadership of the headteacher has ensured that the school has improved substantially since its last inspection.
- The headteacher has built a strong team of leaders, which has significantly enhanced the school’s capacity for further improvement. Senior leaders provide strong and effective support and challenge for staff.
- Pupils achieved well overall in 2016. Pupils currently in the school continue to make good progress.
- Teaching overall is good. Teachers know their pupils very well and most plan and teach lessons which help pupils of all abilities to learn well. The teaching of English is a real strength.
- In 2016, progress made by Year 11 pupils in mathematics was not as good as in other subjects. However, the teaching of mathematics is strong and pupils’ progress is improving rapidly.
- Pupils’ behaviour is outstanding. They have positive attitudes to learning. They work hard and the great majority take pride in their work.
- The school’s work to promote pupils’ personal development and welfare is outstanding, enabling pupils to thrive. Pupils are safe and happy in school. They show good respect for one another, for staff and for other adults.
- Governors make a strong contribution to the school. They are well informed and hold senior leaders to account firmly and rigorously. Governors play a proactive role in the school and have helped senior leaders to drive forward improvements.
- Leaders are working with a small number of teachers to ensure that their practice always meets the school’s exacting standards.
- Teachers do not consistently address literacy errors in pupils’ work.
- A small number of pupils need more help to improve the presentation of their work.
- The school’s website lacks some essential information.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve teaching so that more of it is as good as the very best in the school.
- Ensure that all teachers consistently address key subject-specific spelling errors in pupils' work and take action to support those few pupils whose presentation of work needs to improve.
- Ensure that the school's website includes all mandatory information.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The leadership of the headteacher is inspirational. He has taken effective measures to improve the school and has successfully addressed all of the areas for improvement identified in the last inspection report. Parents speak very warmly of his leadership and of its positive impact on the lives and education of their children. Staff, too, are very supportive of the headteacher and the way in which he leads the school.
- The headteacher has recently recruited a new deputy headteacher and has promoted a head of department to a senior leadership post. This has significantly enhanced the capacity of the leadership team to improve the school. Both colleagues are supporting the headteacher very effectively and have already made a significant difference to the quality of provision.
- Leaders are ambitious for the pupils and have created an ethos of high expectation. For example, they go out of their way to give pupils opportunities to visit sixth form and further education colleges in the region, often travelling many miles, in order to show pupils the possibilities they have for continuing their studies.
- The headteacher has acted decisively to strengthen teaching since the last inspection. He and the governors use performance management effectively and do not offer staff pay rises where their work needs improvement. Leaders continue to support and challenge teachers, with the result that teaching overall is now good.
- As a result of improved teaching, pupils make good progress in most subjects. Disadvantaged pupils, including the most able disadvantaged, make progress comparable with, and often better than, that of their peers in school. The school uses its pupil premium funding effectively to support these pupils, for example by the appointment of a teacher mentor who works with the pupils to raise their achievement.
- Leaders use funding for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities well to ensure that they are fully supported. The school makes effective use of its Year 7 catch-up funding to support pupils whose English and mathematics scores were low at primary school. All pupils in this small group are making expected progress in both English and mathematics.
- Staff know and understand their pupils very well and seek to personalise what they offer them as much as possible in order to meet their needs fully. Pupils thrive in this supportive environment. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are very strong. Pupils speak warmly of the support and attention they receive from staff. They enjoy coming to school, behave very well and support one another collaboratively.
- Senior leaders monitor and evaluate the work of the school robustly. They have a sound knowledge and understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses because they visit lessons regularly and frequently examine the quality of work in pupils' books. They use regular 'focus weeks' in order to highlight and develop key aspects of teaching which they have identified as areas for improvement and teachers have responded well to these, for example by improving their questioning in lessons.
- The headteacher and his senior leaders have worked hard to improve the work of the school's subject leaders. As a result, most middle leaders now manage their subjects

effectively. They have improved their ability to assess pupil performance information, for example. Senior leaders hold subject leaders firmly to account.

- The school's curriculum is innovative, broad and balanced, and provides a wide range of courses, including some vocational subjects such as animal care and agriculture which meet the needs and aptitudes of several pupils in this rural environment. The school offers all of its pupils six option subjects in Years 9 to 11; pupils take two of these in each of the three years. Using this arrangement, the school has successfully preserved much of its curriculum breadth, which it risked losing because it has very small numbers of pupils and teachers. The school allots each subject several teaching periods per week, so pupils study each one in as much depth as if they had the full two years, which is normally allocated. Pupils and their parents really appreciate this wide choice of subjects.
- There is also a suitable focus on subjects in the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) and the school is steadily increasing the numbers of pupils entering and passing this suite of academic qualifications.
- The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities, such as sports and dance clubs, and pupils take part in theatre visits, ski trips and study visits to France.
- The school's website is missing some important, mandatory information. It gives only scant details of the curriculum and misses key information about the governing body. The school has not included essential details about its provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and it has not listed the impact that its spending of Year 7 catch-up funding has had. Inspection evidence showed that the school does promote equality and diversity effectively, but the equality policy was missing from the website at the start of the inspection. Leaders subsequently added this following a prompt from the inspector.
- The headteacher is very appreciative of support offered by the local authority and by the Queen Katherine School Teaching Alliance. They have both made significant contributions to improving the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance is strong and effective.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They hold leaders and managers firmly to account and ask challenging questions about pupils' progress. For example, governors have regularly asked senior leaders about pupils' relatively weak performance in mathematics in 2016 and about how the school is improving this. They joined senior leaders on a visit to the mathematics classroom to talk to the teacher and to ask about pupils' starting points.
- Governors support the school wherever they can. They have assisted leaders in developing various aspects of pedagogy, for example developing methods by which teachers can better meet the needs of the differing abilities in their classes.
- Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise to the governing body. Because they are also the governors of the two partner primary schools in the federation, they have a very good knowledge of the local community and the needs and aspirations of the pupils.

- Governors have a good knowledge of the school's finances. They check that additional funding such as the pupil premium is used appropriately. Working with the headteacher, they have eliminated a large budget deficit, and they have proactively sought solutions in the community regarding the future of the school.
- Governors have not ensured that the school's website meets statutory requirements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- The school's safeguarding policies and practices are strong. Leaders actively promote a culture of vigilance where pupils' safety and welfare are paramount. The school site is very secure.
- The school has rigorous checking procedures in place for child protection. All staff have been trained in safeguarding and child protection and they know what to do if a child is at risk. Referrals to outside agencies meet requirements and concerns are followed up meticulously by school staff. Staff and governors have had training on 'Prevent', the government's programme for preventing radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, for example through e-safety initiatives. The school has filters in place to prevent inappropriate internet usage.
- Governors are suitably trained in safeguarding and in the safe recruitment of new staff. They carry out an annual audit of safeguarding practice across the school and ensure that all necessary measures are fully in place.
- The school works effectively with parents and external agencies to keep pupils secure and safe from harm.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. Pupils told the inspector that the teaching they receive is good. Most teaching seen on this inspection was effective and work seen in pupils' books in a range of subjects across the curriculum also showed that teaching is typically good.
- Because the school has very small numbers of pupils, teachers must teach all abilities in each year group in one class. This requires them to set work at different levels in order to meet pupils' needs. Leaders have made this aspect of teaching a key area of focus for development this year. As a result, most teachers are now adept at providing activities and materials at different levels. Teachers know their pupils very well and often give them tailored, individual support.
- Teachers mainly have high expectations of their pupils. Levels of challenge in most lessons in this inspection were high and pupils confirmed that they are usually challenged sufficiently. Teachers often set demanding tasks which stretched the most able pupils. They also ensured that support was provided for weaker pupils. There were some good examples of teachers working well with pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, for example. However, in a small number of cases teachers pitched activity at too high or too low a level for some pupils.

- Pupils behaved very well in lessons, showing positive interest in their work and very good application. Most pupils worked studiously. Relationships between pupils are very positive. Higher-ability pupils often help their weaker peers with their work, showing great empathy and acceptance of others' difficulties.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved significantly. The work in pupils' books shows that pupils make good progress over time.
- The teaching of English is a real strength. The leader has very high expectations of his pupils and the pupils, in turn, are rising to the challenge. The inspector observed two lessons where pupils were challenged to recall and explain a wide range of literary techniques, which they did with gusto, showing very strong prior knowledge. Others were expected to spell a number of difficult literary words correctly. In a Year 11 poetry lesson, pupils worked well together on analysing poems, often expressing sophisticated ideas and insight. The boys in this class showed a genuine interest in the poems because they were stimulated by the teacher's lively style and demanding questioning.
- The English leader has decorated his classroom in mock-Gothic style in order to link in with the Gothic literature work being done this year. The room resembles an 'Aladdin's Cave' full of eerie objects and artefacts. There are also life-size mannequins dressed as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the room and neighbouring corridor. They are adorned with quotations from the play, which pupils are encouraged to explore. Pupils told the inspector that they 'absolutely love the English room', which they find stimulating. It is a wonderful learning environment.
- The school works hard to promote and develop pupils' reading. During the inspection, all pupils spent one lesson reading books. Year 11 pupils, who have been trained as reading mentors, worked alongside younger learners and helped them to progress. Teachers introduced the inspector to a number of pupils whose reading had been very weak when they arrived at the school, including some who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, but who are now much more confident readers.
- The school is also working to improve pupils' numeracy. The inspector observed a tutor period where pupils worked assiduously on a range of mathematical questions, which pupils said is a regular feature.
- School leaders agree that teaching overall is good. They recognise that some teachers new to the school need more support to ensure that their teaching always meets the school's expected standards. Senior leaders are supporting teachers in science and history, for instance, and can already demonstrate positive improvements. Work seen in lessons in science and in pupils' books in history confirmed that practice in these subjects is improving.
- In line with the school's policy, all teachers give pupils precise feedback on their work and all expect that pupils will respond to comments in order to improve their work. Pupils appreciate the quality of the guidance teachers give them and, in many subjects, they respond very well to commentary, often completing additional challenge questions. However, the inspector saw several examples in pupils' books where teachers had missed the opportunity to correct or improve pupils' literacy, especially misspellings of key subject words.

- Most pupils take a pride in their work and look after their books. However, the inspector found a small number of examples where work was careless or rushed and where pupils needed more guidance and support from teachers on improving the presentation of their work.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils thrive in this very small school where their teachers know them very well. They feel very well supported by their teachers. Parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire or via free text speak very highly of the personalised support and guidance their children receive.
- Pupils feel safe in school, and they know how to stay safe, including staying safe online. They told inspectors that bullying is very rare and that staff deal with it effectively if it ever arises. Pupils said that there is no racism or homophobic bullying and school records confirm this. Relationships between pupils are excellent.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly and are courteous and respectful. They support one another empathetically, for example in the positive way that Year 11 reading mentors guide younger readers. Almost all pupils take pride in their work, and the great majority respond to teachers' feedback on their work with great care and attention, which helps to move their learning on.
- The school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is highly effective. Pupils learn about fundamental British values and they learn about the different cultures and religions in British society. Assemblies and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education cover a range of topics, such as human rights, freedom, conflict, emotional health and healthy lifestyles. Pupils who are appointed to the school council often proactively promote charity events. During the inspection, a small team of pupils from Samuel King's School won a regional speaking competition. They told the inspector with obvious and deserved pride how they had devised a presentation about prejudice and had used a Benjamin Zephaniah poem and extracts from 'To Kill a Mockingbird' to illustrate this.
- Pupils in older year groups are provided with objective advice, information and guidance regarding their future careers, which enables them to develop a good understanding of the broad range of careers open to them. Year 11 pupils have an individual careers profile which staff update frequently with the pupils themselves and their parents. The school seeks to raise the aspirations of its pupils, for example through visits to universities. In 2016, all pupils went on to courses at sixth form or further education colleges.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- During the inspection, pupils moved around the school site responsibly and maturely,

and they behaved extremely well at break and lunchtimes. Several took advantage of games facilities, such as ping-pong, in the school hall.

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons was exemplary. No pupil disrupted any lesson the inspector observed. All showed positive attitudes to learning, working assiduously in every subject. Pupils told the inspector that behaviour in lessons is almost always good and that they can get on with their work in lessons without disruption. Governors have also observed very good behaviour on their tours of the school.
- The school has recorded very few incidents involving poor behaviour this year. Leaders have successfully reduced the number of exclusions in recent years and now very rarely exclude any pupil. Indeed, the school has not done so since October 2015.
- Attendance is close to national averages. Previously, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities had levels of persistent absence which were higher than those of their peers. However, leaders have successfully reduced the levels of persistent absence of all groups of pupils. As a result, there are now very few pupils who do not attend school regularly. Punctuality to school is good.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school has steadily improved its achievement over the last three years. In 2016 the Progress 8 score (the new government measure by which secondary school performance is assessed) was higher than the national average. Pupils made good progress overall from average starting points.
- Progress in English was particularly good in 2016. Pupils' performance was in the top 10% of schools nationally. Pupils also performed very well in science, in modern foreign languages and humanities, as well as in the EBacc. Progress in mathematics was less strong and the Progress 8 figure for mathematics was below the national average. Leaders pointed out that this figure is based on pupils' first entry for the mathematics examination and not on the higher scores pupils achieved when they retook the examination later. The school had traditionally entered pupils early in mathematics to allow them the best chance of gaining high grades in later resits. This practice has now been discontinued.
- The current Year 11 is generally a less able cohort than the Year 11 which left the school in 2016. At the time of the inspection, they were making less progress overall than did their peers last year. However, the school's internal assessment information and work in pupils' books show that pupils have nonetheless made considerable progress in most subjects since the start of this year and that most are on track to achieve their target grades, including in mathematics. Leaders are anticipating that the percentage of pupils achieving good grades in English and mathematics will rise again in 2017.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 10 are generally making good progress. The great majority, including the most able, are on track to achieve their targets or are already achieving them. Targets set are aspirational and challenging. Leaders and teachers have high expectations of what pupils should achieve.
- The school makes good use of its pupil premium funding and has sound plans in place to address the barriers to learning of disadvantaged pupils. In 2016 disadvantaged

pupils achieved approximately one third of a grade less on average across eight subjects than did their non-disadvantaged peers nationally. The in-school difference was slightly wider. However, internal differences are diminishing. Current cohorts of disadvantaged pupils are generally performing better and in several instances are outperforming their non-disadvantaged peers in school. For example, in Year 10 disadvantaged pupils are making better progress currently than other pupils in English, science, French and humanities.

- The school has very few most-able disadvantaged pupils. They are making the progress expected of them, which is at least in line with that of other high-ability pupils.
- Leaders were concerned last year that boys were not making as much progress as girls. Consequently, they placed a whole-school focus on boys' achievement and developed a range of strategies with teachers to address this. Inspection evidence showed that boys generally are now performing as well as girls.
- The school's pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive good support from their teachers and from their fellow pupils. Most are making the progress that is expected of them.

School details

Unique reference number	112378
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	10024117

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Cooper
Headteacher	Ian Johnson
Telephone number	01434 381236
Website	www.samuelkings.school.co.uk
Email address	Office@samuelkings.cumbria.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10–11 March 2015

Information about this school

- The school does not meet requirements on its website on the publication of information about the curriculum, governance, the impact of Year 7 catch-up funding and details of the local offer for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school is a member of the Alston Moor Federation along with its two partner primary schools, Alston Primary School and Nenthead Primary School. The headteacher is the headteacher for all three schools and the three schools share the same governing body.
- The school is much smaller than the average-sized secondary school. There are significantly more boys than girls in the current Year 8, but the opposite is true in Year 9.
- Almost all pupils are White British. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language.

- The proportion of pupils known to be disadvantaged is higher than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is lower than the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' progress across a number of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The school does not use alternative education provision for any of its pupils.
- The school is a member of the Queen Katherine School Teaching Alliance, through which staff have access to professional development opportunities.

Information about this inspection

- The lead inspector observed learning in a range of lessons, including some which were observed jointly with senior leaders. He visited form time and observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- The inspector evaluated pupils' work in lessons and spoke to a number of pupils about a sample of their work. He listened to a small number of pupils reading.
- The inspector held discussions with senior leaders, subject leaders and governors. He also met with a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector met with three groups of pupils formally and spoke with many more pupils informally. He took account of the 11 responses to the online pupil survey.
- The inspector looked at a wide range of documents. These included: the school's internal data which tracks pupils' achievement; development plans and evaluations of the school's progress; minutes of governing body meetings; records of the school's performance management process; and school policies and safeguarding procedures. The inspector also scrutinised the school's website to check whether it met requirements.
- The inspector took account of the 20 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and of the 19 free text responses received from parents. He also took account of the 10 responses to the staff online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clive Hurren, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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