

Inspection of Kirkby Stephen Grammar School

Christian Head, Kirkby Stephen, Cumbria CA17 4HA

Inspection dates: 30 and 31 January 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

The headteacher of this school is Gary Hartley. This school is part of a single academy trust called Kirkby Stephen Grammar School, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the headteacher and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Phil Dew.

What is it like to attend this school?

Kirkby Stephen Grammar School is a friendly and caring community. Pupils are safe. They are happy to attend school each day.

Pupils act respectfully towards each other and to the staff. They benefit from strong relationships with teachers, who know them well. Furthermore, strong pastoral support underpins pupils' positive experience of school. The school helps pupils to understand and manage their well-being.

The school successfully identifies and removes the barriers that some pupils have to learning. It has high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well.

There is a range of exciting extra-curricular clubs and trips on offer. Pupils are keen to participate in these activities, and participation rates are high. For instance, nearly half of the school were involved in the recent school production. Sporting opportunities abound, and pupils are very proud of their sporting achievements. Students in the sixth form are keen to take on leadership responsibilities. This allows them to contribute positively to school life.

Pupils are well versed in how to keep themselves safe, including online, and how to respond to local risk factors such as flooding.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the last inspection, the school has taken determined and effective action to tackle the identified weaknesses successfully. Safeguarding has been prioritised. Consequently, the procedures for keeping pupils safe are now effective. The restructure of the board of trustees has added leadership capacity. Moreover, trustees are clear about their roles and responsibilities. For example, they expertly support the school while also holding it to account. Trustees have an accurate oversight of the school's strengths and areas for development. In addition, the school has welcomed and benefited from the support provided by external partners. As a result, many aspects of the school are stronger than at the time of the previous inspection.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, benefit from a broad, ambitious and well-considered curriculum. The school's ambition is for the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects to be at the heart of the curriculum. It has identified and addressed the reasons why fewer pupils were choosing to study languages in the past. Consequently, the number of pupils learning a language at key stage 4 is increasing.

Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects. In the main, the curriculum is delivered well across key stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Most pupils learn successfully across the curriculum. However, in a small number of subjects, some

teachers do not design suitable activities to help pupils to secure their learning. This hinders pupils' progress through the curriculum.

The school is in the process of finalising the strategies that it will use to check that pupils are learning the content of the curriculum. Currently, some teachers' checks on pupils' learning do not identify well enough their misconceptions or gaps in their knowledge.

Reading is a top priority. Pupils who find reading difficult are successfully supported to close the gaps in their reading knowledge. They become fluent and accurate readers. This has transformed their experience of school because they can access the curriculum more readily. Even so, there is a small minority of pupils who do not readily engage independently in reading for pleasure.

Pupils' additional needs are identified accurately. Information given to staff about pupils with SEND is now more user friendly. Teachers use this information effectively to adapt learning to meet the needs of pupils. Personalised programmes of study are offered to students with SEND in the sixth form. This means that students' needs are catered for well.

Staff are appropriately supported to manage pupils' behaviour. Overall, pupils are engaged in lessons and display positive attitudes to their learning. Most pupils attend school regularly. Students in the sixth form are particularly keen to learn. They act as excellent role models for younger pupils. There is a harmonious atmosphere in the school.

There is a well-thought-out and coherent programme that enhances pupils' personal development. Interwoven through this programme are clear messages about safeguarding. Pupils are given opportunities to debate different ideas. This helps them to develop confidence in expressing their opinions. They show empathy to those who are different. The school supports pupils well in their decisions about next steps. For instance, appropriate work experience and independent careers advice help pupils make informed choices. Students in the sixth form are well informed about different pathways, including university, the world of work and apprenticeships.

Change has happened apace but, alongside this, the school has considered staff's workload. Staff are positive about the support that they receive from leaders and trustees. They appreciate the positive difference recent changes have made to everyone in the school community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff do not use assessment strategies well enough to identify and address pupils' misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge. This prevents some pupils from building securely on what they have learned before. The school should ensure that teachers receive appropriate support to use assessment strategies to identify and then remedy gaps in pupils' learning.
- In a small number of subjects, some teachers do not design suitable learning activities for pupils. This hampers pupils from making the progress that they should through the curriculum. The school should ensure that leaders are suitably equipped to support staff to deliver the curriculum as intended.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	137107
Local authority	Westmorland and Furness
Inspection number	10318110
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	348
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	52
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Phil Dew
Headteacher	Gary Hartley
Website	www.ksgs.cumbria.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 to 6 October 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- A new chair and vice-chair of the trust have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. They deemed the inspection a graded (section 5) inspection under the same Act.

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, His Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school no longer requires significant improvement.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other school leaders and staff. They also met with chair and vice-chair of the trust board. The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority and a representative from the trust that is providing external support to the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors looked closely at some curriculum subjects. These included English, science, Spanish, mathematics, geography and history. This involved discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils, visits to lessons and a review of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to different groups of pupils and students to gather their views about safeguarding, behaviour and their experience of school.
- Inspectors observed behaviour at breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered a wide range of documentation, including the school's action and improvement plans, self-evaluation and minutes of trustee meetings.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Jenny Jones, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Beard

Ofsted Inspector

Philip Wood

Ofsted Inspector

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