



Inspection report

Kings Langley School: *Sixth Form*

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 117526
LEA Hertfordshire

Learning and Skills Council Hertfordshire

Inspection number 274852
Inspection dates 11 and 12 May 2005
Reporting inspector Ms C Kirby HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Love Lane
School category	Community		Kings Langley
Age range of pupils	11 to 18 years		Hertfordshire
			WD4 9HN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	(01923) 264504
Number on roll in school	984	Fax number	(01923) 260564
Number on roll in sixth form	101		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr M Sniders
Date of previous inspection	December 2003	Headteacher	Mr G Lewis

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 18 years	29 June 2005	274852

Introduction

When Kings Langley School was inspected in December 2003, its sixth form was judged to be inadequate because it was failing or likely to fail to give pupils over compulsory school age an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) subsequently visited the sixth form on two occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in May 2005.

Description of the school and sixth form

Kings Langley School is an average-sized secondary school situated in Kings Langley, mid way between Watford and Hemel Hempstead. The pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average. The percentages of the pupils eligible for free school meals and having special educational needs or a Statement of Special Educational Need are below the national averages. Almost all of the pupils are from white British backgrounds and few speak a home language other than English. The school has experienced some difficulties in recruiting staff.

The sixth form is much smaller than other maintained sixth forms; the number on roll has remained constant over the last three years. That none of the sixth-form students are eligible for free school meals reflects the socio-economic profile of the local community. Eleven per cent of the students have been identified as having special educational needs, although none have a Statement of Special Educational Need.

The sixth form is part of the West Dacorum Sixth Form Collaborative partnership. There are several other schools in the locality, including some that are selective, voluntary-aided or foundation.

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Overall effectiveness of the sixth form

In accordance with paragraph 1(2) of schedule 7 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, I am of the opinion that the school's sixth form is no longer inadequate, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for pupils over compulsory school age.

The headteacher's leadership is good. He brought about changes in staffing and has implemented secure systems to monitor the quality of provision and the students' progress. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is good. Staff and governors have worked very hard to raise the quality of provision in the sixth form. Teaching is generally at least satisfactory and often good. The small numbers of students on some courses, however, continue to restrict learning opportunities as well as cost-effectiveness.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection of December 2003 required the school to address areas for improvement concerning standards, the breadth of the curriculum, the direction of the sixth form, attendance and cost-effectiveness of provision. There has been good progress in relation to securing the direction of the sixth form and broadening the curriculum, and satisfactory progress elsewhere. The school recognises that standards need to rise further.

Capacity to improve

The sixth form is well placed to improve. The headteacher has set a strong focus on raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. He is well supported by the governing body. The sixth form is benefiting from a successful partnership with three local sixth forms, which is underpinned by a mutual determination to raise standards and extend choice for students. A comprehensive programme for monitoring students' progress is used effectively, although systems for using assessment information to promote the students' learning and raise attainment remain under-developed. A well-considered enrichment programme is benefiting students by raising their aspirations about careers and further and higher education. Robust monitoring systems have improved attendance and punctuality. Currently, the sixth-form provision is not cost-effective because of some small group sizes, inflexible timetabling, and the low numbers of students staying on into Year 13. The projected increase in numbers of Year 11 students transferring to the sixth form and the expected improvement in retention from Year 12 to Year 13 should address this issue. Overall, there is good capacity to improve the provision for the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve the sixth form further

- continue to raise standards;
- increase the proportion of good or better teaching;

- improve the use of assessment to promote the students' learning;
- develop the provision for the students' spiritual and cultural development, including in relation to the statutory requirements for religious education.

Achievement and standards

Examination results in 2004 for Year 13 students were similar to those in 2003; the students' average points score, at 228, was broadly average when compared with all maintained schools. The pass rate at 88% was below average and only 14% of the entries were awarded the highest A and B grades, which was low. The AS-level examination results in 2004 showed an average points score per entry of 33 points, a slight improvement when compared to 2003. Excluding general studies, the pass rate rose to 85% and 24% of the entries gained A or B grades. Overall, the students achieved in line with predictions based on their GCSE performance.

The students' results were strongest in economics and business studies, art and design, design and technology, and religious education. They were weakest in vocational courses and the sciences. The boys outperformed the girls, which is contrary to the picture across all maintained schools. In 2004, a high proportion of the students in Year 13 progressed into higher education.

Generally the students' rate of progress in lessons was satisfactory. However, entry requirements to some courses have been too low and, as a result, there is a mismatch between the standards students achieve and those expected by the course. The school has implemented a range of short-term strategies to address the gaps in the students' learning. Some students do not have the necessary study skills to manage their own learning effectively. Retention in the sixth form is satisfactory overall although there are considerable variations between courses.

Personal development

The school has made good progress in promoting a settled climate for learning in the sixth form. Students have responded well to teachers' efforts and report satisfaction with the generally improved provision.

Students' behaviour and attitudes to their studies are good overall. They are beginning to respond positively to the focus on developing their independent study skills and to taking responsibility for their learning. Nevertheless, in lessons, there were still some students who showed too little engagement, sometimes as a result of work that was not well enough matched to their needs.

When the students are able to do so, they are ready to contribute to whole-school activities. They are engaged in training and in a managed programme for mentoring younger pupils. The students are actively involved in the school council; they assist in organising school

events such as the production and joint Year 11 and sixth-form celebrations. They volunteer to support younger pupils in lessons in subjects where they are most confident.

The school makes robust efforts to promote good attendance among sixth-form students. Attendance has improved but is still too low at 90%. Recent rigorous tracking of attendance and punctuality has done much to address the discontinuities in learning caused by absence.

The provision for the students' social and moral development is satisfactory. Good opportunities to develop leadership skills arise through work with younger pupils. The provision for the students' spiritual and cultural development, however, is unsatisfactory. Multicultural education does not have a high profile in many lessons nor in the pastoral programme. Most students do not benefit from planned provision for religious education and in this respect provision for the students' spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The school recognises the need to develop further the structure of the tutorial provision for the students.

Students receive good care and guidance on future career choices at the transition from Year 11 and throughout the sixth form. Those preparing for university are well supported and students leaving school to seek employment have benefited significantly from the school's liaison with the local careers service. The school has established good systems to record students' future choices.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Only 40% of the lessons seen were good. This proportion of good teaching is insufficient to raise standards rapidly. There was one unsatisfactory lesson. Overall, lesson planning has improved. The best lessons were well planned, taught with enthusiasm and consistently engaged the students in their learning. Probing questions extended the students' thinking and developed their understanding. The focus in many lessons has shifted from the teaching to the learning and students are being given greater responsibility for their learning through collaborative work and self-evaluation. This helped the students to focus on their achievements and what they needed to do to improve. Several teachers have improved their practice in a range of areas; there was also evidence of teachers applying new ideas gleaned from recent professional development.

There was a fine balance between the strengths and weaknesses in some of the satisfactory teaching, which often lacked variety and briskness of pace. Too little attention was given to the broad ability range of the students. Characteristics of the less effective lessons included weaknesses in teachers' subject knowledge, and work that was insufficiently challenging.

There are robust systems for recording students' attainment and tracking their progress. However, the use of this data to target support aimed at raising attainment is underdeveloped. Homework is set regularly on all courses, although marking is not used consistently well to help students understand what they need to do to improve their work.

The breadth of the curriculum has improved. Its most distinctive feature is an effective partnership with three other local schools that provides a wide choice of academic and vocational courses. A good range of enrichment activities encourage the development of the students' personal and social education. More robust systems for monitoring attendance and progress are helping to raise standards.

The school seeks to provide well for students of all levels of attainment and has recognised that some of the underachievement in 2004, and in module examinations in January 2005 was attributable to the practice of permitting students to take courses that proved too difficult for them. The entry requirements for level 3 courses have been reviewed and modified appropriately.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides good leadership of the sixth form. Following the monitoring visit in January 2005, the headteacher realigned roles and responsibilities and took over the leadership of the sixth form. Under his direction, the pace of improvement accelerated. A clear vision has been shared with staff and a culture in which all staff contribute to improvement is emerging. The leadership skills of middle managers have been strengthened, with a generally positive impact on curriculum development. Systems for monitoring the quality of provision and the students' progress have been established and key staff have a clear understanding about the areas of work that need to be tackled to address remaining areas of weakness.

The day-to-day management of the sixth form is good. Two joint-directors of sixth-form provision are acting in a temporary capacity. The creation of a new senior management post with specific responsibility for the sixth form is planned to strengthen the management of this provision and build on the considerable work already done.

The school benefits from a committed governing body. The appointment of a link governor for the sixth form has improved the rigour with which the school is held accountable for the progress in remedying the inadequacies in the provision. The governors have been instrumental in ensuring that the new post of director of sixth form is at senior leadership level.

External support for the sixth form has been good. The local education authority (LEA), in consultation with the school, has provided a range of support and development activities. The LEA's recent review clearly identified the progress made and accurately defined the areas requiring further improvement.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The school was inspected under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 by a Registered Inspector and a team of inspectors in December 2003. The inspection judged that, in accordance with paragraph 1(2) of schedule 7 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the sixth form was inadequate because it was failing or likely to fail to give its pupils who are over compulsory school age an acceptable standard of education.

The governors drew up an action plan to address the areas for improvement for the sixth form from the inspection of December 2003. The sixth form was visited by HMI in October 2004 and January 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its sixth-form action plan and address the areas for improvement in the inspection report of December 2003.

In May 2005, an HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the sixth form for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

During the visit, 18 lessons or parts of lessons, one assembly and two registration sessions were inspected. The students were observed at break and lunchtimes and samples of their work were inspected. Meetings were held with the headteacher, the joint-directors of sixth form, other key staff, the chair of governors, a representative from the LEA and a group of students. Informal discussions were held with other staff and students. A wide range of the sixth form's documentation was scrutinised. Account was also taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided in the sixth form and the progress the sixth form has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and key issues in the inspection report of December 2003 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those key issues.

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