



Queens' School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117582
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290882
Inspection dates 27–28 September 2006
Reporting inspector Robert Drew

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Aldenham Road
School category	Foundation		Bushey, Bushey
Age range of pupils	11–18		Hertfordshire WD23 2TY
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01923 224465
Number on roll (school)	1623	Fax number	01923 223975
Number on roll (6th form)	0		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Jim Sowerbutts
		Headteacher	Mr Terence James
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	27–28 September 2006	290882

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors over two days

Description of the school

The school draws from a wide area of Watford and is heavily oversubscribed each year. The prior attainment of students as a whole is significantly above average, but relatively few are amongst the highest achieving students as several selective secondary schools are close by. Far fewer students than average have learning difficulties or disabilities. Students' social and economic backgrounds are advantaged compared with the national profile. Most students are from White British backgrounds, with a significant minority of Asian, predominantly Pakistani background. About nine per cent have English as an additional language. The school has Specialist Sports College status.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of this school is very good, with outstanding aspects. Its provision is constantly improving, reflecting the headteacher's determination on appointment to raise the school's aspirations. Leading with vision and skill and building a large team of equally committed colleagues, he has established a formidable momentum for change, without discarding the school's traditional strengths. Standards at every key stage are now significantly above national averages and students are making good progress, a marked improvement since the last inspection, and the upward trend remains strong. For instance, the proportion gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE has risen dramatically over the last five years from 55% to over 80%. Students' progress was previously no more than satisfactory, given their high standards on entry to the school. However, the most recent examination results show that they now achieve well, gaining significantly more from their courses than similar students nationally. The school has begun to implement existing plans for gifted and talented students so that the most able students consistently gain a high proportion of the highest grades. Students' personal development is outstanding. The school's approach to encouraging and challenging them produces unusually mature and positive young people. They are offered, and grasp readily, innumerable opportunities to participate in school life. Nearly all regularly take part in sporting, cultural and social activities. In the sixth form, this active involvement in the school and wider community is an outstanding feature. Positive attitudes are seen throughout the school, leading to excellent behaviour and very good attendance, with very few exclusions for such a large school. Students respond to the clear and demanding expectations for conduct and the first rate care and guidance they receive by showing respect for others and a strong concern for those in the wider community. They clearly enjoy school life. Their good academic progress also benefits from their positive attitudes in class and the highly effective support and monitoring systems that track progress regularly, involving parents more than is common, and ensuring a shared view of students' potential and how to realise it. The house system continues to play a crucial role in this area, as noted in the last report, but now has even greater impact. Teaching and learning are good, with significant outstanding practice. The rise in quality since the last inspection, largely due to effective appointments and rigorous monitoring by the headteacher and senior colleagues, has contributed to improved standards and better academic progress. Teachers consistently demonstrate all round strengths in their professional skills and enjoy good relationships with students, so that lessons are productive, promoting good progress. The very best lessons seen during the inspection led to excellent progress, involving students actively and extensively, allowing them to think and work independently. Students' contributions to such lessons were often highly reflective and showed detailed understanding, as well as the freedom to reveal insecurities. Not all teachers allowed these feature to emerge; in these instances students were limited to brief responses because of the teachers' strongly directive approach. Improvement since the last inspection stems from excellent leadership and management. While the headteacher first galvanised the school into action, every level of leadership now contributes to the process. Subject leaders, heads of house, governors

and other key staff all take the initiative to create new and better opportunities and constantly forge new links with the wider community. The community has become another outstanding element of the school's work, partly because Sports College status has been exceedingly well promoted and partly because so many staff, parents and students give time, imagination and effort to projects close to home and overseas. Parental support for the school is exceptional in both its quality and extent. The school is very good at evaluating its own work and taking action as a result, leading it to focus on the right priorities for improvement and effective strategies. Having built up a wider circle of capable senior and middle leaders, the school's capacity to improve has gained strength and is now excellent. The school is aware that teaching quality could rise further because the range of strategies used by some staff is satisfactory but not exceptional. Curricular provision is very good overall, but the school has, rightly, noted limitations for gifted and talented students and in information and communication technology (ICT) and vocational education courses.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Success here is a result of good teaching and students' strong motivation. High retention rates reflect students' commitment and many choose to join from elsewhere. The school will go to almost any lengths to ensure that its students are able to study their chosen subjects. Sixth form leaders and managers have a clear vision and a commitment to continual improvement. The quality of guidance and support is excellent and much valued by students. All those interviewed had received skilful advice and preparation for higher education. Students take on a wide range of responsibilities. They organise charity events, act as peer mentors, 'buddies' and paired readers and help to run the house system, the Duke of Edinburgh award and the World Challenge project. All this provides first rate support for younger students and ensures that the personal development of sixth formers is quite outstanding. They are excellent ambassadors for the school and leave with a great sense of pride. As a Year 13 student exclaimed, 'I love my school!'

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise teaching quality further by ensuring that more lessons allow students to learn independently and participate actively.
- Complete the existing plans to improve the provision for gifted and talented students so that the most able gain more of the very highest grades.
- Improve the quality of ICT and vocational provision to match the excellent quality of the rest of the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 are significantly above average. The unvalidated results for 2006 are particularly impressive, showing English, mathematics

and science scores are likely to exceed national averages by a wide margin. GCSE results have also risen noticeably in recent years, with students achieving above average results in the three years to 2005. Results in 2006 showed even stronger improvement. Boys and girls now do equally well. Virtually all gained five or more A* to G grades and progress, including that of those with learning difficulties or disabilities, is good. In 2006, the school met its targets for Year 9 students and exceeded those for Year 11. Improvement reflects both the commitment to meeting challenging targets and the effective action taken by school leaders to ensure that teaching and learning quality steadily rise. In all years, students are achieving well, with older students working at well above average standards. As in the main school, there has been a steady improvement in standards in the sixth form. Results in AS and A level examinations in 2006 were better than in previous years, representing good achievement. Current sixth formers are building well on their prior GCSE successes, working at well above average standards and achieving very well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. Students enjoy all aspects of school life and so behave extremely well and have very good attendance. They appreciate the opportunities they have to take part in a wide range of activities outside lessons. Students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is excellent. They show marked respect for people from all cultural backgrounds and with different beliefs, and they are clear that bullying and racism will not be tolerated. Students feel safe in school and consider that their views are taken into account. For example, they are very pleased with the recent upgrading of the toilets. The school council gives students an effective voice in contributing to decision making. The many charity fund raising activities, opportunities to travel abroad and projects such as 'Africa Dreams' give students excellent chances to experience wider horizons and think about others' life chances. They develop a very good understanding of the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle through the strong focus on physical exercise and sport, which are strongly promoted through the ethos of the specialist sports college, and the healthy eating initiatives. Students are well prepared to make decisions about their future education, training and job options and learn to make well informed financial decisions.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Expectations are always high and students are keen to learn. They are highly cooperative and relationships are very

good. The teachers' subject knowledge is consistently impressive. Their questioning skills are good, objectives for students to achieve are clear and in almost all lessons, students responded confidently to the questions and challenges set, using terminology and resources appropriately. Marking and other ongoing assessment is systematic and constructive. Very good, sometimes excellent, progress is made in lessons where students are involved extensively and where learning activities and styles are appropriate to the needs of all learners. For example, in an English lesson exploring examiners' reports, students were encouraged to make extended comment on sample answers, revealing great depth and breadth in their knowledge. However, a significant proportion of lessons limit the scope for this highly independent thinking, and the school is right to have made this a priority for improvement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school offers a very good curriculum that has far greater flexibility than at the time of the previous inspection. There has been a notable improvement in the range of academic courses and all statutory requirements are now met. The school provides exceptionally well for the needs of students with learning difficulties or disabilities. Provision for ICT, students seeking vocational courses and the most able is currently satisfactory and improving. The school uses its specialist status extremely well to enhance learning. All students undertake an accredited physical education course, which appropriately emphasises the importance of physical activity, diet and lifestyle. Education for safety and health is outstanding. The school can be highly responsive to local needs. When it became clear that there was a skills shortage in the local construction industry, the school introduced appropriate courses for students from Years 10 through to Year 13. Key Stage 4 students are taking part in an innovative business related course, examined on line. An exceptional range of sporting, social and cultural out of hours activities adds greatly to the students' relish for school. They have numerous opportunities to participate in local, national and international challenges. Sixth formers have won a national debating competition twice in the past three years.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school places a very high priority on supporting students' personal and educational needs and there is outstanding provision in this area, which contributes to students' progress, enjoyment and well-being. There are robust child protection practices, and potentially vulnerable children are monitored very carefully. The house system is highly effective in monitoring and supporting students, educationally, emotionally and socially. House leaders know individuals' needs very well and there are comprehensive methods for tracking students' personal and academic progress. Careers advice is very effective. The school liaises closely with a wide range of outside agencies to provide tailored

support for individuals who have problems. High quality advice is offered to parents to inform them about how well their child is doing and how they can help them to improve learning at home. Sixth formers who become peer mentors for lower school students are very well prepared for their role and the excellent care, guidance and support continue into the sixth form.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The outstanding leadership and management of this school continue to drive the marked improvements in its performance in recent years. Leaders show strong personal qualities, motivating and supporting others well, and management is highly consistent in applying policy. The headteacher's great strengths are vision and an extremely strong sense of direction. He also leads by example and is highly visible around the school, demonstrating the involvement with students he seeks from all staff. All levels of leadership and management now show strong team work and monitor classroom performance and the wider work of the school very effectively. Governors are heavily involved in strategic decisions and are much more knowledgeable about their school than is common, allowing them to support staff from a well informed position and to promote the school in the wider community with real conviction. Students see how consistently they are treated and how much is offered to them and fully subscribe to the school's ethos of promoting excellence in academic performance and personal development. Exemplary use is being made of the school's Sports College status. Value for money is already very good and is rising as standards rise. The school self-evaluates rigorously, consistently identifying what needs to improve and which strategies will accomplish this. It has created an excellent capacity to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 September 2006 Dear Students Queens' School, Watford, Aldenham Rd, Bushey, Hertfordshire, WD23 2TY Thank you for the pleasant way you received the Ofsted Inspection team during our recent visit. I am particularly grateful to those who gave up much of their lunch hour to talk with us on Wednesday. We enjoyed our visit because we saw much that impressed us: - you are reaching increasingly high standards in all tests and examinations - the progress you make is good and is improving - teaching is good with some that is excellent - your attitudes and behaviour are excellent - far better than we often see - the school offers you an amazing range of extra-curricular activities and you get involved in these with real enthusiasm - the school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher and his colleagues - sixth formers make an excellent contribution to helping younger students settle and progress well. For the school to be even more successful we believe: - the school should learn from the very best lessons and give you more scope for speaking at length, getting actively involved and working things out for yourselves - carry out the plans for stretching the most able students even more, upgrading ICT courses and offering more vocational courses. You are in a very good school - continue to make the most of it! Yours sincerely Robert Drew (Lead inspector)