

Kesteven and Sleaford High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120633
Local Authority	LINCOLNSHIRE
Inspection number	291807
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Elaine Taylor HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School	844
6th form	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Geoff Hotchkin
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Ross
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002
School address	Jermyn Street Sleaford Lincolnshire NG34 7RS
Telephone number	01529 414044
Fax number	01529 414928

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is a selective girls' secondary school which takes the top 25% of the ability range. It serves a predominately rural area. The number of students who are eligible for free school meals or who have learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. Fewer than average students come from minority ethnic groups and none have English as an additional language. The school participates in a joint sixth form arrangement with two local schools, Carre's Grammar School for Boys and St George's College of Technology, a mixed non-selective school.

The school has specialist status in the visual arts and has gained several quality marks: Career Mark, Charter Mark, Artsmark Gold and Investors in People status. It was the first school in the county to achieve ICT Mark.

A significant number of students are members of the National Academy for Gifted Youth.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school which has made many improvements since the last inspection when it was judged to be good. The headteacher and senior leadership team have developed exemplary systems to monitor the work of the school. As a result, their self-evaluation is accurate and they have tackled areas for improvement with great success. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and their views are reflected in these words from one of the questionnaires: 'I personally couldn't be happier with the education my daughter is receiving.'

Achievement is outstanding. The standards which students have achieved when they enter the school are well above average and by the time they reach year 11 they have made excellent progress so that their results in GCSE examinations are exceptionally high. Every student achieved a grade C or better and significantly more than the national average achieved the top two grades.

There is an outstanding curriculum which offers the students a very wide range of subjects to choose from, supplemented by an extensive choice of additional activities ranging from karate to musical productions. As soon as you enter the school the evidence of the specialist status in the visual arts is clear, with stunning examples of the students' work proudly displayed. Every effort is made to ensure that each student has the opportunity to progress at a rate which is suitable for her level of ability. For example, those who have talents in music can take their GCSE earlier than usual and the last group to do so all achieved the top three grades. Many initiatives such as enterprise activities give the students opportunities to develop skills which will help them in their working lives.

The school provides an excellent level of care and guidance which results in outstanding personal development. As a result, the students develop into self-assured, confident young women, or as one parent commented, 'She is suddenly blossoming into a very responsible young woman.' They demonstrate very mature attitudes and high levels of enjoyment as shown by their excellent attendance. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are polite and considerate to others. They support each other and feel very safe. Those students who need individual support are very well cared for and make the same excellent progress as others. This parent's comment reflects this: 'It is sometimes hard to recall the child whom it was at one time felt would never cope in a mainstream school.'

The quality of teaching is good and the school is working hard to raise it all to that of the best. Teachers generally motivate the students with activities which challenge them and which are fun. They make good use of information and communication technology (ICT) in their lessons. In some lesson plans, too much emphasis is placed on what the students will do rather than what they will learn which results in activities which restrict opportunities for all students to be actively involved in the lessons. Many teachers use assessment information effectively to plan their lessons so that all students have work which is well matched to their abilities. This is not the case in all lessons and sometimes the pace slows because the students are not given enough opportunities to develop their ideas in discussion with their classmates.

The school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher and her senior team. The middle leaders are developing well and are being supported by the school with appropriate training opportunities. The governors provide good support. Improvements since the last inspection show that the school is very well placed to continue its development. The school provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The overall effectiveness of the joint sixth form is satisfactory. This is the view of the school and inspectors agree. By working in conjunction with the other two consortium partners the school is able to offer a wide range of A level courses. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory. Students enter the sixth form with attainment which is well above average and make satisfactory progress which results in high standards in examinations. The vast majority of students from Kesteven and Sleaford High School stay on in the sixth form, and most go on to higher education courses. Students make excellent progress in their personal development because of the high quality pastoral care. They enjoy their studies and take up the opportunities to contribute to the life of the school, for instance by helping younger students. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers promote students' independent research skills well. The leadership of the director of the joint sixth form is good. The recently formed joint committee is starting to have a positive impact on achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure all lesson planning addresses quite clearly what students will learn rather than what they will do.
- Capitalise on the excellent attitudes of the students by providing more opportunities in lessons for collaborative learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 3

The students' results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are exceptionally high. Their achievement is outstanding. This excellent attainment is built on satisfactorily in the joint sixth form. Standards across the school have risen in Key Stage 3 since the last inspection and are now exceptionally high in mathematics and science and well above average in English. In the GCSE examinations in 2006, every student gained five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above. When this includes mathematics and English the figure is 95%. The number of students gaining the highest grades was also outstanding, being more than twice the national average. Many of the most able students take advantage of the opportunities the school offers to take tests and examinations early and their results are similarly high. Progress has improved each year at Key Stage 3 and is now excellent. This progress continues in Years 10 and 11. Progress in mathematics was not as good in 2005, but as a result of the effective intervention strategies which the school has put in place it now matches more closely that of the other core subjects. Students are very conscientious and reflective about their learning. They want to do well and take full advantage of the good teaching across the school. There is a small number of students with learning difficulties or disabilities, or from minority ethnic groups, and they make the same excellent progress as others.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students display confidence, independence, maturity, high aspirations and leadership skills and play an active role in the life of the school and the community. All students say they enjoy school and have excellent attitudes to learning. Older students relish the opportunity to support younger ones and play an active part in promoting their well-being. The curriculum, enhanced by aspects of the school's specialist status, provides many opportunities for the students to reflect on their own lives, on other cultures and on issues in the world around them. As a result of excellent personal, social and health education (PSHE) programmes across the school, students are very aware of how to make safe choices and are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. A significant number make an excellent contribution to the community through participation in schemes such as Millennium Volunteers and through a range of charity events. They develop workplace skills through challenging business and enterprise activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. There is some outstanding teaching and also some which is satisfactory. Teachers know their subjects very well and have established an excellent rapport with students. Their enthusiasm is infectious so that students want to learn and are confident in asking questions and expressing their views in lessons. When they are given the chance to debate issues or work collaboratively they do so in a very mature way. At times, the excellent quality of the questioning challenges students' thinking and provokes thoughtful and insightful debate, as in a science lesson on the differences between irradiation and contamination. Students say that teachers tell them clearly how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. In some lessons they also evaluate for themselves how well they have understood the learning. Parents recognise this and one told us, 'She is being encouraged to take responsibility for aspects of her learning.' Often lessons move at a cracking pace and students are very quickly involved in practical or cooperative tasks. At times the pace slows and students become more passive. This is because the planning identifies what students will do rather than what they will learn. No time is lost in lessons in maintaining discipline, as these young people want to learn. The school has extensive systems for tracking how well students are doing, identifying those who may need support to reach their targets and those who could be challenged even more. As a result, work is planned to match the needs of individuals and ensure their excellent progress in most lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides an outstanding range of activities to help students to learn and the numbers involved in the excellent range of after-school clubs and activities is particularly high. The

curriculum equips the students well for higher education. It provides enterprise programmes which give the students the opportunity to explore the world of business and offers a range of qualifications in ICT to meet the needs of all abilities. Excellent links with local businesses ensure that students get plenty of opportunities for work experience. It also offers some vocational courses and has gained the prestigious Career Mark. By working collaboratively with other providers the school is able to offer an extensive range of options for older students including some to challenge the most able even more or to give support to those who may need extra help. Innovative improvements are regularly made to extend the students' success as effective learners, such as the opportunity to take examinations in critical thinking in Key Stage 4.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. All the required procedures to safeguard students' safety and welfare are in place and are reviewed regularly. There are excellent systems to ensure their personal and academic needs are fully met. Students are well informed about their future options as they join the school and at the end of each key stage. The school works well with other agencies to provide high quality careers advice, guidance and mentoring for all students. Robust tracking systems within the school ensure that students meet challenging targets and the school intervenes early to identify any that are at risk of underachieving, providing academic guidance and personal support in order to ensure they achieve their potential. A very small minority of parents expressed concern about communication from the school with regard to consultation evenings. The inspection team found that the school is taking all possible steps to improve this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher and senior team direct the school with exceptional vision. They assess the school's performance highly accurately. Managers promote the professional development of staff effectively, in line with individual and school priorities for improvement. For example, all teachers have been trained in lesson observation skills. The recently established quality assurance procedures are excellent and have already had an impact on standards. Their full impact remains to be seen, however, in future public examinations. Middle management is good. Less experienced subject leaders are supported well in their developing responsibilities for improving teaching, learning and achievement. Some subject leaders are already highly effective. Teachers are well qualified specialists and are deployed well. The library and ICT facilities are now excellent. Governance is much improved and is now good. The new strategy group plays a full part in planning. Governors are well informed. They support and challenge the school's work well.

Leadership of the joint sixth form has improved since the last inspection. The sixth form is now well directed by the recently formed joint steering group. The director of the sixth form manages complex consortium arrangements well.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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?	1	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

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	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
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	1	

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?	1	1
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.

Annex A

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	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

23 March 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Kesteven and Sleaford High School, Jermyn Street, Sleaford, NG34 7RS

What a pleasure it was to meet you all and may I thank you all on behalf of myself and the other inspectors for the welcome you gave us. You shared with us your thoughts on the school in a most mature and thoughtful way. We could tell how much you enjoy all that is offered to you and how proud you are of the school.

We found many things about your school which make it outstanding and some which could be even better. For instance:

- you make excellent progress in learning in Years 7 to 11 and then satisfactory progress in the sixth form
- there is a very wide range of opportunities to take part in trips, visits, sporting and musical activities
- you can study an exceptionally wide range of subjects, including many which are directly linked to your future careers
- the headteacher and colleagues lead the school extremely well
- you benefit from good quality teaching
- the school cares for you and guides you extremely well, which helps you to develop your personal qualities and to become mature and confident young women
- the school makes you aware of how well you are doing in your work and gives you targets to improve it.

We think that your school can improve further by making sure your teachers plan their lessons so you all have more opportunities to work collaboratively with each other. We want them to think about what you will learn in each lesson and not just what you will do, so you all make the best possible progress.

Thank you again for your help in the inspection and for reading this letter. I hope some of you will read the full report I have written which gives more details of our findings.

Elaine Taylor Her Majesty's Inspector