



King James's School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 121687
Local Authority North Yorkshire
Inspection number 292203
Inspection dates 6–7 November 2006
Reporting inspector Tony Thornley

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	King James Road
School category	Community		Knaresborough
Age range of pupils	11–18		North Yorkshire HG5 8EB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01423 866061
Number on roll (school)	1369	Fax number	01423 861189
Number on roll (6th form)	354		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr D James
		Headteacher	Dr D Hudson
Date of previous school inspection	9 September 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	6–7 November 2006	292203

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

King James's is a large non-selective school with a large sixth form. It is the only secondary school in Knaresborough and serves the town and the surrounding villages. The area is relatively advantaged and, as a result, the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very low. The standards of students entering the school are above average. Very few students come from minority ethnic groups or are at an early stage of learning English. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below average. The school's population is stable. It is a specialist technology school and a training school. It has recently had its application for a second specialism, in business and enterprise, approved.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

King James's is a good school with the potential to be even better. Students make good progress as a result of high quality teaching and a broad and innovative curriculum. Staff work well together to secure standards which are well above national averages and to promote students' personal development and well-being.

Nearly all students enjoy coming to school; they attend regularly and behave very well. Relationships between students, and between staff and students, are very good. Students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, say they feel secure and happy at school. They are helped to make progress by staff who care about them and support them well, although not all get clear guidance about how they can improve their work. The proportions of students continuing their education at 16 and at 18 are very high. This reflects the values transmitted by a committed staff as well as students' positive attitudes to school and to learning.

The school has used its specialist status and its designation as a training school to improve the quality of teaching and learning, to broaden its curriculum and to raise standards. The curriculum for all age groups is a strength. It is very well matched to students' needs, particularly the diverse and stimulating extra-curricular programme.

Leadership is good at all levels. Leaders have cultivated a positive climate for learning at King James's, underpinned by a strong belief in the importance of every child. They know the main strengths and weaknesses of the school and their overall judgements about the quality of the school's work match those reached by inspectors. Leaders tackle most of the school's weaknesses but they are not systematic in evaluating the quality of the school's work and do not always focus enough on student performance. For example, in 2006, student progress in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form dipped. The reasons for the dip were some subject underperformance and staff changes, but also a failure by leaders to monitor students' progress closely enough and to take action quickly.

Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Students have continued to make good progress and there have been some key improvements. Teaching is better than at the last inspection and some weaker subjects' results have improved. In some significant areas, though, change has been too slow. Marking and the use of assessment by teachers are still inconsistent and effective tracking of students' academic progress is in its infancy.

The school is well placed to improve further. Students are keen to do well and there are many strengths at all levels of the staff. Leaders and governors know what needs to be improved and are, understandably, focusing on redressing the dip in results in 2006.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Students develop well and provide good role models, for example, raising funds for charity, working to support the wide range of extra-curricular activities and as prefects and house officials. The quality of teaching and learning is good, with increased emphasis being placed on developing students' skills to work independently. Students make good progress and achieve well. This is demonstrated by examination successes in recent years. Results in 2006 were lower than in previous years, but still reflected satisfactory progress overall. The dip was due to underperformance in some subjects, for example, psychology and geography, and to weaknesses in the monitoring of student progress. Strategies put in place to tackle this include interventions to improve subject provision and to track student progress more regularly. The post-16 curriculum is good, with a wide range of A and AS level courses and expanding vocational provision. There are no significant partnerships with other schools or further education colleges to give students access to an even broader range of courses. The sixth form is well led and now has a sharp focus on improving achievement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Be more systematic in evaluating strengths and weaknesses, and in using this evaluation to plan and take action for improvement.
- Improve the assessment of students' work, including the consistency of marking, and ensure that students know how to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students start at King James's with standards which are above average. In their first three years, they make satisfactory progress. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in all of the core subjects are above national averages and there is an upward trend in results. In 2006, the school exceeded its targets and students did particularly well at higher National Curriculum levels.

By the end of Key Stage 4 in 2004 and 2005, students' standards of work were well above average. This represented good progress, with particular strengths in the subjects associated with the school's first specialism: mathematics, science, design and technology, and information and communication technology (ICT). Progress in 2006 was less good and the school, for the first time in five years, failed to improve its results and missed its targets. There was little difference in the progress made by specific groups of students in 2006, although more able students have performed particularly well in the last three years.

In the sixth form, standards are good and above national averages, but with significant subject variations. As with Key Stage 4, progress was satisfactory in 2006, after two years during which progress was good.

The standards of students' work in lessons are in line with the school's external test and examination results. Progress in most lessons is good, a product of the school's strong curriculum and very good teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development and well-being of students are good. Most students choose to eat and drink healthily and to adopt active lifestyles through wide-ranging access to competitive sport and physical exercise. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and has recently been active in helping to create a students' charter. All students help to raise funds for various charities such as Comic Relief and the NSPCC. In many lessons and around the school most students exhibit positive attitudes. For example, they speak of, and wear, the colourful school uniform with enormous pride. One student summed up the feelings of many when he said, 'I like this school because the lessons are always interesting and nobody ever feels left out.'

Although some parents expressed concern about behaviour in school, inspectors were impressed by students' maturity and judged behaviour overall as good. There have been no recent permanent exclusions and the number and incidence of fixed term exclusions is relatively low. Attendance and punctuality are very good. The school uses very effective strategies to track absences and late comers.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. This was exemplified by a moving Year 8 assembly, in which 'The Last Post' was beautifully played by one of the students as the remainder bowed their heads respectfully as part of the school's observance of Remembrance Day. Older students undertake work experience projects and develop enterprise skills which contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good, with some outstanding practice. Teachers have impressive knowledge of their subjects and they manage their students very well. They use well judged praise and rewards to promote learning. Their positive relationships with students underpin good quality work in class and above average examination results.

Teachers plan lessons carefully. Most have clear and challenging aims for their lessons which they discuss and review with students. Lessons move quickly, using a wide range of activities which motivate students and help them all to make progress. The best lessons include not just frequent feedback from teachers but also students constructively evaluating their own and each other's work. Time in lessons is used well, but teachers do not make consistent use of homework to extend classroom learning.

Resources, including computers and interactive whiteboards, are used effectively to make learning interesting. Students respond positively and learn well, particularly appreciating tasks which require research or collaborative effort. They make valuable contributions to lessons and sensibly seek assistance when they need it. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well integrated and progress well, in line with their peers.

Teachers in some subjects are assessing students' progress regularly and using the information well to set individual targets. This is not universal practice, particularly in Key Stage 3. Those students who do know what their target is do not always know what they need to do to make progress towards it. Marking of work is inconsistent. The best marking encourages students and tells them how they can improve; the worst is token or non-existent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good. Its breadth and innovative elements reflect the school's status as a technology and business and enterprise college. Since the last inspection, the curriculum has been extended; it now meets students' needs well. In Key Stage 3, all students have ICT lessons and take drama and a second modern language. In Years 10 and 11 all students take design and technology (D&T) and short courses in religious education and ICT. Many students opt for additional courses in statistics and physical education and there is a one year course in expressive arts for some students in Year 9, as well as an astronomy option. Vocational provision has been increased, with courses available in hospitality and catering, travel and tourism and ICT. Enterprise education is integrated into the curriculum. It is good and improving, building on the recent specialist designation.

Gifted and talented students are enrolled in the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Youth and attend a variety of enrichment events as well as accessing on-line resources. The school is developing guidance for all staff on how to provide better challenge for this group within lessons. There is an outstanding range of enrichment activities including sports, drama, arts and music activities as well as participation in competitions. For example, a group of D&T students designed, made and raced a 'green-powered' car successfully in a regional competition.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support for students are good. Child protection systems are in place and safety checks on new staff satisfy the latest national requirements. Health & safety, medical and accident reporting systems are robust. School staff and a range of multi-agency professionals provide good pastoral and emotional support to a number of vulnerable students and those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The transition arrangements for new entrants to King James's also work well, building on strong partnerships with local primary schools.

The school's isolation room, open one day per week as a sanction, does not fulfil its intended purpose. Its availability is too restricted and students in isolation do not get appropriate work to do. The provision for students' personal, social, health and citizenship education is very good. It plays a significant role in their personal development. Careers guidance is good and is reflected in positive feedback from students and the high progression rates at 16 and 18.

Most parents are supportive of the school's work and feel that they are kept in touch with their child's progress, although some would welcome more frequent feedback. Students say that staff listen to their opinions and act on them when appropriate. Most students in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have short-term targets for improvement. Not all receive good guidance about what they need to do to meet these targets, although the school is implementing strategies to improve this.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management of the school are good. The school is led well by the headteacher who devolves significant responsibility to other leaders. This autonomy is a strength of the school and enables it to run smoothly. Changes in the leadership team in the last year have caused some uncertainty about roles and have contributed to the dip in results. Responsibilities are now being clarified; the team is strong and is very well placed to move the school forwards.

Middle leaders know their teams well and monitor their work effectively. They have been influential in securing good quality teaching and learning throughout the school. There is a clear sense of collective purpose amongst the staff, and leaders at all levels feel they receive a good balance of support and challenge. Gaining and retaining specialist status has allowed the school to improve resources, particularly for ICT and technology. This has strengthened the curriculum as well as improving teaching.

The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. It is accurate but it is not systematic enough. There is extensive monitoring of all aspects of the school's work and leaders and governors know the main strengths and weaknesses of the provision. They are less

successful in aggregating these into a clear over-arching picture of what needs to be done, or in translating that into consistent actions to address all the weaknesses. The result is that some problems are addressed very effectively, for example, standards in physics post-16 and in English in Key Stage 4 have both risen as a result of interventions. Others, for example, a lower rate of student progress last year and the improvement of assessment and target-setting, have not been tackled quickly enough.

Leaders place a high value on staff development to improve learning and teaching. This has been successful in developing some outstanding practice, building on the school's status as a training school. Performance management is very good and, in contrast to the school's development plan, is focused on actions to improve outcomes for students.

Governance is good. Governors are dedicated and take their responsibilities seriously. They are active in strategic planning and decision-making. The school operates a balanced budget and gives good value for money.

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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?	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	2	2

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
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	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

Thank you for welcoming us to your school during the recent inspection. We enjoyed being in school and meeting you. Many of you gave up time to talk to us in lessons and during lunchtimes which helped us in our work. Those of you who we spoke to were kind, courteous and very thoughtful and honest in your comments about what the school does well and what could be even better.

Most of you spoke very positively about what the school provides, particularly about the wide range of activities which are available to you and the support you get from staff to make progress. Your views matched those of your parents, many of whom took the time and trouble to let us know their views of your education. We agree with the vast majority of you that King James's is a good school. Standards are high and nearly all of you make good progress, although there was a dip in results at GCSE and in the sixth form last year. The school is already working with some of you to avoid such a dip in future.

We were particularly impressed by your behaviour and the way you present yourselves. You take a pride in your appearance and nearly all of you get on well together. Although a few of you, and your parents, were concerned about bullying, we think it is not widespread and that the school has good strategies to manage any problems which you have. You have very good teachers. They work hard to make lessons interesting for you and they encourage you to do your best. We have asked the staff to give you clearer ideas, in lessons and through marking, about how you can improve your work. You can help them by reading and listening carefully, and by acting on their advice.

King James's is well led. The headteacher and his senior team know the school well. They enable the staff to work well as a team for your benefit. We have recommended them to plan more thoroughly, focusing on things which will help you to make even better progress.