

The King John School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122116
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	292324
Inspection dates	21–22 February 2007
Reporting inspector	Champak Chauhan HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	463
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Blakeman
Headteacher	Alan Dodds
Date of previous school inspection	20 January 2003
School address	Market Road Thrapston Kettering NN14 4JU
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a popular and oversubscribed middle school. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average and the proportion eligible for free school meals is very low. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Standards on entry at age nine are usually broadly average. However, the pupils who took the national tests in 2006 had above average attainment in their test results at age seven.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in enhancing the pupils' progress, especially in Years 5 and 6.

Although standards are broadly average, the school's overall effectiveness is inadequate because pupils' achievement is inadequate. The results of the national tests in 2005 and 2006 showed that pupils in Year 6 underachieved. This is because the quality of teaching and learning, although broadly satisfactory, is too narrow in its range and approach. Typically, teachers plan their lessons conscientiously and lessons are characterised by good relationships. Some teachers use incisive and brisk questioning to extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding, and there is a good pace to the learning. However, the teachers' day-to-day planning does not use the wealth of data on the pupils' prior attainment that is already available in the school to target the more precise needs of specific groups of pupils.

Parents are supportive of the school. They value the care, consideration and hard work of the staff in helping their children. Pupils and parents are pleased that the school responds quickly to any concerns they express and to suggestions that are made. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly. The marking indicates the level that pupils are working at but does not routinely show pupils how to improve their work. Where it does, teachers do not always ensure that the pupils are improving their work in the ways suggested. The weaknesses in the academic guidance given to pupils are balanced by some good features that mean care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good, and are a strength of the school. Pupils are courteous, polite and well behaved. There are good relationships and pupils enjoy their education. This is evident in their positive attitudes to work and their regular attendance. Pupils know how to stay safe and report that they feel safe in school. They are keen to follow healthier lifestyles through the adoption of a healthier diet and by participating in a good range of sporting activities, including attending after-school clubs. Pupils have mature attitudes; they are caring and are normally keen to make a positive contribution to the community. In addition to undertaking extra responsibilities in school, for example as reading buddies for younger pupils, they regularly organise charitable events and help organise recycling or lost property. However, pupils' skills in writing need further development to enable them to secure their future economic well-being.

The curriculum is good because it is broad and relevant, and is complemented by a good range of enrichment activities. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher provides clear leadership and direction to the work of the school. He, the other senior managers and the governors have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are acutely aware that pupils' progress over the last two years, especially in Years 5 and 6, is a cause for concern. As a result, they have implemented a range of strategies to counter this decline. However, the impact of these strategies has been limited because there has not been a thorough evaluation of their success or otherwise. Overall, the school's self-evaluation is largely accurate but its assessment of achievement and standards is over-generous and it does not recognise that academic monitoring is a weakness. Nonetheless, the action taken to tackle

issues from the last inspection show that the school has a satisfactory capacity to improve further but that it currently provides inadequate value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Broaden the range of teaching and learning styles and ensure that more of the teaching and learning is good or better so that pupils make better progress, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
- Strengthen marking and assessment procedures so that they indicate to pupils how to improve their work and what they need to do to achieve a higher level of attainment.
- Ensure that initiatives to improve pupils' progress are thoroughly evaluated so that their impact can be better measured.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Achievement is inadequate because pupils make insufficient progress by the end of Year 6 considering their prior attainment at the end of Year 2.

Although recent results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 have varied, standards have dropped overall from above average in 2004 to broadly average in 2006. In each of the last three years, the pupils' overall progress in Key Stage 2 has declined steadily, such that the school's performance is now in the bottom 12% of all schools. In mathematics, the pupils' progress ranks in the lowest 10% of schools nationally, with the performance in English being only slightly better. In science, standards are above those in English and mathematics. However, considering their starting points, the progress made by pupils in science has fallen steadily since 2004 so that performance is now in the bottom quarter of all schools. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities do not always achieve their potential. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 and 8 is satisfactory, reflecting the quality of teaching they experience. Across all ages, pupils have good speaking and listening skills. Some pupils can write fluently for their ages but overall pupils' written work is not always well presented.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy coming to school and their behaviour is good. They report that incidents of bullying are infrequent and dealt with effectively. They know how to remain safe in school and are given talks from the police on how to remain safe outside. Pupils make a good contribution to the wider community, for example by taking part in musical events, entering national competitions and supporting local initiatives. They have raised large sums of money for charities such as Children in Need. A significant number become prefects, house captains or representatives on the school council. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, ranging from string orchestras to the pen-friend club which links with a school in Turkey. Consequently, their moral, spiritual and social development is generally good, although their understanding of living in an ethnically diverse society is more limited. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles as a result of the good programme of extra-curricular sport and the school's emphasis on healthy eating. There is some preparation for their future economic well-being through, for example, being taught to plan and budget for stalls that they will be running at the summer fair but their literacy skills need further development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, although too much teaching is merely adequate and not enough is good or better. When teaching is good, the strong relationships between pupils and adults enable pupils to be confident enough to respond with clarity and accuracy to their teachers' questioning. In some lessons, small group work is used effectively to promote pupils' thinking skills. Teachers have good subject knowledge and, in some cases, use the interactive whiteboards well. Such lessons are appropriately paced and offer adequate challenge, with pupils actively encouraged to take part in their own learning. However, in too many lessons, pupils are not given enough opportunities to develop their own learning. This is because of the narrow range of teaching styles that is used. The more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and learning support assistants are not always efficiently used to support pupils with learning difficulties. Lessons are characterised by teachers teaching to the whole class with little adaptation of materials and approaches to meet the needs of different groups of pupils or individuals. The school's investment in resources for information and communication technology (ICT) has yet to make a significant impact on extending teaching and learning styles. Too often the marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. Teachers mark work conscientiously and regularly, but they do not always indicate to pupils how to improve their work. Other than in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, there is insufficient analysis or awareness of the levels pupils are working at and how these relate to their performance. Outside the core subjects, individual targets are not explicitly identified for pupils, and the current assessment procedures in these subjects are consequently weaker.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school makes effective use of its specialist resources, for example design and technology and French, to broaden the experiences of pupils in Years 5 and 6. Citizenship is taught in all years, with different subjects contributing to those aspects that are taught in personal, social and health education lessons. The programme of enrichment activities provides many opportunities for pupils to extend their learning. For example, they experience a Victorian Day and Living History Days and the school regularly invites prominent authors and sporting personalities to talk to pupils. The school organises a residential trip for Year 6. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes and after school, and participation rates are high. These cover many interests from sports to making digital movies on computers. Additional musical activities are a strong feature of this provision. In addition, there are enhancement activities for the more able pupils such as an after-school Latin class.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Child protection procedures are in place and understood by the staff. The monitoring of behaviour and attendance is good. Pupils feel well cared for and they can confidently identify a trusted adult to turn to if they feel vulnerable. As one school council member stated, 'We always know there is somebody interested in helping us'. Pastoral staff know their pupils well and are quick to take action and offer support when necessary. Procedures for maintaining

health and safety are generally good but inspectors raised concerns about the shared access to the boys' toilets. Links with outside agencies, other schools and the community are good.

The success of individuals is encouraged and celebrated by the school. Pupils value the system for rewards and it motivates them to work harder. Procedures for gathering data on pupils' attainment are becoming more sophisticated but these are not used enough to boost pupils' progress. There are good strategies for monitoring progress but they are not yet having a sufficient impact on raising standards. Pupils are not always clear of their academic targets and how to achieve them. The school has a system for identifying gifted and talented pupils and is trying to improve the work done with them in departments. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties are identified and are met effectively when they are withdrawn in small groups.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides clear leadership and direction to the work of the school and he has helped to develop good and supportive links between the school, the community it serves and the needs of the pupils. He has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and is aware that the pupils' inadequate progress, especially over the last two years, is a cause for concern. As a result, he has instigated various measures to improve the situation. These have included the regular checking of the teaching and learning, a regular scrutiny of the pupils' written work over time, and ensuring that the school has a good range of data on pupils' prior attainment and the academic targets they should be aiming for. These strategies have been devised with the full involvement of other senior staff. The senior leaders work well as a team and they are trying hard to improve standards of achievement. They regularly check the work of other teachers and this role is being delegated more to subject coordinators. The impact of these initiatives, however, is currently too limited. Performance is being monitored but procedures for in-depth evaluations have yet to be fully developed. For example, the school is trying to improve its overall assessment procedures but no thorough systems have been developed to judge how well teachers are using these in their routine planning and teaching to improve pupils' progress.

The governing body meets regularly and it has a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Individual governors visit the school on a regular basis to gain a first-hand view of provision. The governing body is reflective of its own performance and carries out an annual review of its work. Financial planning and its monitoring are thorough.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

23 February 2007

Dear Pupils

The King John School, Market Road, Thrapston, Kettering, NN14 4JU

Thank you for welcoming us to your school. We enjoyed talking with many of you. I would like to say below what we thought about The King John School.

Here are the things that we think are best about your school:

- You are courteous, polite and well behaved. There are good relationships in the school and you work well with all the adults.
- You have good attitudes to your work.
- The curriculum is good and you are given a good range of learning experiences. Many of you participate enthusiastically in the wide range of extra-curricular activities that you are offered at lunchtimes and after school.
- You are looked after well by the staff. You approach them when you have any concerns and you know that they will look into these for you.
- Some of the teaching you receive is good whilst in other areas it is satisfactory.
- Mr Dodds leads and manages the school well. He and the other senior teachers know the school's strengths and weaknesses.

These are the things that we think could be better:

- Teachers should use a greater range of teaching and learning styles to help ensure you make good progress.
- Teachers need to show you how to improve your work when they mark it. Please ask them to do this for you.
- Teachers need to use your test results and other information of what you are capable of doing to plan their lessons more thoroughly for you. Mr Dodds and other staff need to check that this is regularly happening so that it leads to improved standards for all of you.

As you can see, we do have some concerns about your progress, especially for the younger pupils. As a result, inspectors will come to visit your school again to make sure that it is helping you make sufficient progress.

I wish you all the best for your future.

- Mr C Chauhan
- Her Majesty's Inspector