

Kennet School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110055
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	310189
Inspection date	1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1714
6th form	300
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andy Smith
Headteacher	Mr Paul Dick
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2005
School address	Stoney Lane Thatcham RG19 4LL
Telephone number	01635 862 121
Fax number	01635 871 814

Age group	11-18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, particularly in English and in the sixth form; the impact of specialist status; the effectiveness of systems for academic guidance and safeguarding; and the impact of leadership and management on improving elements of provision and outcomes for students.

Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation form (SEF) and other review documents; nationally published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; observation of the school at work in lessons and at break times; discussions with staff, students and three members of the governing body; and the parents' questionnaires.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. Inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than average. The vast majority of students are White British; others are from a wide range of other backgrounds. The proportion of students with English as an additional language is below average. Four students are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average: the largest groups of such students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, moderate or specific learning difficulties, or autistic spectrum disorders. The school has a resourced base for 20 students with physical disabilities. The percentage of students with statements of special educational needs is above average.

Attainment on entry is wide ranging. Whilst broadly average overall, it shows many high attaining students but also a higher than average proportion of students who started the school with below expected levels.

Kennet School is a specialist technology college with additional specialisms in theatre arts, drama and literacy and also in modern foreign languages.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Kennet School is outstanding. Students achieve exceptionally well in Years 7 to 11 and well in the sixth form. Their excellent progress is raising standards, which are now well above average by Year 11. Students' personal development is excellent. These outcomes are a tribute to students' extremely good efforts and attitudes to learning, to the enthusiasm, dedication and skill of staff, and to the outstanding leadership and management of the senior staff and governors. The headteacher of over eighteen years commands great respect from students, parents, staff and governors. One teacher said of him 'He encourages us to come forward with good ideas, and then says 'Let's make it happen' and we do.' The vast majority of parents praise the school highly. A comment from one, 'Every opportunity is given to the pupils so they can achieve their best results at all levels.' is typical of many.

The school strives constantly for improvement in all aspects of school life. Standards have been rising over many years. In English, students' progress over Years 7 to 9 in recent years has been slower than in science where it is good, and much slower than in mathematics where it is outstanding. The school has taken action to improve provision in English in Years 7 to 9 with a positive impact on achievement, which is now good. Results in the national Year 9 tests in 2007 were above average overall. GCSE results show that the good progress students make over Years 7 to 9 speeds up and is excellent in Years 10 and 11. In 2007, GCSE results were above average. Students' achievements were best in mathematics, geography, art, drama and French. Achievement in mathematics was outstanding. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, wide ranging in nature, make excellent progress. Their needs are identified, understood and met extremely well, both in lessons and through highly effective specialist support. Current work and records show that students' progress is continuing to improve. They confirm the school's view that standards are likely to rise again in 2008.

The house system is high on the list of things that students and staff mention when asked about what makes the school so successful. The four houses give students a strong sense of belonging and many opportunities to contribute to the life of the school and wider community, through sporting, creative, and performing activities, for example. Heads of house, form tutors and subject leaders are highly vigilant in their care of students and keep an extremely close check on each one's progress. Students' behaviour is extremely good in lessons and around the school. Some parents mention instances of less than perfect behaviour and the school acknowledges that a few students can be very challenging. The rate of exclusions, however, is very low as considerable efforts successfully maintain students' engagement in learning. The school is a highly orderly community and its work on fostering respect for all its members is extremely visible and effective. Students speak with great pride about what the school offers and show tremendous enjoyment in their work. They value enormously the vast range of enriching activities and the fact that staff give so freely of their time to arrange them and to support students when they need extra help. Students mature into highly responsible and confident young people, extremely well prepared for their next stages in education and ready to make excellent contributions to society. Many parents wrote appreciatively about such matters.

Teaching and learning are outstanding in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. A high level of consistency exists in the quality of lessons and a large majority of them are good or better. The school's work on increasing the variety of teaching methods is noted and praised by older students. Some teaching is inspirational. In a few lessons, however, particularly where students

show a wide range of abilities, tasks are not matched well to meet this range. Sometimes, the teacher's questioning does not challenge or engage students fully, or probe deeply the extent of their understanding. Students speak confidently about how well they are doing, what grades or levels they are working at or hoping to reach and how to get there.

Outstanding leadership and management ensure every aspect of school life is planned well and kept under review with tremendous attention to detail. School self-evaluation is excellent, particularly at senior level. Just occasionally, at middle management level, development plans or evaluation reports are not incisive enough regarding students' progress and the factors behind it. Staff are buoyant and feel extremely well supported by each other and their managers. Specialist status has enabled the school to develop its facilities greatly and enhance the curriculum so that it is now excellent. Not only have the specialist subject areas been enhanced but, through various forms of collaboration, so have others. Much fine work exists in partnership with primary schools, for example, through the specialist status, to boost provision, forge links and smooth transition for students. In view of the rising trend in educational outcomes since the last inspection, and existing strengths in leadership and management, the school demonstrates excellent capacity for improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

In this good sixth form, students' personal development is excellent because so many opportunities are provided for students to show initiative and take responsibility. Relationships are excellent. Younger students speak highly of sixth form students as organisers of the house music events, for example, and praise them for their work as captains and role models in other areas of school life. The curriculum is excellent and affords students much choice of subject and types of course. Retention and attendance rates are very high. Standards are above average overall and students' academic achievements are good but not entirely consistent across all subjects. Inconsistencies are linked to the variable quality of lessons. Whilst good overall, teaching does not always move with good pace or address all students' needs, especially in mixed ability classes. Outstanding leadership and management are very apparent in the fact that strengths and relative weaknesses in sixth form outcomes are clearly understood. Improvements in provision have been and are being made where necessary to good effect.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement in the sixth form and eliminate the inconsistency in the rates of students' progress between subjects.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by more consistently matching work closely to students' needs, particularly where the ability range in a class is wide, and by ensuring that even more teachers question students skilfully.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	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	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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	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

14 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Kennet School, Thatcham, RG19 4LL

Thank you for your welcome when I visited the school with another inspector. We much appreciated the conversations we had with some of you in lessons and at break times. I write to let you know that we found your school to be outstanding.

You achieve extremely well in your academic work by Year 11, particularly in mathematics. Standards have been rising for several years and are now well above average by Year 11. The sixth form is good. You develop extremely well into confident, considerate and respectful young people, prepared to make outstanding contributions to society and your own future lives. Many of you told us that you enjoy school greatly. Your behaviour in lessons is excellent. Your parents mentioned that less than perfect behaviour does occasionally occur but you feel that the school deals with this very well.

The curriculum is outstanding. It includes a good range of subjects and a great many enrichment activities. You praise the house system for the way in which you are cared for, supported and encouraged; it is indeed outstanding. You enjoy greatly the house sporting and music competitions. Most lessons are good if not excellent and many of you said that teachers are always willing to help you when necessary outside of lessons. Those of you with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, wide ranging in their nature, are extremely well supported in lessons and in the physically disabled resource (PDR). In a few lessons, activities do not meet everyone's needs, so that some of you are either unclear about the work or find it too easy. In most lessons, teachers pose questions skilfully to check your understanding but, in a few, they do not do that enough. We saw you asking questions of each other and teachers about your work and we encourage you to keep doing that.

Your headteacher, with his senior team, provides outstanding leadership. The school is extremely well led and managed. Staff and governors are dedicated and enthusiastic about improving the school further. We have highlighted two areas of improvement: firstly, to raise further standards in the sixth form; and secondly, to make all lessons at least good, which most indeed already are. Leaders have made tremendous use of the specialist status to boost provision in your school and in some local primary schools as well. They are very clear about the school's strengths and entirely accurate about what needs to be improved.

We hope that you continue to work hard and enjoy school and wish you all the very best for the future.

Wiola Hola

Her Majesty's Inspector