

The Queen Katherine School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112431
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310891
Inspection dates	1–2 July 2008
Reporting inspector	Garry Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1438
6th form	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Stephen Pooley
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Wilkinson
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2005
School address	Appleby Road Kendal Cumbria LA9 6PJ
Telephone number	01539 773640
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This is a larger than average size school serving the market town of Kendal. In addition the school draws students from a broad area around the town. There are pockets of social and economic deprivation within the area served, but the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below that found nationally. The overwhelming majority of students are from White British backgrounds with very few students from minority ethnic groups. There is a small but growing number of students at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average as is the proportion with a statement of special educational need. However, the school has a resourced base for students with physical or medical needs. The school is a specialist school for technology. It is a lead member of the South Lakes Federation of schools and the Kendal Community Partnership. It has been a pilot for the development of multi agency support teams within extended schools for the local authority. It has received the Diana Award for its commitment to recognising students' achievement.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has outstanding capacity to improve. The provision for the curriculum and pastoral care is outstanding and contributes to the outstanding personal development of the students. This reflects the strong emphasis on inclusion in what is a truly comprehensive school, which is extremely well led and managed. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire value the school highly.

It is a harmonious community in which students' personal development is excellent. Students enjoy coming to school and behave exceptionally well. The relationships between students and with staff are excellent. Students learn to behave in a safe manner and to make healthy choices with regards to diet and physical activity. They feel safe in school and report that they have adults to turn to if they face difficulties. Incidents of bullying occur rarely and students report that these are dealt with effectively. There is an extensive range of opportunities for them to contribute to the school community by taking on positions of responsibility and they do this with enthusiasm. Students also make an outstanding contribution to the wider community through productions, charitable works and fund-raising.

Staff know students exceptionally well and look after them extremely well. The staff willingly give up their time to support students. There are particularly effective systems to support the most vulnerable students. Parents who wrote in response to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the quality of care for students when entering the school and particularly if they face learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students are able to access support in school from a range of workers drawn from external agencies to support their development, as well as through the school mentor and counsellor.

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly average, but make good progress to leave at the end of Key Stage 4 with standards that are well above average. The standards in GCSE examinations have been rising at a faster rate than has been the case nationally for the last three years. The standards in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have also been above average since 2003. However, progress in English is slower than in mathematics and the results fell in 2007. School data suggests that this dip will be reversed in 2008. Standards in the specialist subjects of mathematics, technology and science are above average and all the specialist college targets have been met or exceeded.

The good progress that students make is the result of good teaching. Teachers have good relationships with students and use their expertise to plan challenging lessons. The specialist college status has been used to disseminate good practice in teaching and particularly in the use of ICT (information and communications technology) to enhance learning. There is a small proportion of satisfactory teaching. In these lessons, the pace of learning slows as the activities do not sufficiently engage the students and are not always accurately enough matched to the full range of abilities. Marking does not consistently provide students with sufficiently detailed advice on how to improve and reach their targets. Academic guidance is good and there are secure systems to monitor the progress of students against their challenging targets.

The curriculum is outstanding and has been enhanced through a range of enrichment activities associated with the specialist school status. It meets the needs of students and the community well. There is a good range of vocational and academic courses, and individualised programmes with opportunities to study at the college or work-related provision are a strength.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. The headteacher has a clear vision for the development of an inclusive school. He makes an outstanding contribution to the school and particularly its involvement in the wider community. The impact of the specialist status on providing support for local primary schools and for developing community courses is particularly strong. He is ably supported by his senior leadership team who display determination to bring about school improvement. The senior leadership team are fully aware of the need to increase achievement by further improving teaching in order to achieve their goal of developing into an outstanding school. The process of self-evaluation is very effective. It draws on the views of all stakeholders including parents and governors to accurately identify strengths and areas for development which inform the school development plan. The governors are highly effective. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school extremely well and are both supportive and challenging as required. Currently the school provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form provision is outstanding. Students achieve standards that are exceptionally high and achievement is excellent. Standards and achievement have risen over the last three years. The proportion of students continuing to higher education is also very high. Students benefit from outstanding teaching which results in enthusiasm for learning. The curriculum is well matched to the needs of the students and links through the South Lakes Federation of schools broaden the range of courses available. There is an extensive range of opportunities for enrichment including an exceptional range of residential visits. Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They develop into confident and mature young people who contribute well to the school and to the wider community. Students are exceptionally well supported and those facing considerable difficulties are given exceptional support to ensure they complete their studies. This is reflected in very high retention rates. The detailed assessment and tracking of students' progress support their learning and ensure that students are challenged and supported to do their best. The leadership and management of the provision are outstanding with a proven record for bringing about improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching.
- Ensure that marking is used consistently to ensure that all students know specifically what they have to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The achievement of students is good overall. When the background of students and their starting points are taken into account, they make above average progress. Students enter the school with standards that are in line with the national average. They achieve standards in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 that have been above the national average since 2003. Although standards in English fell in 2007, they remained above average. The available data suggests that this fall in standards will be reversed in 2008. Progress was greater in mathematics and science and standards rose further. Students continue to make progress in Key Stage 4 to achieve standards that are well above average. Performance in the GCSE examinations has improved over the last three years at a faster rate than has been found nationally. The proportion

of students gaining 5 or more grades A* to C at GCSE including English and mathematics is 63% which is well above that found nationally and almost every student leaves with a qualification at GCSE. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding as is their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development. Students behave exceptionally well and take good account of their own and others' safety in the school buildings and grounds. There are excellent relationships between students, and between students and staff. Students report that they feel safe and that they are confident that there are many adults that they would turn to if they faced difficulties. Incidents of bullying are rare and students report that they are dealt with effectively. They enjoy coming to school and are highly motivated to do well; however, attendance is satisfactory. This is largely due to the effect of holidays taken during the term due to the seasonal nature of the local tourist economy. Students are well aware of how to live healthy lives and the vast majority make healthy choices in the dining areas and enthusiastically take part in extra-curricular sporting activities. Students have many opportunities to contribute to and influence the development of the school through taking on positions of responsibility. A meeting of the school council held during the inspection was chaired by a senior student and demonstrated well the mature approach students took to the discussions. Students also contribute well to the wider community through musical and dramatic productions, charity work and fund raising, and taking on roles as junior and senior sports leaders. Students are well prepared for their future economic well-being with very good basic skills, including extremely well developed skills in ICT, and through their excellent social skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching is good overall, and there is a significant proportion of outstanding teaching. There are good relationships in classrooms and students behave exceptionally well in response to teachers' high expectations. The teachers have good subject knowledge which they use well to plan and provide a good range of appropriate learning activities. These are delivered at a brisk pace and are well matched to the range of abilities within the groups. Effective use of resources and particularly the good use of ICT contribute to the students' learning. This results in students making good progress and enjoying their lessons. There is effective support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the lessons where teaching is satisfactory, the pace of learning slows. In some lessons, the challenges are not pitched accurately enough at the abilities of the pupils. In others, the activities are too closely controlled by the teacher or do not fully engage the interest of the students. The marking of work is inconsistent and does not consistently give students specific enough advice on how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It is broad and balanced, and contributes well to the progress of students and their personal development. The curriculum is very well matched to the needs and aspirations of all groups of students. This is particularly evident in the Key Stage 4 curriculum which is increasingly focused on individualised learning. There are clear pathways that allow students to study their preferred combination of academic and vocational subjects. There is a strong focus on meeting the needs of those students at risk of disaffection through allowing students to access courses with other local providers or employers. This includes a range of vocational courses at the local college. The curriculum is also very well matched to the needs of the local community with a good range of courses related to the leisure, tourism, catering and hospitality industries. There is an outstanding range of extra-curricular and additional activities that contributes to students' development. Enrichment of the curriculum, through numerous off-site activities including an impressive range of residential visits and many visiting speakers and performers, successfully widens students' cultural awareness and counters any effects of rural isolation. The opportunities for students to develop basic skills across the curriculum are well developed. There is excellent provision for students to take part in enterprise activities, creative projects and to experience work related learning through links to local employers and these prepare students exceptionally well for their future working lives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Systems for pastoral care are exceptionally well developed. Staff know students well and give willingly of their time to support them. The support for the most vulnerable students and those at risk of disaffection is particularly effective. The 'Red Shed' provides a drop-in centre for students identified as facing difficulties and provides a mentoring and counselling service. In addition, the school has developed a multi-agency support team by gaining the services of staff from social care, health, primary mental health, educational welfare, the police, the 'Prevent and Deter' team, behaviour support team and psychology services. The 'Red Shed' centre is linked closely to the pastoral system through being managed by a member of the senior leadership team. Support for transition is a particular strength of the school and was commented on by a significant number of the parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. There is effective monitoring of and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and, as a consequence, they are well integrated into the life of the school and achieve well. The arrangements for health and safety are robust and there are effective procedures for safeguarding students that meet current government requirements. There are robust mechanisms for monitoring and improving attendance.

Academic guidance is good. There are rigorous systems to assess and record students' progress against their targets. These are well developed in Key Stage 4 and are contributing to the identification of underachievement and appropriate intervention. The systems at Key Stage 3 are effective, but the school has recognised that an integrated computer based system will facilitate improved access by pastoral and academic staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the headteacher is exemplary. He has a very clear vision for the school which is communicated very effectively to students, staff, parents, governors and the wider community. The senior leadership team has been expanded and works extremely well with middle managers. The process of self-evaluation is rigorous and effectively involves staff, students, governors and other partners. Monitoring and self-evaluation are very effective in highlighting areas that need attention and appropriate action is swiftly taken to ensure improvement. Self-evaluation is an accurate analysis of the school's strengths and areas for development. There is now a much more consistent approach from middle leaders and they have a very good understanding of what needs to be done to improve. There is a strong commitment to raising achievement and challenging, but realistic targets are being set for all students. As a result, standards at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form have risen steadily over the last three years. Equality of opportunity is actively promoted. The systems for ensuring the care and well-being of students are of a high standard, but further developments are planned. The school has taken the lead in developing strong and innovative links with other schools, the local community and outside agencies through the South Lakes Federation and Kendal Community Partnership to enhance learning. The record of improvement together with the capacity of the leadership team illustrates the outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The governing body is well led by an effective and experienced chair. The governors know the school well and are committed to its improvement. Governors are linked to departments and are involved in the process of departmental self-evaluation. They ensure that resources are deployed efficiently to provide good value for money.

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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?	2	1
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?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	1
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	2	
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

3 July 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Queen Katherine School, Cumbria, LA9 6PJ

Thank you for the warm welcome that you gave to us when we recently inspected your school. We enjoyed talking to you about your work and listening to your views on the school. We agree with you and your parents that Queen Katherine is a good school.

The teaching in your school is generally good and some is outstanding. This encourages you to work hard and you make good progress to achieve standards in the GCSE examinations that are well above average. This prepares you well for your life after school. The curriculum that you study is of very high quality. This is particularly evident in the wide range of courses available to you in Key Stage 4, including those at the college. The range of activities for you to participate in after school and the trips and residential visits are exceptionally good.

Your development as confident young people prepared to make a positive contribution to society is outstanding. We were impressed by your behaviour and your mature approach to school life. You told us that you feel safe in school and that you are well looked after. You take all opportunities to engage in exercise and to pursue a healthy lifestyle. The staff of the school know you well and are eager to support your development. There are good systems in place to support those of you who face difficulties and we were particularly impressed by the support services available in the 'Red Shed'.

The leadership of the school is outstanding. The head, his senior colleagues and the governors have brought about significant improvements and are determined that this will continue. We have suggested to them that in some satisfactory lessons you make less progress and that they should concentrate on ensuring that all lessons are of good or outstanding quality. We have also asked them to make sure that all of you are given clear advice on how to improve your work when teachers mark your books in all subjects. You can help by attending school regularly, telling them what activities help you to learn well and what is the best way to give you advice on how to improve your work.

Best wishes for the future

Garry Jones HMI

On behalf of the inspection team