

Keswick School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112441
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	310894
Inspection date	6 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Angela M Headon HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1057
6th form	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Professor Robert Fowler
Headteacher	Mr Michael Chapman
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2004
School address	Vicarage Hill Keswick Cumbria CA12 5QB
Telephone number	01768 772605
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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, students' personal development and well being, teaching and learning, curriculum, care, guidance and support, leadership and management and the effectiveness of the sixth form. Evidence was gathered from a range of school documentation; assessment data; observation of the school at work; parents' questionnaires and discussions with staff, students and the vice-chair of governors. Some aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments in its self-evaluation were not justified and these have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

Keswick School is an average size 11 to 18 secondary school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below national figures, as is the number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Boarding accommodation is provided for approximately 50 students. The school has been awarded specialist science and Leading Edge status and has also achieved the Financial Management Standard.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Keswick School is a good school with a strong commitment to continued improvement. The school actively promotes a culture that successfully motivates students and staff to attain the highest levels in all aspects of school life.

Students' achievement is good overall. Students enter the school with above average levels of attainment and leave with standards which are significantly above average. Standards overall remain exceptionally high at Key Stage 3, although attainment declined at expected levels in English, mathematics and science in 2007. A significant number of students, however, reached the higher levels in all core subjects. Attainment at expected and higher levels in all other curriculum subjects is above national figures.

At Key Stage 4, GCSE results continue to improve with more than three out of every four students attaining five GCSE grades at C or above. Nevertheless, the rate of progress students make between the ages of 11 to 14 is not sustained during Key Stage 4. This is particularly evident in English, where standards, although still above average, have continued to decline. However, in terms of relative performance to other subjects, students achieve good results in art, technology, geography, German, history and religious education. The school is fully aware of the difference in progress between the key stages and has introduced a range of strategies to support groups of students in raising standards further. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are appropriately supported and make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students' attitudes to learning are extremely positive and they are very keen to achieve as well as they can. Their behaviour is exemplary and they are excellent ambassadors for the school, responding well to its values and expectations. Students enjoy coming to school, as reflected in their regular attendance which is above national levels. Students' excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strongly supported by well planned programmes for citizenship and personal, social and health education. Students are also making very positive contributions to the school and wider community and they value opportunities to serve on the school council. Sport is a key focus for the school and participation is high with a very good range of extra-curricular sports and outdoor activities.

Staff demonstrate a high level of concern for, and commitment to, students' welfare which contributes significantly to their good progress, enjoyment and well-being. This is further enhanced by the effective use of the 'personalised learning centre' which is helping a number of students to re-engage with learning.

Teaching and learning are good and contribute well to students' enjoyment and achievement. Students work well together, enjoy opportunities for group and paired work and are keen to participate in discussion. Teachers positively reinforce the efforts of students, who in turn are well motivated and have high aspirations for themselves. The school recognises that students are capable learners. It is developing the use of 'assessment for learning', including the skilled use of questioning, to extend students' knowledge and understanding further. This is already apparent in the best lessons, for example science, where lessons are focused, engaging and challenging and students are well informed by the use of assessment information.

Systems are in place to set academic targets and track student progress. However, these are not yet effective enough to identify underachievement swiftly. Students are unclear about their targets in some cases, and too many are uncertain about how well they are doing. This is

further reflected in the quality of marking, which is regular, but does not always set out what students need to do to improve.

Overall, the quality of the curriculum is good, and is under review by the school. The curriculum for students aged 11 to 14 and for students in the sixth form is appropriately meeting their needs. The school has recently introduced a 'learning to learn' course and all students in Years 7, 8 and 9 are taught biology, chemistry and physics, in keeping with the school's specialist status. This continues into Years 10 and 11 where all students take three separate sciences at GCSE level. At this stage, students are able to choose from a good range of GCSE courses that link well with the school's sixth form provision. The school is seeking to provide further flexibility and choice by extending its provision for those students who are not well suited to a full GCSE programme. Some students are already effectively combining vocational courses at a local college with their school based work. Experience in careers, enterprise, and work experience are very well planned, and ensure that students are well informed about their future choices and opportunities.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong clear leadership and is firmly committed to continuing to raise standards and achievement. He is ably supported by senior leaders who are highly effective with complimentary skills. Development of the leadership team, as a result of workforce reform, has further strengthened its effectiveness.

The school is aware of its strengths and has identified areas for improvement that follow a clear rationale. Systems for monitoring teaching and learning are rigorous and involves leaders at all levels. The school is continuing to further improve this work with opportunities for teachers to share effective practice with each other.

Leaders at all levels are clear about where improvements are needed. The school presently has focused intervention plans in place to raise standards in English at Key Stage 4. A new electronic system is also being introduced to track and monitor individual student progress, with access for both teachers and learners. The school is strengthening further the targets set for groups and individual students.

The school's work with a range of external partners is excellent. Leading Edge and specialist status have raised the profile of the school both locally and nationally. The school has used its specialist science status well: enhancing curriculum provision, raising attainment, extending community links, and developing resources across the school. Leading Edge status has enabled the school to work very effectively with neighbouring schools. A professional development centre and a developing information and communication technology (ICT) network have ensured that the school continues to play a pivotal role in improving provision within the area.

The knowledgeable governing body holds the school to account well. Governors are involved in the life of the school and monitor its performance very effectively. The vast majority of parents are very supportive of the school, although some would welcome further opportunities to express their views. The school provides good value for money and in light of the effective leadership, the school's capacity to improve further is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form at Keswick School is outstanding. Levels of attainment are high for both AS and A2 level, related to students' achievement prior to entering the sixth form. Continued excellent performance in art and design is evident.

The sixth form is very well led and managed and there is a sharp focus on continually improving teaching and learning. Students therefore benefit from consistently good teaching with examples of very strong practice. Students respond well to this; they have very positive attitudes to their learning and are keen to succeed. Systems for checking on their progress are secure. As a result, they understand clearly how well they are doing and how to improve their performance. Students speak highly of the strong support and guidance they receive from teachers in achieving academic success and in organising a wide range of events and activities to meet their personal interests.

Students feel strongly that their views matter to the school and enthusiastically play a full part in school life, notably as prefects, helping younger students through their links with tutor groups in the main school. The completion of the new sixth form centre is eagerly awaited. The school has excellent links with universities; guidance and support on options after school are exemplary.

Whilst the current curriculum is very effective, the school acknowledges the wisdom in reviewing the range and level of its sixth form provision to ensure a closer match to the needs and aspirations of all potential sixth form applicants.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

This aspect was not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessment was not justified. The school fully meets national minimum standards for boarding provision. A previous inspection report carried out by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate in October 2006 gave no further recommendations for improvement. Since that time, the boarding house has continued to be refurbished, with further improvements in ICT facilities. A strength of the provision is that all students in the school are treated in the same way. Students feel they have equal status, regardless of whether they are boarders or day students and say they are provided with excellent opportunities for academic and personal development. There is a high standard of care with first class relationships between students and adults.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further improve achievement at Key Stage 4.
- Strengthen the use of assessment to monitor student performance

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 effectiveness of boarding provision	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	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	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
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?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	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	2	1
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

6 December 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Keswick School, Cumbria, CA12 5QB

Following our visit to your school, we would like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for your contribution to the inspection. This proved very helpful.

Here is a summary of our report.

- Your school is a good school, where overall, you make good progress and achieve very well in national tests and examinations.
- You enjoy coming to school and your behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent.
- Teaching is good and you value the efforts of all staff at your school.
- You receive good care, support and guidance which you and your parents/carers appreciate.
- The curriculum is good and is continuing to improve, particularly for those students in Years 10 and 11.
- Your school is well led and managed and has an outstanding sixth form.

So that you continue to do well, we have asked your school to focus on the following areas.

- Further improve the progress you make at Key Stage 4.
- Strengthen the use of assessment to monitor your performance.

We hope you continue to enjoy your time at the school and wish you all every future success!

Yours sincerely

Angela Headon HMI