

The King's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113500
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	311298
Inspection dates	26–27 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Anne Looney 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1081
6th form	212
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robin Mitchell
Headteacher	Faith Jarrett
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2003
School address	Barrack Road Ottery St Mary EX11 1RA
Telephone number	01404 812982
Fax number	01404 815685

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

One of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors carried out the inspection.

Description of the school

The King's School is of average size with a growing sixth form. It is popular and heavily oversubscribed and is restricted for space. Students come from a relatively affluent but still diverse area. The number of students from minority ethnic groups is low. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average but the school's recently acquired additional specialism in cognition and learning in special educational needs is starting to attract students from outside the catchment area. As well as having an established specialist status as a sports college, the school is also now a training school. There is shared sixth form partnership with neighbouring schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The King's School is a good school with outstanding features. It is well led and managed and the headteacher has been dynamic in the way she has spearheaded the drive for improved standards and achievement and ensured that all students make good progress by the time they leave the school. The GCSE results are consistently well above average. In 2006 the results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 indicated that students were not achieving as well as they should have done, and the school acted quickly. Departments concentrated on improving teaching and learning and made well thought-out changes to schemes of work where necessary. In 2007 results in the Year 9 tests showed a marked improvement and were above average. Achievement is now good in both key stages. The headteacher, with the support of the senior leadership team and the experienced and well-informed governing body, provides a clear vision for the school. Efforts to ensure that that vision is communicated effectively throughout the school have been very effective and parental support for the school is high. A sure sign of the strength of the leadership of the headteacher is the manner in which autonomy is being devolved to heads of department so that they are more actively involved in monitoring and development of their subjects. Expectations of middle managers are high but so is the quality of support they are afforded by the senior leaders. There is a very high level of commitment among all staff to promoting the personal development and well-being of all students. As one parent commented, 'The level of care is consistent from teaching assistants right up to senior staff.' Students made it clear to inspectors that they thoroughly enjoy being at the school and talked of fun and academic support in the same breath. The school is justifiably proud of these students, whose personal development is outstanding. Their behaviour is excellent throughout the school and they show great consideration of others when moving around the limited outdoor space. Older students support their younger peers and they are committed to improving their school and contributing to the wider community. The school has worked hard to ensure its provision meets the needs of its students. The curriculum has become increasingly diverse and well matched to their needs. The range of enhancement activities on offer is outstanding. A significant proportion of this offer is as a result of the school's sports college status and its considerable impact on the school's provision as a whole. Participation in sporting activities is high and several students are gaining places in national teams. Students, however, are at pains to point out that enhancement is not just about physical education, but that they value the broad range of other opportunities too. Teaching is well monitored and its quality is good. Relationships are strong and ensure that students are confident to ask questions. They make good progress in lessons. Teachers explain well to students what they are to do in a lesson, but not all are being specific enough about what the students are to learn by the end of the lesson and how they will assess that learning. The monitoring system, whilst rigorous in the way it identifies strengths and weaknesses in lessons, is not as clear on how it will help the satisfactory teaching to become good and the good teaching to become outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. Standards are above average and achievement is consistently very high because students receive excellent support and academic challenge and guidance from their teachers and tutors. As students said, 'We enjoy a very close relationship with staff.' The outstanding curriculum contributes to high retention rates and teaching is good, but there is a narrower range of teaching styles than is evident elsewhere in

the school. Students are highly motivated individuals and demonstrate good independent learning skills, although they are constrained by insufficient resources and facilities. The sixth form is well managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Teachers should ensure that learning objectives for lessons are specific and focus on what they want pupils to have learned by the end of the lesson.
- Clarify how teachers will be supported to improve their practice further once they have been observed.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

When over a quarter of the students attained the highest grades. Information and communication technology (ICT) and modern foreign languages, which were targeted by the school in 2006, made significant gains. Students join the school with above-average attainment and so this constitutes good achievement. Progress is tracked well throughout Years 10 and 11 and underachieving pupils are monitored carefully. The progress made by students who took the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2006 was not good enough considering their starting points. The standards achieved in English that year were only in line with national averages. The school acted swiftly to analyse the reasons for that underachievement and implemented a range of strategies linked to the teaching and learning in the subject. In 2007 the improvement in the English results at the end of Year 9 was marked. In 2007 there was also, as in the GCSE results, a much larger percentage of students attaining the higher levels in all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science than was nationally the case. Pupils' achievement at Key Stage 3 is increasingly well supported by rigorous assessment schemes and by analysis of test results for individual students. The school met nearly all of its challenging specialist college targets in 2007 and has already taken effective action to improve physical education results further. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well at the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The students' personal development and well-being are outstanding, as is their social, moral, cultural and spiritual development. The King's is a happy school and students enjoy attending it. There is a calm atmosphere and students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent. They value the range of learning opportunities available to them and appreciate the good work done by others. One student identified the quality of the GCSE artwork on display as a 'source of inspiration'. A very high proportion of students involve themselves in a range of extra-curricular activities. Attendance is above average and the school is working on reducing absence, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Students display an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. This is well supported by the work of the sports specialism in promoting health and fitness, and by the school's Healthy School Award. A website for teenagers developed by students with a neighbouring medical practice has been used as a model by other organisations. Students say they feel very safe and say that, even though bullying is not an issue at the school, they would know who to turn to if they were to need help. Students of all

ages make a very positive contribution to their school and the outside community. The school council is very effective and senior leaders respond and act on its recommendations.

Collaboration between year groups is good and older students act as 'reading buddies' for younger ones. Students understand other cultures well and endeavour to help others less fortunate than themselves. There are regular fund-raising events and the school council is working with the community to finance a charity project in Moldova. A large number of students are involved in junior sports and community sports leader awards. In this role they work regularly with primary schools, helping them to run sporting activities. Students develop a very good understanding of the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers are skilled in maintaining orderly yet stimulating environments and working relationships in lessons are very positive. Where teaching is most effective, there is a buzz of enthusiasm for the subjects and students meet the challenges set for them with determination. Creative activities foster students' interest and they enjoy learning because of the 'fun' approach of their teachers. The support provided by teachers and teaching assistants for all students in lessons is strong. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in lessons, as do gifted and talented students. The marking and assessment of students' work in most subjects contain helpful comments for students. In these subjects students know their targets and what they need to do to improve. Teachers make clear to students at the beginning of lessons what they are to do but not all teachers are expressing this clearly enough in terms of what the students are going to learn by the end of the lesson. This makes it difficult for students to remain focused on a goal.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

In Years 10 and 11, students have open access to an increasingly diverse curriculum where the choice of vocational subjects is expanding in response to students' needs and requests. Vocational courses benefit greatly from links with both college and work-based settings, and the partnerships with employers enhance the experience of the students. The school's specialist sports status has had a far-reaching impact on curricular provision, and the range of opportunities on offer to students is outstanding. The curriculum is also greatly enriched by opportunities such as visiting speakers and educational trips at home and abroad. Creative initiatives in subjects, enterprise days for all year groups and high quality careers advice contribute to a very well-coordinated and highly effective programme of developing students' skills for the future. As a result, a very high percentage of students progress into the sixth form, local colleges or employment with training.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding care, guidance and support for all students fully support the inclusive nature of the school. Effective measures are put in place in Year 6 of feeding primary schools to ease the transition and to identify those students who might be vulnerable. As one parent said, 'Induction week was invaluable, absolutely brilliant and removed any fears or concerns about starting in September.' Risk assessments are firmly in place and arrangements for safeguarding students are secure. A particular strength of the school is the success of its work with parents and liaison with outside agencies. The very high degree of pastoral support is illustrated by the strong focus on the individual and by the knowledge of the teachers, particularly the tutors, of individual students. There is a strong feeling throughout the school that all students are extremely well supported, whatever their need. Students are very well informed about future options and are mentored carefully towards challenging targets. Not all students are clear, however, how these targets are arrived at.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has set a clear agenda for improvement. The senior leadership team has targeted areas of underachievement well and has succeeded in improving standards in Key Stage 3 and in specific subjects in Key Stage 4. The school is monitoring students' progress increasingly well, identifying underachievers and initiating mentoring to support them. Teachers and senior leaders have a very good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students. The school has set increasingly high targets and plans to meet a very challenging target in 2010. Recent GCSE examination data and the school's good capacity to improve further based on its recent track record suggest that this target could be achieved earlier. Self-evaluation at school level is accurate and honest and is based on a good range of secure evidence. It leads well into the school development plan. The plan itself is specific in its targets but does not make clear how the school will evaluate the impact of these targets or how it will measure success. Self-evaluation at departmental level is relatively new, but in some subjects the quality of evidence, identification and analysis is already very high. The school has developed a good system for monitoring teaching and learning following on from well-planned training for middle managers. The system is rigorous in the way it identifies strengths and areas for development for individual teachers. It is less clear how this system will develop teachers' practice or how this will be measured in terms of impact in the classroom. The headteacher has made good use of workforce restructuring to ensure that the areas of responsibility are clearly defined, that curriculum areas are more coherent and that support staff are used effectively to free teachers to teach.

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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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
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	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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	1	
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	

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

- 28 September 2007 Dear Students Inspection of The King's School, Ottery St Mary, Devon EX11 1RA I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made about your school. Thank you for making us welcome and for taking the time to talk to us so courteously.
- We believe that your school is good with some excellent features and that your sixth form is outstanding.
- Students make good progress throughout their time in the school and the GCSE results are well above average.
- The school develops you very well as rounded individuals.
- Your headteacher leads the school well and is supported well by the governors and all the staff.
- Teachers are teaching you well and keeping an eye on how well you are doing.
- You told us that you really enjoy being at your school and that you felt both well looked after and challenged to do well.
- We believe that you have really benefited from the school being a sports college and you told us how much you appreciated everything that was on offer.
- You have a very good choice of subjects, particularly when you get to Year 10.
- You behave very well and move calmly around the school. This is not always easy as you are rather short of space. We think that your school needs to:
- make sure that every teacher makes it very clear to you at the beginning of lessons what they want you to learn
- help teachers improve their teaching even further when they have been observed and given suggestions of what could be better. You can help the school improve by continuing to show the very positive attitudes towards work that we saw when we visited your school. With best wishes Anne Looney HMI Lead inspector



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With best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Anne Looney'.

Anne Looney HMI
Lead inspector