

North Kesteven School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120708
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	313721
Inspection date	8 May 2008
Reporting inspector	George Derby

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1170
6th form	248
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Tony Gamble
Headteacher	Mr Keith Elms
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2004
School address	Moor Lane North Hykeham Lincoln LN6 9AG
Telephone number	01522 881010
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: students' progress and standards across the whole school, with a particular focus on English and information and communication technology (ICT), and how leaders and managers across the school are improving provision; the impact of the school's work in its specialist areas and the support for students' with learning difficulties. The school's work in relation to the curriculum and the improvements required since the last inspection were also inspected. Other aspects were not investigated in detail, but no evidence was found to suggest that the school's own assessments in these aspects, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Evidence was gathered from the school's data, students' work, observations of teaching and school life, analysis of parental questionnaires, discussions with staff and students and photographic evidence.

Description of the school

North Kesteven School is a large comprehensive school which serves Lincoln and its outlying areas. It has a performing arts specialism with dance, drama and music as component subjects, and is a foundation school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the percentage with English as an additional language. The majority are White British with a very small number of students from a range of ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, although the figure for those with a statement of special educational need is average. The students' attainment on entry to North Kesteven is average and has been for many years. The sixth form is a joint arrangement with the Robert Pattinson School and admits students mainly from three secondary schools. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is average.

The school's work has been recognised through its receipt of a large number of awards including the Healthy Schools Award, Eco Green Flag, National Mentoring and Befriending Award, Careers Mark, and Artsmark Gold.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

North Kesteven School is a good school. It is outstanding in the key areas of personal development, the curriculum and the care, support and guidance. With its exceptional facilities especially for sport, drama, dance and music and an instantly recognisable excellent community spirit, it provides an extremely positive atmosphere in which students thrive particularly well. It rightly prides itself on its 'can-do' culture and its high expectations and as a result, students achieve well and reach academic standards which are above average. In some areas their attainment is extremely high. The work in performing arts is outstanding and adds a great deal to students' personal development, which is also outstanding. The percentage of students attaining five or more good GCSE results last year was broadly average. However, the school's best eight GCSE scores were significantly above average and nearly a half of the students taking GCSE physical education gained the highest A and A* grades.

The performing arts specialism is a significant strength that drives the school forward. The school reached all its challenging targets in 2007 and exceeded some. Accreditation is also good amongst those students who pursue performing arts as a leisure activity. The school has Arts Award Centres in all three areas of performing arts. The impact of performing arts across the curriculum is exceptionally strong, with aspects being used very well in other subject areas. Highly effective partnerships, as a result of the school's work, have been established with primary schools and in the wider community.

All these positive features do not happen by themselves. The excellent senior leadership team, led by an extremely clear-sighted headteacher, is impressive in the way it reflects on the school's performance and has taken decisive action to eliminate weaknesses. Teamwork is also excellent. Through its increased analysis of assessment data, the senior team has rigorously addressed the issue of falling standards in Key Stage 3. Although these were average at the end of Year 9 in the 2007 national tests, they had fallen over the past few years from an above average position. This drop was caused mainly by the severe staffing difficulties in English. The team has strengthened the work of middle leaders, whose effectiveness is now good, and they have a clear view of their roles and responsibilities in leading and managing their subjects. Of particular impact, is the excellent support, both pastorally and academically, which students receive, something which they praise very strongly. Students are exceptionally well cared for and arrangements for their safeguarding meet requirements fully.

Past underperformance in English, particularly at Key Stage 3, and information and communication technology (ICT) in Key Stage 4 has now been successfully addressed. The new leader for English has made significant changes to the curriculum and to the arrangements for additional support for students, which are clearly bearing fruit. Leadership here is outstandingly strong. Assessments show that the students' attainment has risen, is now above average and they make good progress. Students' skills in the use of ICT are clearly very well developed and their everyday use of it during lessons, and for research, show that they are confident users. However, the school's results in the Key Stage 4 Diploma course over the past two years have been disappointing. Once again, the departmental leader has addressed the issues well and results are set to rise this year. Recent test results show these to be above average. Course arrangements have been changed this year so that students can cope better with the amount of the work and balance this with their other studies.

The vast majority of parents praise the school's work, especially the good progress which students make and the opportunities they have for learning and for personal development. Many of their comments are particularly positive and reflect the views of inspectors. One family's views were that 'North Kesteven is a super school... our daughter is developing into a well-rounded individual.' Another family stated that their children had been 'nurtured, encouraged and celebrated for their own abilities' and were pleased that their children were educated at North Kesteven. The comment that the school 'brought out the best, be it in academic, social or emotional development... because of the well rounded educational influences received', is testimony to the enormous efforts the school puts into providing an 'all round' and inclusive education.

Students' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding. The opportunities to reflect on world issues, to explore their own and other's feelings and to express themselves through drama and dance have a significant impact on their spiritual development. Their work on the eco committee, the student voice (school council) and the specialist schools trust network is outstanding and make a significant contribution to the school, local and wider community, especially through the performing arts opportunities. Students enjoy school thoroughly and this is why their attendance is excellent. They are extremely well prepared for the future through the considerable emphasis the school has on preparation for working life for example, through business and social enterprise, the sixth form financial capability programme, and company development. A small percentage of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed concern about discipline, behaviour and bullying in the school. Inspectors found little evidence to support this, although sixth formers did talk of occasional 'annoying' and immature responses by some younger students. Main school students felt that the school is a calm learning environment where any minor issues are dealt with swiftly and effectively. During the inspection movement in and around the school by students was exemplary, they were seen to get on with each other very well indeed and classes were very settled.

Teaching and learning are good. The school is rigorous in the way it monitors the quality of its teaching and senior leaders have a particularly accurate knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. Much work has been done on improving the quality of teaching and on ensuring additional guidance to help develop teaching skills, is directed to those who need it the most. Teaching is generally lively and engaging and provides a good level of challenge for students. There is good use of ICT to support learning and literacy across the curriculum is promoted well. The school works very hard to make links between subjects so that learning is relevant. Some exceptional levels of challenge were seen in dance and drama lessons, with students rising to this and demonstrating outstanding learning. While the school has had a focus on improving the match of work for different groups within each lesson, there is still some inconsistency, especially in identifying on lesson plans what they will learn. While steps have been taken to address the underperformance of some higher attaining students and standards for these are rising, teachers sometimes miss an opportunity to ensure work is planned specifically for these students during each lesson.

The curriculum is outstanding. There is an excellent range of academic courses and good provision for vocational learning. An exceptional array of extra-curricular activities supports the students' work in the performing arts and significantly adds to their personal development. In Key Stage 3, students learn two of four modern foreign languages by Year 8. A good range of opportunities is available in technology, where the carousel system of delivering the component subjects such as resistant materials, graphics and electronics has generated very strong target-setting and assessment models. Students praise these for the way they help them

with their achievements. A very strong programme of personal, social and health education is provided through the wider curriculum with rigorous auditing to ensure it meets requirements fully. In Key Stage 4, three sciences are available along with an additional language, as extra curricular courses. A good range of BTEC vocational courses is provided in school and a work-related pathway is delivered as a one-day experience at a local college, which includes health and beauty, catering, building and vehicle maintenance. At another college, students access courses in horse care and agricultural land management.

The school is well led and managed. The school's view of itself is, in the main, accurate, although the way it rates itself in some aspects is too generous and does not take enough account of the impact of provision on standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good overall and the school is well placed to progress further. Governance is outstanding. The grip that governors have on standards and what the school must do to improve is exceptional and the long-standing budget deficit has been eliminated through their highly prudent management. Given what the school has achieved during the time of the deficit budget, and especially the excellent extra-curricular programmes that have had a considerable impact of the performing arts work and achievement, value for money is excellent. The management of all the learning support provision, including that for lower attaining pupils and those with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is excellent. Liaison with agencies and feeder schools, and communication throughout the school about students' needs, are particularly strong. Through well-targeted support and intervention over the past school year, students with the most complex needs achieved outstandingly well.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Attainment in the sixth form is above average and progress is good. From average attainment on entry, in 2007 students reached average standards. Targets and current standards are above average at AS and A Level. Good analysis of students' levels and target setting by the senior leadership team, management by the sixth form leader and good teaching overall, have lifted standards and achievement this year.

Personal development is outstanding. Students thoroughly enjoy their sixth form experience and work positively as an extremely well organised community to support friends and other students by leading extra-curricular activities. They describe the school as a safe place with a great atmosphere that welcomes everyone. The school council meets termly, supported by regular meetings of year-based 'student voice' groups. Students feel that their views are taken very seriously and acted upon. They highly recommend their school and sixth form because they provide 'more of an all-round education'.

Care, guidance and support in the sixth form is outstanding. Students are particularly well advised on the next stages in their learning and they appreciate the support of their tutors and the Connexions advisers. All groups of learners are provided for well. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are welcomed into the sixth form and all achieve well. Students are fully aware of their targets and current attainment. They understand fully how to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching by planning a better match of work to students' ability in each lesson, and especially for the higher attaining students.

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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	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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	
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	1	
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	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

9 May 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of North Kesteven School, North Hykeham, Lincoln, LN6 9AG

What a pleasure it was to inspect your school and to see how effectively you learn. Thank you for the time you gave, showing us around, meeting with us and discussing your views. The community spirit, which is highly conducive to your learning and your social development, is instantly recognisable; the really positive ethos is a credit to you and the staff. It was impressive to see how you get on with one another, the respect you have for the staff and how exceptionally well you behave. Well done! Although a few parents feel that behaviour is sometimes a problem, we did not find this and you told us how well nearly all students behave.

Your school is a good school and is outstanding in the areas of personal development, the curriculum and care, guidance and support. With its exceptional facilities especially for sport, drama, dance and instrumental tuition, it provides a learning environment in which you thrive particularly well. You make good progress and reach academic standards that are above average. This is because support is excellent and teaching is good. We think, however, the school could do more to plan for the learning of the different groups in each class and challenge the more able students even more. In some areas, your attainment is extremely high and the school does consistently well. Your achievements in performing arts are outstanding and add a great deal to your excellent personal development. The great successes in physical education achieved, the work done on health promotion, the 'eco' work, and preparation for life after school, help support your futures particularly well. You and your parents have said that North Kesteven provides an all round education and we agree.

These positive features do not happen by themselves. They take place because the senior leadership team, led by your extremely clear-sighted headteacher, works exceptionally hard to make North Kesteven the place it is. As your headteacher comes to the end of his time at the school, he has a lot to be proud of and so do you! We wish him every success in his retirement and new ventures and you, good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

George Derby Lead inspector