

Kingsbrook School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122060
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	314206
Inspection dates	26–27 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Alder 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	960
6th form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Steve Parkin
Headteacher	Andy Howlett
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2003
School address	Stratford Road Deanshanger Milton Keynes MK19 6HN
Telephone number	01908 563468
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is situated in a village eight miles west of Milton Keynes. The proportions of students from minority ethnic groups and those who are at an early stage of acquiring the English language are much lower than found nationally. There is also a lower proportion of students with learning difficulties and a much lower proportion who are eligible for free school meals.

The school has been awarded specialist status for business and enterprise.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement and standards in the main school.

Students do not make sufficient progress in their work and so do not achieve the standards of which they are capable. There has been a steady decline in the progress which they make, as shown in both the end-of-Year 9 national tests and the GCSE examinations. In 2007 this culminated in progress being exceptionally low for students in both Year 9 and Year 11, particularly for boys and students who have learning difficulties. In the sixth form, however, standards are above average and improving, and students make good progress.

The school's leaders are well aware of its shortcomings. Their own assessments of the quality of teaching, which inspectors found to be largely accurate, show that in the past, too much has been inadequate and too little good or better. In addition, there have been problems with recruiting new staff. This, combined with an unusually high proportion of staff with long-term absences caused by ill health, has caused the school to be highly reliant on supply teachers. The transient nature of this provision has caused discontinuities in students' learning, along with some problems with behaviour. Both of these issues cause parents concern. The problem is now diminishing to a more acceptable level, as a result of more successful recruitment of new staff.

The school is now acting in a concerted way to resolve these problems, and the recent developments demonstrate that it has the capacity to improve. The governors have recently reorganised themselves and now provide more challenge. They have recognised that their knowledge of the school has been inaccurate in some respects. This has now been rectified. Since September 2007 there has been an increased rigour in the leadership and management of the school. The leaders' monitoring of the school's work, including the quality of teaching, has increased markedly. Effective steps are being taken to improve teaching quality, largely through the school's own resources. The result is that teaching is now satisfactory and the proportion of inadequate lessons has diminished significantly. Too few are of good or outstanding quality, however. Regular assessments of students' learning are also being carried out. These show that, while there is still some way to go, standards are improving in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in all years.

Although a number of parents expressed concern about behaviour, inspectors found that behaviour in lessons and around school is satisfactory. Students say they feel safe, that the incidence of bullying is low and that when bullying does occur it is generally dealt with successfully. Students themselves have discussed bullying and proposed support networks to counter it, which the school has adopted. This is a good example of students' commitment to the school community and of the school's acknowledgement of the value of involving students in evaluating provision through the 'student voice' initiative. Students take care over their health. The food eaten at lunchtime reveals this, as does the extent of sporting activities undertaken through both PE lessons and extra-curricular sporting activities. Their enjoyment of school is at a satisfactory level.

Students are cared for in school and the checks on the progress individuals are making are now much more regular and are acted upon, although safeguarding procedures do not fully meet statutory requirements. Their attendance is good. It has improved as a result of increased rigour in the following up of absences.

The curriculum is satisfactory. A good range of options exists. There is good take-up of the specialist optional subjects, but some of the constraints the school imposes on students' choice cause frustration. Students are strongly involved in enterprise-related work in local primary and secondary schools but, overall, the school's specialism is not having sufficient effect on standards of work.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The attainment of students in the sixth form is above the national average and has improved over the last three years. Standards at A level are higher than in the other sixth form courses, and progress is better. A wide range of subjects is offered at A level, but the provision of vocational courses is more restricted. Retention rates in the sixth form are good and have improved in recent years: in 2007, only about 4% of students admitted to the sixth form did not complete their courses.

Students' personal development is good. Sixth formers are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and to make a positive contribution to the school community through, for example, the prefect system and the leadership of the 'student voice' initiative. Students speak appreciatively of the guidance and support offered to them and of the opportunities that the school provides. The leadership and management of the sixth form are effective in monitoring and, where necessary, improving provision. There is a wide range of well-managed external links, and the views of learners and other stakeholders are actively sought and responded to appropriately.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the progress made by all students, but particularly by boys, by ensuring that all those who are falling behind receive the attention needed to make up lost ground.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that more is of a good or better quality and that it leads to enhanced attitudes to learning by students.
- Ensure that statutory requirements over the safeguarding of students are fully complied with.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 2

There has been a decline over the last three years in the progress which students make. The students who took GCSE examinations in 2007 had standards of work which were above national averages when they joined the school in Year 7. Their GCSE results show that their standards had slipped to being in line with national averages. This represents inadequate progress. Progress was particularly weak in mathematics, one of the school's specialist subjects, and in resistant materials, but was good in art and design and in geography. Boys made markedly less progress than girls, as did students who had learning difficulties. In some subjects, though, boys made good progress, showing what is possible when they are well taught. The national tests showed

that students in Year 9 had also made inadequate progress in English and science since they joined the school in Year 7.

Results for the school's specialist subjects show a mixed picture and the targets were not achieved. Standards in business studies were below the national average, largely because of underachievement by boys. In information and communication technology (ICT), however, results were above the national average.

Current data from the school, along with observation of lessons and a scrutiny of students' work, show that there are now improvements being made in the core subjects in all years. However, standards are still broadly average and progress is not yet satisfactory. There is too much variability between subjects and boys are not yet making sufficient progress, but the school's data indicate some improvement of the performance of students with learning difficulties.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students generally feel safe and behave satisfactorily around school. Attendance is above the national average and exclusion rates are reasonably low. Students have good awareness of what a healthy lifestyle means; most eat healthily and many take part in extra-curricular sport activities. The incidence of smoking appears to be low. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, but lessons in religious education fail to contribute significantly to their spiritual development. Students are keen to lead initiatives, such as the anti-bullying campaign. Learners in all years have numerous opportunities to take on responsibilities: peer behaviour counselling, anti-bullying work and learning partnering are especially noteworthy. Sixth form students have a significant presence in the school as enablers, mentors and guides. They take on responsibility and make good suggestions to improve the school, for example, by tackling litter. Students regularly report developments to the governing body.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Typical lessons proceed at a satisfactory pace and have clear objectives, with plans on how students of different abilities will be catered for. In practice, though, the plans are not acted upon sufficiently and students of differing abilities receive much the same diet. Teaching is no better than satisfactory because there is generally little variety in teaching approaches and not enough opportunity for students to undertake challenging independent work. While a satisfactory degree of learning takes place in lessons, students' approach, and particularly that of boys, is often more one of resignation than of real commitment. In the best lessons, teachers provide a good mix of activities and give students good opportunities for discussion and independent learning. They also assess progress as the lesson develops, intervening or modifying approaches where necessary and providing clear guidance about how to improve. In these lessons students are inspired to learn and they do so with confidence, boys making progress that is equal to that of the girls. Students with learning difficulties are well supported by

teaching assistants when they are deployed to work with them. The marking of students' work is satisfactory overall, but it is inconsistent. Teachers often give targets for improvement, but they are too often ignored by students. As a result, the majority of students know the level they are working at but do not know how to improve. The setting of homework is irregular and often not properly recorded by students, particularly boys.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Specialist business and enterprise status is beginning to have an impact on provision, for example, by providing a business studies lesson for all students in Years 7 to 9. There is also a system of three pathways at Key Stage 4 to cater for students' different interests and aspirations. All students are now required to take either a business studies or applied course. Students are also expected to select one other option from each of the school's faculties, although this has the effect of providing unnecessary restrictions by barring combinations such as geography and history.

Specialist provision is enhanced by means of five enterprise days, including a day of business learning provided via Connexions. The school places a particular priority on 'enterprise capabilities' as a means of enhancing students' capacity for independent learning, problem solving and innovation, and as a tool for promoting learning in all subject areas. This is insufficiently incorporated into day-to-day lessons, however. Work-related learning is well established in the school, although the placing of work experience in the autumn term of Year 11 is less than satisfactory.

There are examples of insufficient regard being paid to students' prior experience. In a Year 7 class, for example, students were told that they were all 'making a fresh start' irrespective of any experience in primary school. There is a varied range of out-of-school sports and other enrichment opportunities which extend students' horizons in all years and in which participation rates are very good.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Effective induction procedures ensure students quickly settle into the school, which provides a supportive and caring ethos where they feel safe and secure. The inclusion unit minimises the impact of any unsatisfactory behaviour in the classroom. It helps students to develop useful behaviour management strategies.

Students' personal development is helped by the provision of teaching about sex and drug abuse. Confidential drop-in sessions are available, run by the school nurse and an independent outside agency. There is effective support for vulnerable pupils. Individual education plans for pupils who find learning more difficult are well written and provide useful advice. However, too many teachers take insufficient account of their content when planning lessons. Formal arrangements for safeguarding students are developing but are not yet sufficiently robust.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

A reorganisation of the leadership and management of the school is resulting in improvements. Leaders are held to account much more. There are regular and frequent one-to-one meetings between the headteacher and other senior leaders to check that progress is being made at an acceptable rate in their areas of responsibility. The governors, recognising the recent decline in the quality of education provided, now hold the school's leaders much more to account. Monitoring and evaluation are more detailed and are used to focus on where improvements are particularly needed. There are robust and effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching. A range of intervention strategies has recently been implemented to help students who are underachieving, particularly in Years 9 and 11. These are beginning to improve learning for the students involved. The school's targets are appropriately challenging and are being used to focus interventions to raise standards. The school has yet to extend such strategies to pupils of all ages and abilities. Nevertheless, improvements in the progress being made in all year groups are now evident.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	4	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	3
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

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?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

28 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Kingsbrook School, Deanshanger, Northamptonshire MK19 6HN

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school recently. We spoke to a good number of you in meetings, lessons or around the school. Thanks to those of you who helped us find our way around too!

We found some good, positive things about your school. Students in the sixth form are doing particularly well, both in their subjects and as role models for the younger students. We were pleased to note that your attendance is good, and has improved recently. We found that your behaviour is satisfactory, and that you have a good level of healthiness. Most of you eat a healthy diet in school, the number of you who smoke is relatively small and you generally get a good amount of exercise. You told us that the amount of bullying is quite low and that it is usually well dealt with when it happens. As students you should feel pleased that many of you are involved in anti-bullying activities. You also make other positive contributions to your school life through 'student voice'.

There were some areas of your school that need to be improved, however. The two main ones are that you should be making better progress than you are in your work, and that teaching should improve so that more is of a good or better quality. You can help in this. It struck inspectors that in lessons you tend to be not very involved in your own learning, and you are often rather passive. When you get the opportunity to do some independent work, make the most of it so your teachers know that you can learn well in that way. We also noticed that when homework is set, many of you do not write it down. That must mean that many of you forget to do it. The other area to improve is more minor but relates to government requirements for schools' safeguarding procedures.

Because of the lack of progress you have been making in your work, we have given your school a Notice to Improve. That means that an inspector will visit in a few months' time to check how well things are going. There will be another inspection in 12 to 16 months' time to see if the necessary improvements have been made.

Best wishes for your future,

Alan Alder Her Majesty's Inspector

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