

Queen Elizabeth Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112428
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325604
Inspection date	24 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Brian Dower

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 (total)	830
Sixth form	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Susan Thomas
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Kirkup
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2006
School address	Ullswater Road Penrith Cumbria CA11 7EG
Telephone number	01768 864621
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an additional inspector.

He evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and students' progress and achievement in English by the end of Year 11. He looked at the quality of teaching and learning across all key stages, particularly students' ability to work independently and to take responsibility for their own learning. He also examined the school's monitoring and evaluation of students' current progress and the guidance students receive on how well they were doing and what they need to do to improve. The impact of the school's specialist status on provision and standards and the effectiveness of the school's efforts to promote community cohesion were also explored.

Evidence was collected from the school's self-evaluation, nationally published assessment data, the school's records of students' progress and standards, observations of lessons and the school's plans for further improvement. Discussions with students, staff and governors were held and questionnaires returned by parents were considered. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified. These have been included, where appropriate, in this report.

Description of the school

Queen Elizabeth Grammar School is average in size. It has a selective intake of students. It serves a large rural area with many students having to travel long distances to school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low. Few students have special educational needs or come from minority ethnic backgrounds. Students are predominantly of White British heritage. The school has specialist status for mathematics and computing, as well as holding the Healthy Schools and International School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It has the support of parents and is oversubscribed.

Students' attainment at the start of Year 7 is well above average. Standards by the end of Year 11 remain well above average overall but are exceptionally high in terms of the proportion of students gaining the top A* and A grades in the GCSE examinations. Progress and achievement are outstanding. The school's monitoring and evaluation of students' current work and inspection evidence shows that progress continues to be excellent. Students' progress in English has been variable in recent years but is now good because of the effective measures the school has taken to address past underachievement. Students have excellent basic skills and they use these flexibly and effectively across the curriculum. Their mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are particularly well developed because of the opportunities provided by the school's specialist status for independent work in school and the local community. That status has also contributed to very high standards in other subjects such as science and design and technology.

The school is committed to equality of opportunity. It invests considerable time and energy in ensuring that vulnerable students, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the small number from minority ethnic backgrounds have the same educational chances as others. Timely and appropriate guidance helps students to make informed choices about examination courses, post-sixteen opportunities and future career options. The vast majority proceed to sixth form academic studies but the minority who do not receive extensive support and advice to ensure that they fulfil their potential through alternative pathways. This exceptional attention to the needs of every student is indicative of the school's inclusiveness. An excellent pastoral system and close links with outside agencies and other schools ensure that every student receives the care and support they need. The result is a harmonious learning community, based on respect for others. The school's influence in the local and wider communities is extensive. For example, older students use their expertise in mathematics and computing to provide enrichment activities for primary school pupils and to support the local group of cub scouts. They work with older people in the community and undertake charitable and conservation projects. There are links with a school in Uganda and a range of educational visits abroad which do much for their social development and their cultural awareness. The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding.

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. Students enjoy school, grow in maturity and independence and are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education. Their qualifications, skills and personal qualities equip them to make the most of future economic opportunities. Students say bullying is rare and dealt with effectively on the very few occasions it arises; that they feel safe and supported at all times. Safeguarding procedures are effective and meet government requirements. Students have timetabled physical education lessons and many take part in a range of sports at lunch times and after school. There is excellent attendance at the Wednesday afternoon sports activities for Years 11, 12 and 13. Students eat healthily. Their social, cultural and personal development is enhanced by an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. For example, the school productions leave an indelible impression on the many students who participate. They speak about their gains in self-confidence because they have to put their communication skills to the test of public scrutiny and trust in others to work as a team. The productions are enjoyed by the audience and participants, and students

experience success. Students are morally aware. They know that with rights come responsibilities. They are sensitive to the impact of their actions on others. Their spiritual development is excellent because they question and reflect on life's imponderables, they are aware of the diversity of faiths and cultures and they are confident of their own individuality and worth.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teaching is consistently good and often inspiring. Students are lively and inquisitive. They talk about their teachers having 'personality'. This is evident in the enthusiasm their teachers have for their subjects, their sense of humour and their ability to make learning fun as well as challenging. Students say that expectations of them are high, that they are made to work hard and that this is how they want it to be. They are perceptive. In a poetry lesson, a Year 11 girl was quick to spot the cultural and social divide in American society when a garbage truck waited at lights alongside a limousine. The symbolism of the dirty refuse collectors looking down on the beautiful people was not lost on her. Students are independent learners. In a Year 10 chemistry lesson, students were using computer programmes to research parts of the syllabus they felt uncertain about. Students' ability to use technology as a learning tool is highly developed and is another example of the influence of the school's specialist status. There are occasions when learning activities are restricted because of the pressure on accommodation in an oversubscribed school and because some teaching rooms are small for the number of students in the class.

The curriculum is excellent. It is geared to the academic needs of the students and provides exceptionally well for their future studies. The specialist status has broadened provision. For example, an advanced supplementary computing course is taken by Year 11 students. A wide range of enrichment activities contributes to students' enjoyment and achievement. The programme for gifted and talented students, for example, covers the mathematics challenge, the Arkwright Scholarship, individual and group Oxbridge tuition and science and engineering workshops. There are clubs, sports leadership awards and history and mathematics extension paper classes. Equal weight is given to students' personal development and their creative and enterprise education through the personal, social, health, citizenship and life skills programmes. Years 9 and 10 have days off timetable for enterprise education. Music is strong in the school; with an outstanding orchestra and flourishing ensembles for wind, strings and a school and chamber choir. The school is not standing still and has plans to achieve a second specialism to broaden provision further.

The school is well led by an experienced and able senior team and committed and enthusiastic subject and pastoral coordinators. They can point to considerable success in motivating students to maintain and build on the high academic standards they brought to the school. There have been significant improvements, for example, in the proportion of students attaining at the top GCSE grades. Leaders have provided for students' development by giving them the skills and nurturing the personal qualities for future success. They have tackled the issues for improvement from the previous inspection in the assessment and marking of students' work and in the sharing of best practice for teaching and learning. Governors are knowledgeable and closely involved in the day-to-day life of the school. They are supportive and encouraging as well as expecting a lot from students and staff. Self-evaluation is accurate and appropriate priorities are in place to build on what has already been achieved. The chair of governors captures the uniqueness of the school when she says that it is outward looking. Students have extensive opportunities to be involved in life outside the classroom and to contribute to the local and wider community.

The school has an excellent capacity to improve further because leadership, management and governance are outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is outstanding.

Students' attainment on entry is average. This means they have the skills and qualifications which are typical of students in most post sixteen schools or colleges. Students' progress and achievement are excellent and by the time they leave standards are above average overall, and well above average in many subjects. In 2008, for example, students attained well above average grades in design and technology, art and design, drama, geography, physics, religious studies and environmental science. The proportion of students attaining at the higher grades A and B in most subjects that year was well above average.

Students are highly motivated and are appreciative of the provision made. Retention rates are high. Achievement is excellent as a result of experienced and knowledgeable teaching and students' ability to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning. The academic curriculum is designed to meet the aspirations of students and prepares them well for higher education. Students' personal development is excellent. They show initiative and enterprise. They are taking the lead, for example, in promoting the cause of conservation and sustainability throughout the school. The Year 10 assembly they led, blended humour, rap music and serious points and the younger students listened intently. Sixth form students feel they are very well supported both on a personal level and through academic monitoring. There is excellent provision to help students make higher education choices. Self-reliance is encouraged and students have ready access to modern technology as an aid to learning.

The sixth form is exceptionally well led and managed. Subject leaders and tutors know the students well because they have worked alongside them since Year 7. They are therefore skilled in providing the right level of academic challenge to get the best from them and in providing appropriate care and guidance at critical points. The capacity to improve further is excellent.

What the school should do to improve further

- There are no significant issues for improvement.

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.

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?	1	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?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which 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 learners' needs?	1	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

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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	

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

27 April 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth Grammar School, Cumbria, CA11 7EG

Thank you for welcoming me to your school. The one day I spent with you allowed me to see a sample of your lessons and to look at your books and your teachers' assessment records. I spoke to many of you and to senior members of staff. I did my homework before coming by reading a range of school documents. The result was that I was able to give an outstanding judgement on the quality of the education you receive.

You attain well above average standards in your academic work by the end of Year 11 and in the sixth form. I found you to be mature and responsible young people and you have the skills and personal qualities to make the most of your education. You work well in group activities and independently. Many of you help others in the local community through links with the primary schools and with organisations like the cub scouts. Behaviour and the concern you show for others is exceptional. Your personal development is excellent.

The school's specialist status in mathematics and computing has raised standards and given you the skills to make the most of future economic opportunities. You also benefit from an excellent range of extra-curricular activities and visits away in this country and abroad. Students I met spoke about the enjoyment and sense of achievement they experienced from being part of the school productions. They also expressed their appreciation of the level of care and support they receive and the guidance given when they have to make decisions about courses and higher education applications.

I know that space is at a premium because your school is popular and oversubscribed. This can at times restrict the range of learning activities undertaken in class, although not the quality of your learning. Apart from this, the capacity of the school to improve further is excellent because of the commitment and enthusiasm of the staff and your impressive attitudes to your work and your support for each other.

My best wishes to you all.

Yours sincerely

Brian Dower

Lead inspector