

The King John School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115319
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326178
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Robert Drew

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 (total)	1816
Sixth form	229
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Surinder Kaur
Headteacher	Miss Margaret Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2005
School address	Shipwrights Drive Thundersley Benfleet Essex SS7 1RQ
Telephone number	01702558284
Fax number	01702555636

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	16–17 October 2008
Inspection number	326178

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is much larger than most secondary schools. It serves the residential district of Thundersley and Benfleet near Southend. Students' attainment on entry is above average and far fewer than usual have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of students are White British with very few from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school holds the Sportmark and Artsmark Gold awards. Several staff, including the headteacher, have recently provided additional leadership and support for other schools and academies nationwide.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This good school has many outstanding features. Parents and students are right to be strongly supportive. A high proportion of parents who responded to the questionnaire were happy with all the school offers. It already promotes high standards and good achievement, stemming from good leadership and management and the effective teaching which predominates. The headteacher's leadership brings outstanding direction, drive and care to the role. The senior team support her very well and together they have improved the school well since the last inspection. Recently, middle managers have gained significantly in confidence and have provided an additional force for change. As a result, there is now an excellent capacity for further improvement.

A major success over the years has been the development of students' personal skills, their maturity and their enjoyment of school. Personal development is outstanding. It reflects the excellent guidance, support and care provided by teachers and non-teaching staff and the effective tracking systems now in place. Students' enjoyment, attendance, awareness of safety and health issues are excellent. They make an outstanding contribution to their own school and its local community as well as internationally, through sport and music, charity fund-raising, and visits and links with schools abroad.

Standards in the main school are high and achievement is good. GCSE results are well above average and rising, representing good progress from students' starting points. There are particular strengths and a few relative weaknesses in achievement. The proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C passes including English and mathematics, for instance, is outstanding, far exceeds predictions and is a major strength. At the same time, in most recent years the proportion of students gaining A* to A passes has been broadly average, and Key Stage 3 achievement has been satisfactory rather than good. Unvalidated results for 2008 suggest a marked improvement at Key Stage 3 and some gains at GCSE A* to A.

The school's specialisms, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), make an excellent contribution to standards and the learning skills acquired by students. This has helped raise standards, not only in these subjects, but also by enhancing progress throughout the curriculum. Where the school has noted aspects of underperformance by students, it has adjusted its curriculum well. The curriculum is now excellent and is enhanced by outstanding extra-curricular provision. New courses are already having an effect on supporting less able students more effectively and meeting students' preferences successfully. Out-of-hours clubs, societies and events are too numerous to list but all are of outstanding quality. They contribute to personal development very effectively and offer extensive scope for students to contribute to the local community and help others further afield.

Teaching and learning are good overall. There is some outstanding practice, while the quality in a significant minority is satisfactory. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Strengths include the good relationships which prevail, highly attentive students, and staff who are clear and authoritative. High expectations are typical. In the best lessons, there is very strong pace, heavy involvement of students and good matching of work to differing abilities. However, more often and partly because planning is variable, the full ability range is less well catered for, leading to a lack of challenge for the most able.

The school's contribution to community cohesion is excellent. Many parents see the school as a focus for community activities and strongly support events on its premises. Students participate

far more eagerly and extensively than usual in local music, sporting and charitable events. Links with business and other schools are very strong.

Self-evaluation is good. It identifies the right areas and in most cases ensures rapid improvement. Middle managers have benefited from the headteacher's focus on their roles and several have gained extra experience from working in other schools. The governing body is well informed, is strongly supportive and carries out the role of 'critical friend' effectively.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The successful sixth form offers a very wide range of courses that increasingly attract students from the main school and from the surrounding area. Standards in A-level courses are now in line with those nationally, reflecting the good progress most students make in their courses from a below average starting point.

The school offers over 30 subjects at A level as well as higher-level diplomas in sports, beauty therapy, business, ICT, and hospitality and catering. Enhancements include general studies, critical studies and a social responsibility scheme. Students show considerable responsibility for their own study time and are actively involved in mentoring and supporting younger students in different activities, including whole-school cross-curricular days. The school has worked hard to establish outstanding procedures for tracking and supporting progress. Students value the encouragement and support that enables many more to apply successfully for university.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Many lessons are well planned and taught by specialists, though on occasion the focus on providing authoritative knowledge is at the expense of ensuring that students are actively involved in their learning in lessons.

Strong and well-informed leadership of the sixth form is grounded in excellent self-evaluation. It is well supported by subject co-ordinators, tutors and pastoral support staff and has resulted in significant improvements in provision. These improvements are now having an increasingly positive impact on students' success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase achievement further by raising the proportion of outstanding teaching. To do this, ensure that lesson planning is consistent and explicit in promoting challenging work for the most able pupils and the full, active involvement of students generally.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The school helps students reach standards by the end of Year 11 that are significantly above average and which continue to rise. GCSE results are high in general and a particular strength is the outstanding proportion gaining five or more A* to C passes including English and mathematics. A good number of subjects exceed 80% passes at grade C or above, with students doing especially well in design and technology, English, mathematics, Spanish, French, geography, religious education, art and design, music, dance and economics. Standards in mathematics have recently risen steeply and an improving trend is evident in science. Both subjects are above average.

In the main school, achievement is good. From an above average starting point, students in general reach significantly above average standards. In recent years, fewer have gained A* to A passes than could be expected and action to improve this is having an effect. A small minority

of students have underperformed, but changes to the curriculum have addressed this issue. Standards attained in Key Stage 3 are significantly above the national average but achievement has been satisfactory rather than good in most recent years, with science results holding down the overall performance. Unvalidated results for 2008 indicate significant improvement in Key Stage 3 standards and progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding. This success derives from a wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities and commitment to an effective pastoral system. Excellent behaviour is an outstanding feature of the school and students take pride in their appearance. Relationships are very positive and students respond to staff and fellow students with respect and consideration. The school has achieved both Sportsmark Gold and Artsmark Gold. The performing arts are lively and well supported, with a choir that performs throughout the year and numerous clubs and productions. The remarkable number of sporting activities and the provision of good, well-balanced meals produce highly positive attitudes to healthy lifestyles. Students make much-valued contributions, such as acting as guides for parental tours and promoting and running theatrical productions. Attendance is well above the national level and is another indicator of students' enjoyment of their school life. While moral, social and cultural aspects are of high quality, there is less emphasis given to the spiritual dimension. All sixth-form students opt to do community service and many readily organise and participate in diverse whole-school activities, including many sports, musical events, drama productions and a school radio station.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall and help to ensure good academic progress. They also contribute to the excellent personal development of students. There is some exceptional practice, a minority that is satisfactory and none that is unsatisfactory. Good relationships and impressive subject knowledge are constant features. Equally, good behaviour and high overall expectations regularly form the basis for successful lessons. Another common strength is the high quality of explanations and instructions teachers give. In lessons with excellent teaching, students are fully engaged throughout and contribute extensively. The match of work to different abilities is a strength here and pace is generally extremely strong. Where teaching and learning are satisfactory, these features tend to be underplayed and in several good lessons, the potential for outstanding learning was hindered by the over-dominance of the teacher's contribution. Most teachers use assessment data well to set individual targets. Those students who find learning difficult make good progress, reflecting increasingly effective use of resources and curriculum.

The quality of lesson planning is too variable. Plans that explicitly identify time deadlines and extension work nearly always lead to high pace and challenging tasks for the most able, but a small proportion of lesson planning lacks these features and their impact is weakened.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets the needs and interests of all students exceptionally well. Following the last inspection, the school introduced a comprehensive and popular range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4, resulting in improvements to achievement, motivation and attendance. Students capable of a more demanding academic curriculum continue to be well provided for. Throughout the school, students study Skills Acquisition and Common Knowledge, which includes citizenship. Almost all curricular provision is accredited, thus increasing students' pride in their achievements. For example, they have the opportunity to gain a first-aid qualification. Excellent provision and take-up of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits, some of which are also accredited, greatly enhance students' experiences.

The school is an important focus for extended provision within the community, especially because of its specialist school status. Extensive mathematics and ICT support for primary schools is highly valued. The school remains committed to work-related learning. It acknowledges the need to strengthen provision for religious education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are responsible for an excellent sense of self-worth and personal development in students. They are confident and articulate, as they know that all staff greatly value their opinions. The student voice forums and the school council contribute to this. The trained staff in the Student Services centre offer outstanding support to pupils and parents. Pastoral assistants provide an effective link with tutors and heads of year. The high quality of the relationships throughout the school means that students appreciate the very effective support and advice they receive. Teachers monitor academic progress well, though the school appreciates the scope for more administrative efficiency in this area. Safeguarding procedures are thorough, sensible and coherent and students feel well cared for. Incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with immediately and effectively when they occur. Awareness of the financial demands and rewards of the world beyond school is encouraged through excellent careers advice and guidance throughout the school. Transition into this large school is assisted in numerous ways, including Year 8 students visiting local primary schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is very effectively led and managed at all levels. Outstanding, visionary and gifted leadership of the headteacher, together with an able senior leadership team, and loyal and hard-working staff mean planning for the future is very successful. The school has an accurate view of its strengths and areas in need of development. Leaders set clear direction and monitor its work rigorously. Central to its purpose is a sharp focus on the quality of learning and personal development, leading to improved standards of education. As a result, the school has met or exceeded challenging targets. Senior staff delegate well and have inspired teachers to take risks, lead initiatives and work in teams in a highly supportive environment. 'Leading from the middle' training has been instrumental in equipping managers for their responsibilities. Careful analysis of staff needs and commitment to professional development are strengths. For example, fifteen members of staff are currently completing masters degrees in leading learning.

Governors support and challenge the school well. The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding, particularly in its partnership with primary schools. In the last two years, the new sixth form leadership has been successful in bringing about considerable improvements. These include ensuring that students are provided with varied and appropriate programmes in which they can succeed, and extending to the sixth form the outstanding procedures for tracking and supporting students in the main school. The school works exceptionally well to include all groups of students.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

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	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	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

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	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
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	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	

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

20 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The King John School, Essex, SS7 1RQ

Thank you for the welcome you gave me and my team during our recent visit. We were greatly impressed by your maturity, excellent behaviour and the high quality of so much that the school does. You and your parents are right to be extremely supportive of the school: it is already good, it has many outstanding features and it is still improving.

Its greatest strengths include:

- standards which are well above average overall
- outstanding pass rates, where students gain five or more A* to C passes at GCSE including English and mathematics
- good achievement, that is, your progress between entering and leaving the school
- good teaching, with some that is outstanding and none that is unsatisfactory
- your own excellent personal development, including your willingness to help other pupils and the local community, your attendance and enjoyment of school
- good leadership and management, with an outstanding contribution from the headteacher
- an excellent curriculum
- an excellent contribution to the school's work arising from its specialisms in ICT and mathematics
- staff care for you extremely well.

If it is to improve even further it needs to:

- lift your good progress to excellent levels by increasing the amount of outstanding teaching. Your best lessons already allow you to get fully involved and they always include demanding work for the most able. More need to follow this example.

Best wishes for the rest of your time at King John.

Yours sincerely

Bob Drew

Lead inspector