

Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Horncastle

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120707
Local Authority	Lincolnshire
Inspection number	327349
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	877
Sixth form	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Margaret Sergeant
Headteacher	Mr Tim Peacock
Date of previous school inspection	22 March 2006
School address	West Street Horncastle Lincolnshire LN9 5AD
Telephone number	01507 522465
Fax number	01507 527711

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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

Queen Elizabeth's is a selective school drawing students from rural areas and small villages. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds although a range of other ethnic groups are represented. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low, as is the proportion eligible for free school meals. A growing number of students join the school's sixth form, in Year 12.

In 2003, Queen Elizabeth's gained joint specialist status for science and mathematics in partnership with a neighbouring school. A second specialism for modern languages was added in 2008. It holds the EcoSchools and Healthy Schools awards, and is the lead centre for an Extended Schools Cluster.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Queen Elizabeth's is a good and improving school, highly regarded by the local community. Its capacity to sustain improvement in the future is also good. The school's specialism in science and mathematics is strongly felt, not only in the enhanced resources and rising levels of attainment in these subjects, but also in excellent collaborative work with other secondary and primary schools. A carefully constructed induction programme involving visits and high quality 'workshop' activities ensure that Year 7 students are fully prepared for the challenges of their new school.

Excellent relationships, exemplary behaviour and positive attitudes help to create a thriving learning community. This contributes to the students' good personal development and well-being, which is well supported by parents. Students show awareness of the needs of others through involvement in school and charity events, and community projects. These opportunities contribute to excellent social and moral development. Spiritual and cultural aspects are less well developed, for example, older learners feel they are not sufficiently aware of different cultures. Opportunities to take responsibility, to provide feedback, and to influence improvements within the school are strong features in the sixth form. These aspects are underdeveloped in Years 7 to 11. Students do not have sufficient planned opportunities in citizenship, for example, to participate and understand democracy in action. Students appreciate the good care, support and guidance they receive. The good and improving curriculum is complemented by popular enrichment activities, visits and exchanges. This greatly enhances students' experiences, enjoyment and motivation.

Students enter the school with exceptionally high standards. These standards are maintained at the end of Key Stage 3, and are rising in Key Stage 4. In 2008, standards in GCSE performance were exceptionally high. Overall, students make excellent progress, although there is some variation in rates of progress across key stages and between subjects. The school continues to improve the proportion of top grades in GCSE and is rightly focusing on consistency across subjects. In 2008, the rate of progress made by students from Year 7 to Year 11 improved on recent years. Progress was excellent overall in mathematics but less strong in English. Analysis highlights a small minority of able students who did not make the progress expected from their high attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. A newly formed gifted and talented advisory group is supporting this priority through guidance on planning, and the use of enrichment activities, such as 'masterclasses' in mathematics. Good leadership is demonstrated in the steps taken to tackle areas where progress is less than expected, such as the focus on writing skills in Key Stage 3, and improved systems to analyse assessment and progress information, in English language. The recently introduced departmental review and quality assurance process is proving to be a helpful strategy for supporting consistency, for example, in assessment, presentation and the marking of students' work across departments. However, it is not yet sufficiently embedded to include all subjects or provision delivered across the curriculum, such as in information and communications technology (ICT).

Teaching and learning is good overall, with examples of outstanding teaching, helping students to achieve well. The impact of the more recent languages specialism is beginning to be felt. Increased ICT resources have led to more varied teaching styles. Strengths in teaching lie in excellent subject knowledge, high expectations, enthusiasm and the commitment of teachers and support staff. In the very best lessons, students thrive because they are provided with opportunities to be actively involved in their learning, and receive regular feedback on their

progress. Teachers do not always provide more able students with challenging learning tasks to accelerate their progress. Marking is inconsistent; the best examples of marking are frequent and thorough with a clear indication to students of how to improve their work.

School leaders and governors provide good leadership overall and relish opportunities through specialist status and excellent partnerships to work with others to build on the school's success. However, they have not specifically considered the implications of the duty to promote community cohesion for the school. Although there are some good aspects such as the promotion of shared values and equal opportunities, a strategy has not been agreed to extend students' understanding of community cohesion and cultural diversity across local, national and global communities.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The school judges the sixth form to be outstanding and inspectors support this view. Teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. Students value their teachers' excellent subject knowledge, and the inspiration and ready support which teachers provide. Students progress well and reach excellent standards. They are encouraged to work independently and they show an eagerness to improve. Retention rates are very high. Students take responsibilities in many aspects of school life by, for example, serving as prefects, leading sports activities, organising 'peer listening' and serving as 'buddies' to help younger pupils settle in. An impressive range of sports, music, charity and other activities is on offer outside lessons, and the uptake is very high. Students benefit from high-quality advice and support when considering their move to the next stage of education. Students say they feel valued and know that their views are heard and taken seriously. Leadership and management are exemplary, ensuring that provision is monitored and improved, making effective use of external organisations to enhance students' all-round education. Resources, some of which are quite stretched because of the high number of students, are used as effectively as possible to foster students' learning and personal development.

What the school should do to improve further

- Agree and implement a strategy for the promotion of community cohesion to increase understanding of equality and diversity, and of local, national and global communities.
- Refine and embed the departmental review and quality assurance process to strengthen provision and consistency in line with the school's best practice.
- Ensure that students' personal development is enhanced through the planned audit of citizenship across the curriculum, in order to secure a consistent and coherent programme for students across the age range.
- Strengthen the use of 'student voice' in contributing to the school's improvement in the main school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

In 2008, at Key Stage 4 standards in GCSE performance were exceptionally high. The overwhelming majority of students achieved five or more higher grades, including English and mathematics, to prepare them very well for the next stage in their education. They sustained excellent progress from their high starting points. Business studies, French, history, religious

studies and statistics all made a very positive contribution to the school's results. There were a small number of other subjects where students did not achieve as expected.

At Key Stage 3, in 2007, students maintained exceptionally high standards and made good progress, particularly in science. Subject leaders are looking increasingly at progress linked to National Curriculum levels from Key Stage 2 to further increase challenge and aspirations.

Systems to track student progress have been strengthened and recently refined. Consequently, leaders are better able to identify students at risk of falling behind and to determine appropriate intervention strategies to keep them on track. This is now supported by a comprehensive assessment of students in Year 7 across all subjects to secure an accurate measure of attainment on entry. Confidence is growing in the use of assessment information by subject leaders.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy school as reflected in outstanding levels of attendance, and an enthusiasm for learning. Students are advised well about healthy eating and the need for regular exercise and this is recognised through the Healthy Schools Award. There are significant strengths in students' personal development in the level of personal care they receive, in social and moral development and in the effective working relationships between students and with their teachers. Students feel safe in school and are well informed about how to stay safe. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent.

Students have a good understanding of further education and career opportunities. The promotion of , students' economic well-being are hampered by inconsistencies in the provision for citizenship across subjects. The school council makes a good contribution to school life although there is scope for further development in allowing students opportunities to organise and run their own meetings, and in promoting greater involvement and responsibility within the school. Although older students appreciate the opportunity to study a high number of subjects they say that homework demands can be very heavy. School leaders plan to look closely at this. Older students particularly enjoy greater choice within physical education (PE) lessons to develop their skills and interests.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Most lessons are well planned to ensure a variety of activities and teaching strategies are used. Teachers manage their classes well, promoting excellent relationships and, consequently students enjoy their lessons. Students especially enjoy lessons which provide a good level of interaction with practical activities to support their learning. Students show considerable maturity in lessons when challenged to extend their thinking and appear keen to broaden their knowledge and understanding. Students work well as individuals, and enjoy opportunities for collaborative learning in pairs and groups. ICT is used increasingly as an effective tool for teaching and learning. In outstanding lessons teachers engender enthusiasm; challenge students progressively through a variety of tasks, and use questions expertly to both engage them, and deepen their learning. In these lessons learning is reviewed regularly to adjust the pace, and to tailor support for individuals and groups.

The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is improving through greater involvement of middle leaders. However, it is not yet systematic enough to strengthen consistency in the use of assessment information, for example, in planning lessons that provide greater challenge for more able students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good quality curriculum provides opportunities for all students, including the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties, to progress and perform well. Improvements have been made to the curriculum since the last inspection, by the addition of a number of courses. In Year 10, the school is piloting 'The European Computer Driving Licence' course to better meet the needs of students. At Key Stage 4, in response to student requests, the school now provides dance and PE courses.

At post-16, the engineering diploma is being delivered, supported by the latest interactive equipment and technology, although progression is not available for students in Key Stage 4. The specialist status of the school is having an increasingly positive impact across a number of areas, broadening the range of courses and popular enrichment activities.

The school recognises that the programme for personal development does not provide sufficient opportunities to fully meet the requirements for citizenship. This closely mirrors feedback from parents in a recent school questionnaire. Opportunities to widen students' understanding and appreciation of Britain's diverse cultures are underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Teachers and other staff provide a high level of personal care to students, who report that they are confident in discussing problems with teachers and other staff. The school provides a very secure place for learning and personal development.

The academic guidance that students receive in terms of marking, assessment and the setting of personal targets is good overall but is inconsistent. Students are not always aware of their current progress, as marking does not consistently provide detailed comments with targets showing the steps necessary to improve. It is a similar picture with regard to assessment of students' overall progress. This means that in some lessons the range of ability in classes is not consistently catered for to further accelerate students' progress. Academic guidance is a stronger feature within the sixth form.

Procedures for child protection and for safeguarding are in place. However, there is no formal cover for the teacher responsible for child protection should she be absent. There has been limited recent training for all staff in child protection matters.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher is well supported by his management team and together they ensure a clear focus on raising achievement. Staff performance management and professional development are more closely linked to students' academic targets. The 'Teaching and Learning' group is

making a good contribution to professional development, facilitating the sharing of skills and expertise, such as in the use of interactive whiteboards.

Although the school's self-evaluation is over generous there is a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement, and the need to strengthen consistency in line with best practice. There are effective links to planning at whole-school and department level although action plans are not consistently in place to ensure that progress is measured and evaluated regularly.

The revised departmental reviews based on the analysis of performance, classroom observation and work scrutiny are beginning to strengthen the role and capacity of middle leaders, and are improving the link between senior and middle leaders. This is building good capacity across the school, extending leadership skills, and supporting the sharing of good practice. Senior leaders recognise the need to consolidate and extend this aspect of the school's work.

The governing body is very supportive and committed to the school's improvement, and involve themselves actively in school events. They receive regular reports on the school's work. They are not directly involved in gathering first hand evidence to contribute more directly to the school's self-evaluation. The majority of parents are very positive about the school, its provision and achievements. A small minority express concern that the school does not take account of parental and student views.

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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	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	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?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

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?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
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 eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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**

23 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School Horncastle LN9 5AD

Thank you for being so welcoming when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking to you, and hearing how much you enjoyed school and the activities on offer. We were particularly impressed with your excellent attitudes to learning, and exemplary behaviour. Queen Elizabeth's is a good and improving school, and the sixth form is outstanding. The standards you reach in school are exceptionally high and you make excellent progress because of your positive attitudes, the commitment of staff, and the support of your parents. You recognise the benefits of being a specialist school with the additional resources available to make learning more enjoyable, such as through ICT, and opportunities for visits and exchanges.

The headteacher and staff provide you with a safe and stimulating learning environment. You all appreciate the support you receive. Sixth form students are enthusiastic about the high quality guidance and support available. The sixth form undertakes most responsibilities and this makes a hugely positive contribution to students' personal development. We have suggested that students in the main school have more opportunities to take responsibility, and to be involved in the school's further improvement.

The quality of teaching is generally good across the school. You told us that lessons vary between subjects and teachers. We have asked school leaders to strengthen consistency across departments. Students in Key Stage 4 recognise that it is difficult to fit everything into the curriculum. They did not think that enough time was given over to personal development, to exploring issues in citizenship, or in developing an understanding and appreciation of different cultures. The inspection team agreed. We have asked the school to strengthen understanding of local, national and global communities, and opportunities for you to work with others from different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds.

The headteacher and senior staff work very hard to support your success in school, and are extremely proud of your achievements. Specialist and Extended School status are providing opportunities for further improvements. I hope that you will all play a part in this.

I wish you all every success in the future.

Nada Trikic

Her Majesty's Inspector