

Kingsdown School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126502
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	328509
Inspection date	15 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Nick Green HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Guy Duncan
Headteacher	Wendy Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	2 November 2005
School address	Hyde Road Stratton St Margaret Swindon SN2 7SH
Telephone number	01793 822284
Fax number	01793 828726

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. The inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: evidence to corroborate if students' personal development and well-being and the quality of provision were outstanding, and the effectiveness of leadership and management, gathering evidence from data, discussions with students and staff and observation of lessons. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average in size and has been a specialist technology school for five years, encompassing mathematics, science, design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT). Most students are of White British heritage from predominantly favourable socio-economic backgrounds. A small numbers of students are from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is a third of the national average. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. The school is the designated centre for secondary aged children in Swindon with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD).

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's overall effectiveness is good as students' achievement is good. However, in most other respects, Kingsdown is an outstanding school. The school has taken very effective steps to improve since the last inspection and this is evident in the improvements in students' personal development and well-being, in the curriculum, and in the care, guidance and support provided for all students. Parents justifiably have great confidence in the school; one rightly described it as being a place where 'children are encouraged to work to the best of their ability'. The school's recent significant improvement and outstanding capacity to improve further owe a lot to the excellent leadership and management of the headteacher, the highly effective senior leadership team and the strong middle managers whose clear vision and direction set high expectations for staff and students.

Standards in national tests and examinations have been above average for the last four years. In English and mathematics, standards in Year 9 have fluctuated a little over this period, whilst in science they have remained consistently high. When dips in performance have occurred these have been rectified, for example last year standards improved in mathematics because of effective intervention by the school. Standards in students' best eight GCSE examinations are above average and the number attaining five or more A* to C passes including English and mathematics has been above average until the last academic year when it was in line with the national figure. Given the starting points of students when they join the school, progress and achievement are good. In design and technology, science and physical education students' attainment is exceptionally high and their achievement is outstanding. There are no significant differences between the performance of boys and girls and no group of students underperforms. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are given well matched support to enable them to progress as well as all other students. Current standards and levels of progress indicate students are on track to achieve better results by the end of this academic year.

A great strength of the school is the way it effectively promotes students' personal development and well-being. Students' enjoyment of their education is outstanding and this is clearly reflected in the very high attendance, positive attitudes to learning, very good behaviour and excellent relationships with staff. As one student commented to inspectors, 'School is exciting, variable and every day is different.' Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good as exhibited by the thoughtful responses in discussions about school and wider issues and the considerate attitudes towards each other and adults. Students have an excellent understanding of how to manage risk in their own lives; they adopt safe practices in lessons, such as science and technology, and around the school. There is little racial intolerance or bullying. Students are keen to develop responsibility and show leadership. Membership of the school council and the roles of student mentors and prefects are highly prized. This is exemplified by the recently established Student Leadership Team that interviews other students for leadership roles within the school via the student 'jobs4us' scheme.

Students are well aware of the importance of making healthy lifestyle choices and show this in their meal choices at lunchtime and in their high level of involvement in physical activity. By supporting local community groups through charity fund raising, helping to run ICT classes and performing concerts for senior citizens, participating in local church services and organising science and technology activities for local primary schools, students make an outstanding contribution to the community. Students recently organised very successfully the Swindon Sports Relief Mile event, working with local sporting and business partners. Through excellent

work experience and enterprise activities, they develop team working, research and workplace skills. With their good standards in literacy and numeracy and strong capability in ICT, these skills make an outstanding contribution to their future economic well-being.

The good and often outstanding teaching and learning provided by the school staff play a major role in ensuring students enjoy and achieve well. Teachers plan thoroughly and share the well considered learning objectives of lessons fully with students. A variety of interesting tasks keeps students working at a lively pace. Teachers provide clear explanations and use skilful questioning to check and develop students' knowledge and understanding. In most lessons, students are active and, in the best, they are encouraged to work independently for significant periods although this is not yet evident across all lessons. Teaching assistants are deployed well and they provide effective support. The highly effective features of the best lessons are developing rapidly across all subjects but have yet to be embedded consistently in all lessons. Work is marked regularly and students are given clear guidance on how to improve their work. The use of assessment to inform learning has strengthened recently; ensuring its effectiveness is consistent across all lessons has been identified by the school as an area for development.

The curriculum is outstanding because it is broad, balanced and highly responsive to changing student needs. In the upper school, the opportunities for undertaking vocational and more work related courses have been extended since the last inspection and now provide a range of alternative pathways. These initiatives have begun to have an impact on students' learning and enjoyment but, as many courses have still to be completed, their impact on improved achievement is yet to be seen. Exemplary features of the curriculum are the variety and number of enrichment activities and extended schools programme which are highly valued by students as shown by their level of participation and enthusiastic response to them. Parents comment favourably too on how these 'promote the children's self-esteem'. The establishment of a virtual learning centre has improved ICT resources considerably. Their use to support teaching and learning across the curriculum is excellent. A high proportion of students successfully complete courses in the school's specialist status subjects. Every student follows a science and design and technology option to the end of Year 11, almost all take an ICT course and most students achieve well in these subjects. The school effectively disseminates the best practice within its technology subjects across the curriculum.

Staff know the students well and show high levels of commitment to students' care, guidance and support. For those who need specific support, for example students with ASD and those who experience behavioural and social/emotional difficulties, there is exemplary provision. As one parent said of the staff, 'They are patient, supportive, understanding and work hard to educate in a fun and interesting way.' The school makes excellent use of the skills of its staff and works highly effectively in partnership with other agencies to promote students' well-being. The school's pastoral systems provide a supportive environment that nurtures students' personal development very well. Robust systems ensure high attendance and reduce exclusions. While there is inconsistency in the short term use of assessment to inform learning, the academic monitoring systems and the long term guidance students receive are good. Child protection requirements and procedures are fully in place and the safeguarding of students is secure. Students are well informed about their future options and they receive excellent guidance at transition stages. The students' adoption of healthy lifestyles, their excellent behaviour, the high level of participation in activities and their good achievement are testament to the outstanding care, guidance and support students receive.

The headteacher's clear analysis of the school's performance, her identification of strategies to promote high quality care and education, and her excellent communication underpin the improvements the school has made since the last inspection. Leadership and management at all levels have been strengthened and accountability is now more distributed across the school. The positive impact of this on students' personal development is clear but it has yet to have the same effect on raising students' achievement. Self-evaluation is accurate and used effectively to inform improvement planning. Systematic evaluation of lessons and a range of beneficial professional development activities have helped staff improve the quality of teaching and learning. Performance data are analysed well and used to identify strengths and areas of underachievement. This leads to clear identification of priorities for development. The school sets challenging yet realistic targets including those for its specialist subjects that have contributed effectively to raising standards. Effort is now focused on improving teaching and learning further to raise students' achievement to the high quality of their personal development.

The school's leaders and managers promote equality of opportunity and eliminate discrimination well. They have created an ethos of inclusion that has enabled all students to flourish. The school's contribution to community cohesion is outstanding. Its strategies for engaging with the local community and the way teaching and the curriculum increase pupils' understanding of the UK and global communities are exemplary. These help pupils learn about and understand others, value diversity, and promote the school's shared values. A recent festival celebrating the culture of India and its partnership with a group of schools in Europe exemplify this. Governors discharge their responsibilities effectively and hold the school's leaders and managers suitably to account for the school's performance while providing valuable support.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement to ensure that students make the same progress in all subjects as they do in the best.
- Ensure all teachers use consistently the highly effective teaching, learning and assessment strategies evident in the best lessons, particularly by increasing opportunities for students to work independently.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
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	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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**

17 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Kingsdown School, Swindon SN2 7SH Thank you for the help you gave the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed our discussions with many of you and visiting your lessons.

The quality of education provided by the school is good because you make good progress. In most other respects, Kingsdown is an outstanding school. The standards attained in national tests and examinations last year were above average and students made good progress from the time they entered the school, including those who had learning difficulties. The progress of current Year 9 and 11 students shows you are on track to attain better results this year. Your teachers plan very well and use effective strategies to help you learn, although the outstanding teaching, marking and the feedback in the best lessons is not yet consistent across the school.

Your personal development and well-being are outstanding. You clearly enjoy school very much, your behaviour and attendance are excellent and your involvement in the local community is outstanding. We clearly saw the pride you show in your roles as members of the school council, as prefects and student mentors. The curriculum you receive is outstanding and meets your needs and capabilities very well. The quality of the school's technology specialist subjects and the variety of extra-curricular activities you participate in have a significant, beneficial impact on your enjoyment and achievement. The care, guidance and support you receive are outstanding. Staff know you very well and are committed to ensuring your safety and promoting your well-being. Those of you who need extra help are given the very best support.

The clear vision, strong direction and effective leadership and management of the headteacher and senior teachers underpin the school's success. In order to improve further, we have asked the school to raise standards and achievement to ensure that you all make the same progress in all subjects as you do in the best. To do this, we have asked that all teachers use consistently the highly effective teaching, learning and assessment strategies we saw in the best lessons, particularly by increasing opportunities for you to work independently. You can help by developing this skill and striving to do your very best in tests and examinations.

Best wishes with your studies.

Yours sincerely

Nick Green Her Majesty's Inspector