

The King's Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134223
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	331638
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1096
Sixth form	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Peter Vardy
Headteacher	Mr Chris Drew
Date of previous school inspection	5 December 2005
School address	Stainton Way Coulby Newham Middlesbrough Cleveland TS8 0GA
Telephone number	01642 577577
Fax number	01642 590204

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This large academy is set in an area of economic disadvantage. The vast majority of students are from a White British heritage and fewer than usual are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion eligible for free school meals is well above average as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has four times the average percentage of students who have a statement of special educational need because it welcomes and integrates students who have hearing impairment, visual impairment and those with moderate learning difficulties. The academy is a specialist centre for students with hearing and visual impairments. The number of these students in each year group varies quite significantly from year to year and makes up to 10% of the students in some year groups.

The academy is an independent school with a non-denominational Christian religious character. It is also a specialist centre for business and enterprise education and has close links with sister schools in the region. The academy holds the Sportsmark Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The King's Academy is a good academy, with a number of outstanding features. It is highly regarded by parents and students and deservedly enjoys a good reputation in the local community, which has led to it being over-subscribed. A typical parental comment indicates their views, 'This is in a class of its own'. A Christian ethos permeates the life and work of the academy. This is reflected in the outstanding care, guidance and support provided to students and in the excellent relationships found throughout the academy. As a result, students' personal development is outstanding.

Standards have risen rapidly since the last inspection and are now average. The performance of students at 16 has showed sustained improvement since the last inspection. Since 2006 the percentage of students gaining 5+ A* to C grades has risen from 35% to 61%. Results in 2008 were the best ever for the school. Students of all abilities and backgrounds achieve well and make at least good progress in their learning; those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities often make exceptional progress and overcome complex barriers to succeed in their learning. At Key Stage 3, some former variations in standards between subjects have been reduced, so that students now reach average standards in English, mathematics and science.

Students enjoy the challenges and opportunities of academy life. They create a happy, calm and purposeful atmosphere which supports good learning and a sense of security. They lead healthy and active lives and are aware of risks to their health and well-being. Students' behaviour is excellent because they have high levels of self-respect and respect the rights of others to live in harmony and learn. They are active in their own and the local community. For example, students have been successful in persuading the local authority to install additional lighting on a local public footpath. Their fundraising and entertainments for the local community do much to foster cohesion and develop in the students a good understanding of serving the needs of others. Their excellent personal development prepares them very well for future economic well-being.

A well-planned curriculum underpins students' good achievement, because it meets their needs well. While students in Key Stage 3 benefit from business and enterprise education, there could be more opportunity for them to develop their computer skills in other subjects. Teaching is good overall. Lessons are well planned around clear learning targets. When teaching is good or outstanding, this quality is linked to a very good knowledge of what students need to learn next. Students work is not always marked in a way that will help them improve. Although there are good and outstanding examples of clear advice on how to improve, this practice is not consistent enough throughout the academy. The care and support given to students are excellent. They ensure that students feel safe and are comfortable about seeking help, confident that any problems will be solved quickly by caring and committed staff. Students' progress is tracked rigorously and effective interventions made when any are found to be falling behind.

Leadership, management and governance of the academy are good. There is a commitment to continuous improvement in all aspects of the academy's work and especially to raising standards and achievement for all students. The academy knows its strengths and weaknesses well, though the monitoring of action plans and academy policies needs to be more systematic to confirm that all targets are met. Since the last inspection, the principal has led very good improvement in standards and in the quality of care, support and guidance for students which have had a

tremendous impact on their personal development and self-belief. The academy gives good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are good. Students' attainment has risen since the previous inspection and is now broadly average. Students achieve well across a wide range of subjects and courses. They conscientiously and willingly accept responsibility in the school and the wider community. For example, when giving support to younger students in lessons or learning ballroom dancing so they can partner senior citizens at the academy's social events. Their personal development is outstanding and equips them very well for the future.

Students have access to a wide range of courses, both academic and vocational, to suit their needs, interests and aspirations. Progress in lessons is good. Students appreciate the quality of teaching, which is good. One student said that teaching is 'more personal' and another that, 'teachers know how each of us learns best'. Students also recognise the benefits of supervised study time, which allows them to develop and sustain independent work habits and prepares them well for higher education or the world of work. The care and support that students experience at the academy is a major factor in their choosing to join this sixth form rather than local alternatives for further education. One student said there is a 'fantastic network of support'. Systems for assessing and monitoring students' work are effective and have improved since the previous inspection, so that students are well guided and supported to improve. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The numbers of students joining the sixth form both from within the academy and other institutions within the local area are increasing year on year. Very good links have been established with universities, which have had a positive impact on students' aspirations and choices for the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish robust procedures to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of academy policies and development planning.
- Improve the quality of marking so that it consistently gives students clear guidance on how to improve.
- Improve students' use of information and communication technology (ICT) in some subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are average and students' achievement is good. Students join the academy with standards that are below average. Up to 40% of students in some year groups have a reading age well below what is expected for 11-year-olds when they join the academy.

Results of national tests for students in Year 9 in 2007 were below average in mathematics and science and average in English. However, these results showed that students who sat the tests had made significantly better progress from when they joined the academy in Year 7, than most students nationally. The academy's swift response to close the gap in standards between subjects has proved effective. Standards have improved in mathematics and science in Key Stage 3. Unvalidated results for Year 9 students in 2008 and the academy's records for students currently in Key Stage 3 confirm this view of improvement.

In 2008, GCSE results for 16-year-olds reached the national average for the first time in the academy's history. The academy exceeded its challenging targets for the percentage of students gaining 5+ A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, while results at 5+ A* to G grades also improved. Examination results showed that academy students made significantly better progress from their previous test performance than most other students nationally. A number of subjects exceeded the national average; notably, art and design, business studies, chemistry and engineering, drama, modern foreign languages, geography and science.

Students achieve well in both key stages, regardless of their background, starting points or learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with hearing or visual impairment, make exceptional progress because provision is very well tailored to meet their individual needs and because the academy's high quality inclusion practices ensure they are fully integrated in the life of the school. Students make outstanding progress in English, with many overcoming significant barriers to do so.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. As students progress through the academy, they become increasingly confident and self-disciplined. They develop high levels of self-respect and respect for others as success increases their self-esteem. Students' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Students know about and appreciate cultural differences and traditions and this is reflected in some outstanding art and textiles work displayed around the academy. Students are tolerant, caring and supportive of each other in all areas of academy life, in and out of the classroom.

Behaviour is exemplary with all students showing consideration for the needs of others and their academy. Students demonstrate consistent standards of conduct, much of the time without adult supervision. Rare instances of anti-social behaviour are managed effectively in line with the academy's behaviour policy. Parents speak very highly of behaviour within the academy. Students enjoy their education; many socialise, take part in the many extra-curricular activities or catch up with one another at the end of the day rather than rush home. Attendance continues to improve and is now in line with the national average. Students demonstrate a very good attitude to healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating and participation in sport. Students have very good understanding of how to stay safe, assess possible risks and manage relationships as they mature.

Students have the opportunity through their year councils to contribute to the development of the community. Examples include the introduction of a Year 8 residential course. Charity work is an important part of academy life and students work tirelessly to support a range of charities. The academy prepares students very well for adult life through good careers guidance and links with local business. Enterprise skills are very well developed through a variety of enterprise activities and education which begins in Year 7. By the time they leave, students have excellent skills to secure their economic future well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Some examples of outstanding teaching were seen during inspection. Strengths in teaching include the sharing of learning objectives with students so they know what they are expected to learn in the lesson. Where learning is very good, these objectives are displayed and referred to throughout the lesson, so that students are regularly reminded of what it is they are aiming for. A relative weakness in some lessons is that lesson targets are not used as a check on learning at the end of the session to confirm for students how well they have learned. Teachers give clear explanations to students and, where these are followed up with an opportunity to practise what has been taught, students quickly consolidate their learning and retain it well. On some occasions, teachers 'over explain' and in these instances students become inattentive and can become restless. Many teachers make good use of questions to assess what students know and then develop students' thinking through further questioning. Where the pace is brisk, these sessions can become excellent vehicles for accelerating students' learning, as they turn the tables and begin to ask questions of themselves and others in the class.

Students report that they like learning best when they are given plenty to do rather than learning through listening. Good opportunities are provided for paired and collaborative work and these too accelerate learning. Practical activities are also favourites with students who say they remember what they have learned in such lessons more easily. Guidance given to students on how to improve their work is inconsistent. There are many examples of good and outstanding guidance in students' books, but there are also many where marking neither gives advice nor sets targets, so that students are not supported to improve. Specialist teachers and teaching assistants provide very good support for all students who need it and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are extremely well supported to surmount significant barriers to their learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and supports all students to develop well academically and personally. It is successful in providing suitable pathways for students of all abilities. A strength of the curriculum is the way in which it is successfully adapted to meet the many and complex needs of vulnerable students, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, there is effective additional provision for students at risk of disenchantment with education, which enables them to experience successful development. Through its specialist programme, the academy effectively enables students to develop several business and enterprise skills that are vital in the world of commerce and industry.

Since the last inspection, the academy has introduced a number of vocational courses thereby extending the choice offered at Key Stage 4. These have proved popular with students by meeting better their wide range of needs and aspirations. The academy has in hand plans for further development of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, particularly in vocational subjects. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is enriched by lessons in philosophy, theology and ethics, and business and enterprise education. While students have lessons in ICT which develop their skills, very little use of these skills was seen in students' work in other subjects. More needs to be done

to enable them to use and develop competence with computers in many of the subjects they study.

A very wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities and visits strongly supports students' personal development, especially in relation to improving their confidence, self-esteem and social skills. Visits locally, nationally and overseas make a significant contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for students to learn a sign language indicates how well the academy contributes to good community cohesion. Careers guidance and work related opportunities are well planned to ensure that students are well informed about their options when they leave the academy.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The academy provides outstanding care, guidance and support for students. This makes an excellent contribution to the significant improvement in students' personal and academic development since the last inspection. High quality care and support for students are at the heart of the school's ethos. Staff set a very good example to students in the way they care for and support them and this is well reflected in students' care and respect for each other. Systems for pastoral care are extremely well developed. A very efficient referral system ensures that students' concerns or problems are dealt with promptly and appropriately. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the view that their children are well cared for. One view sums up many, 'The staff are committed and enthusiastic about the children's well-being and education.' All arrangements for safeguarding, health and safety and child protection are in place and meet statutory requirements.

Provision for the most vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is exemplary. Outstanding inclusion practices and excellent links with external agencies support their exceptional achievement. These students speak very positively of the guidance they receive from their learning support assistants, teachers and peers. They are supported and encouraged to play a full and active part in the life of the academy, including involvement in the wide range of extra-curricular activities from sports, to playing in a band to drama productions.

Academic guidance is good. While inconsistencies in marking reduce the overall effectiveness of guidance, there are rigorous systems to assess, record and track students' progress. These provide good detail for middle and senior leaders who are quick to spot any underachievement and take effective action. Very effective transition arrangements exist at all key stages which ensure that students are well equipped for the next stage of learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The principal provides the academy with strong and effective leadership. Since the last inspection, he has led considerable improvement in the quality of care, guidance and support provided by the academy. This has had a very significant impact on raising students' attainment and strengthening their personal development. The principal shares a clear vision for the academy with the board of directors and communicates it effectively to staff and students. A strong senior team helps him to translate this vision into reality. The success of this work is reflected in the popularity of the school in the locality, rapidly

rising standards, and the achievements of its students both personally and academically. Parents of students at the school are delighted that their children attend because as one put it, 'King's Academy offers an exceptional standard of education for our child'. Students value their academy for the many opportunities it offers.

Managers monitor the quality of teaching and students' achievements in a robust and effective manner. Any perceived weaknesses trigger good levels of extra support. These are strong features which lead to constant improvements in the classroom and raise expectations of even better examination results. Development planning at whole academy and subject level demonstrates a clear agenda for improvement. However, the systems for ensuring that all targets in academy and department action plans are met are too variable. The academy has all the policies that would be expected but the system to ensure they are effective lacks rigour.

The Academy has a clear understanding of what is required to promote community cohesion and has been active in ensuring there are many opportunities for students to contribute to their local and wider communities.

The board of directors has been instrumental in helping to guide the academy towards better results and successes on many fronts. They, and the senior leadership, are well aware that more can be done. Together they have set ambitious, but attainable, targets to continue the rise in standards. There is still some way to go but the capacity for further improvement is good.

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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	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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	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	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	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	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
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?	2	2
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	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	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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**

5 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The King's Academy, Middlesbrough, TS8 0GA

I would like to thank you, on behalf of the inspection team, for your warm welcome and the assistance you gave during the recent inspection of your academy. Your excellent conduct and mature attitudes are a credit to you, your families and the academy. We were pleased to discover how much your parents and carers value the education you receive. Please pass on our thanks for the questionnaires they returned.

Your behaviour in and out of class is impressive and makes a major contribution to how well you are learning. Together, you create a strong sense of security in the academy, because you are tolerant, caring and very supportive of each other. Your consideration for others beyond the academy through fundraising, producing 'world class' entertainments and social events for local citizens shows how well you are developing as caring citizens of the future.

We think that The King's Academy is good overall, and that some things are outstanding. We agree with you that staff provide excellent care and support and set you a very good example of how to relate to each other. They also make learning interesting, through good teaching, and expect you to work hard. We noticed that you frequently receive excellent feedback on how to improve, but that this does not always happen. We have asked that your directors and senior leaders make the quality of marking and feedback more consistent. Standards in the academy are rising and your achievement is good. Standards are average now, but your teachers, senior leaders and directors are rightly ambitious for them to be even higher than this. You enjoy a varied and well-planned curriculum which also helps you to do well. While students in Key Stage 3 have lessons in ICT, we think that perhaps they could use their skills more often in other subjects and have asked for this to be developed.

Your academy has gone from strength to strength since it opened. Senior leaders and staff have constantly planned ways of making improvements and now need to make sure that they check how well these things are doing to keep your academy moving forward at a good rate. You can do your bit by continuing to take full advantage of everything the academy has to offer and working as hard as you do now.

My colleagues and I wish you and your academy every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector