

Kingsthorpe College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122079
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	340089
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Elaine Taylor HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1339
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrew Savage
Headteacher	Judith Long
Date of previous school inspection	1 January 2007
School address	Boughton Green Road Kingsthorpe Northampton
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent looking at learning; 35 lessons were observed, including a joint observation with a senior leader; 35 teachers were seen; meetings were held with groups of students, governors, staff. The inspectors observed the college's work including some extra-curricular activities; scrutinised work in books and looked at monitoring records, records tracking the progress students are currently making; minutes of meetings; policies; safeguarding documents and 123 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the college's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether the rise in standards evident in 2009 was continuing in the current year
- if the groups who had made insufficient progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 by the end of 2009 were now making satisfactory progress
- how well improved teaching was contributing to learning in lessons and helping students to develop as independent learners, especially in the sixth form.

Information about the school

The college is larger than average and has been a specialist sports college with a second specialism in history since 2006. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is higher than the national average. The college has above average numbers of students learning English as an additional language or from a minority ethnic heritage. Since the last inspection the college has moved to a new building on one site. The college works with a number of providers of initial teacher education and was successfully redesignated as an Investors in People establishment in 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The college has been through a period of considerable change and disruption in the last few years. As a result of strong and determined leadership at all levels standards are rising securely, teaching is improving and the college has evolved into a happy and caring community where staff morale is very high and students attend regularly and behave well.

Standards fell in 2008 and results in the GCSE examinations were below the government threshold. A thorough review of provision took place and rigorous systems were established to monitor the work of the college and the progress being made by all groups of students. A sharp rise in standards followed and the college met its challenging targets in 2009. Current reliable data indicate that a further rise is set to take place in this year's examinations. Students enter the college having reached standards that are well below average. Overall progress is satisfactory and some students make good progress, especially the large group identified by the college as needing additional support. Progress in Key Stage 3 is good. Despite these improvements standards are still low and too few gain the highest grades. Achievement in the sixth form is satisfactory, but there is considerable variation between subjects.

Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, ably assisted by leaders at all levels and challenged and supported by good governance, the college has developed a very systematic approach to all aspects of its work. The impact of these systems is most evident in the accurate self-assessment, improved behaviour and attendance of students and the outstanding safeguarding procedures. The rigorous monitoring procedures and the record of significant improvement in some outcomes for students show the college has good capacity to improve further.

Teaching is improving. Teachers are successfully providing students with activities that engage them and relationships in lessons are productive and pleasant. Teachers do not consistently use information on how well students are progressing to provide work which has sufficient or appropriate challenge for all levels of ability. The repertoire of strategies they use as the lesson proceeds to measure the level of students' understanding and the quality of their learning is too narrow. This means they sometimes fail to adjust their teaching to ensure all make good progress. Too often all students are given the same tasks and this limits the opportunities for them to develop independence as learners, especially the most able students. Teaching is variable in the sixth form, but there is some good practice which is not shared sufficiently well at present.

The curriculum meets students' needs well. Through a good range of partnerships the

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college is able to offer a much wider range of options than otherwise would be the case. Extra-curricular activities have a good take-up and special events such as drama productions and imaginative weekly events in the college library contribute significantly to the students' social, moral and cultural development.

The college cares for students well and they feel safe. Strategies to raise attendance have been effective particularly for persistent absentees. There are good relationships with parents and outside agencies to ensure individual needs are met. Arrangements to support the move from primary school are well-managed and enable students to settle in quickly. Students are guided well on how to improve their work. One student told us: 'I know how well I am doing at college as I am told my targets and current working level regularly. I am told how to improve regularly as well.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the progress made by all groups of students in lessons by:
 - ensuring teachers check the quality of students' learning regularly as the lesson proceeds and adjust their teaching accordingly
 - raising the level of challenge in lessons especially for more able students so they deepen their understanding and learn to become more independent.
 - Raise standards further so the gap with those found nationally is closed and increase the proportion of those gaining the highest grades.
 - Reduce the inconsistency between outcomes across subjects in the sixth form by sharing best practice in teaching more effectively.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

From starting points that are well below average many students made good progress in 2009 and the percentage who gained five or more passes including English and mathematics at grade C or above was more than double the figure in the previous year. However, taken over the last three years standards remain low in comparison to those found nationally. There were some groups who failed to make satisfactory progress in 2009. These included lower ability boys and some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The collection of extensive data on the progress of all groups has enabled the college to target support very effectively at students who are falling behind. Consequently, the progress of all groups is now at least satisfactory. Progress in Key Stage 3 is good. Students in these classes have been less affected by the disruptions of previous years and there is no variation between the progress of the different groups in the college. In lessons, progress is usually at least satisfactory. Sometimes students' good behaviour increases the progress they make where the teaching is merely satisfactory.

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Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. The specialist subject of sport contributes well to this outcome. Through the active student council, whose representatives attend governor meetings and meetings with the senior team, they contribute to developing the college. Student sports leaders have a positive impact in college and the community and all students work hard for a number of charities. Students are developing some good skills for their future working lives but their basic skills are still low, except in information and communication technology (ICT) where their achievement is above average. The curriculum is enhanced to support their understanding of the world of work and their enterprise skills. Students demonstrate their ability to empathise with others in discussions in lessons. For example, in a history lesson Year 9 students made mature and insightful contributions in a discussion about war. Social and moral development is good. Events in the library at lunchtime regularly see a large group of students from a range of year groups mixing happily together conducting quizzes, doing homework, debating moral issues or reading with a minimum of supervision and demonstrating much mutual support. Their spiritual and cultural development is supported well through the specialist subjects and performing arts.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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How effective is the provision?

Teaching is improving but remains satisfactory overall because assessment is a weaker feature of most lessons. Sometimes the good behaviour and positive attitudes of the students compensate for weaker teaching. The level of challenge in many lessons is not high enough for the more able students. Lesson objectives clearly identify a range of outcomes to suit all levels of ability, but the activities teachers devise do not always allow the more able students to demonstrate and develop the skills needed to reach those levels. All students undertake the same tasks. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it to enthuse the students. They plan a range of activities and the pace of the lessons is generally brisk. As a result, most students are engaged and enjoy their learning. In the most successful lessons teachers check regularly and systematically how well students understand the work and how their skills are developing. They then adjust their teaching to steer the lesson so all continue to make progress. Where teachers do not build sufficient assessment opportunities into the lesson, students' progress is slower and their learning merely satisfactory.

The good curriculum allows students to follow a range of courses that meet their individual requirements well. More able students in Key Stage 3 in mathematics and science can follow an accelerated course and those for whom a vocational course is more appropriate have a choice of courses available to them in which they succeed well. All students on these courses in 2009 gained a qualification and went on into further education or training.

Both parents and students are positive about the guidance and support the college provides. The arrangements to guide students as they enter and progress through the college are effective. Sometimes the support provided in class does not match that provided in withdrawal groups, but all groups now make satisfactory progress, including the increasingly large group who have English as an additional language. The support provided for vulnerable students is a particular strength.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Strong leadership is raising standards and improving the quality of teaching. There is a consistent and effective system for improvement planning and more robust self-evaluation across all faculties that inform the core priorities for school improvement.

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Strong links have been established between the well-organised governing body and faculty heads. The leadership of teaching and learning is good and collaboration with providers of teacher training is used very effectively to develop mentoring skills. All leaders have been trained to undertake regular lesson observations and good practice is shared effectively so that variability in teaching is much reduced. The school has been receiving considerable support from external consultants and advisers but is increasingly demonstrating a capacity for self-reliance. Leaders take full account of the views of students and parents when considering points for development. The analysis of data is increasingly taking account of the progress for different groups, including pupils from minority ethnic groups and those whose circumstances deem them vulnerable and there is considerably less variability. However, in some subjects attainment is still too low and learning and progress are still fragile. Students say they all feel equal as members of the school community and that conflicts based on difference are rare. Leaders in the school engage with a wide range of partners and use creative strategies to ensure everyone has equal opportunities to succeed. Increasingly the college is extending some of these to parents, for example in order to ensure language is not a barrier to participation. The school understands its composition in terms of groups through an audit and has established a group of 'like-minded people who want to make a difference'. Through the curriculum, it promotes understanding of the school and wider communities. The specialist subject makes a strong contribution to community cohesion. Safeguarding procedures are exemplary with every aspect being most rigorously applied.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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The sixth form is highly inclusive. Outcomes are variable across subjects with some good progress in subjects such as travel and tourism. The weak performance in some subjects is partly attributable to low attainment on entry in core skills such as mathematics. Retention rates have been stubbornly low, although they are improving and most students move on to higher or further education, work or training. There is strong pastoral support and a good environment for students to engage in personal study. As a result they are developing better independent study skills. Students are mature and well behaved as well as punctual and attendance is in line with that expected for the age group. Students take on personal responsibilities and contribute well to the school and local community for example by mentoring younger students or helping with paired reading. The quality of teaching remains satisfactory but sharper and more systematic evaluations of the teaching and students' performance are raising the quality. Insufficient use is currently made of the good practice that exists in some subjects to raise the quality across the college. The courses on offer include two diplomas. Enrichment activities have been increased but the college recognises that there is scope for further extension. Students are provided with good guidance and advice about options when transferring from Year 11. Leadership and management are satisfactory with good attention given to raising attainment and to students' rates of progress towards more challenging targets. There is good support for vulnerable groups and individuals, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and students whose first language is not English, who receive personalised literacy support in lessons as and when required.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Although a relatively small number of parents and carers replied to the questionnaire, their responses were very positive and supportive of the school. Most feel their children are making enough progress and several spoke highly of the support they receive if there are problems. A few were concerned about the variability of teaching particularly where supply staff have been needed. Several would like better opportunities to receive information on their children's progress that is more subject specific.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Kingsthorpe College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 123 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1339 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	20	87	71	11	9	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	25	20	89	72	4	3	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	19	15	84	68	16	13	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	15	90	73	12	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	11	9	90	73	8	7	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	9	7	81	66	22	18	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	7	86	70	20	16	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	18	15	82	67	11	9	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	11	91	74	11	9	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	15	75	61	18	15	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	7	85	69	16	13	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	14	11	90	73	5	4	4	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	16	90	73	8	7	3	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Kingsthorpe College, Northampton, NN2 7HR

On behalf of my colleagues and myself, I should like to thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school recently.

We judge your school to be satisfactory but improving. We congratulate you on the increasingly higher standards you are reaching. We are pleased that the variation in the progress some of you made last year has been reduced. We want the school to make sure that you are all given work that has the right level of challenge to ensure you make good or better progress in all lessons. We think those of you who have the potential to reach the highest levels should be given more opportunities to do so.

You told us that you appreciate the hard work your teachers put in on your behalf to make lessons interesting. You make a good contribution to the learning that takes place by your positive attitudes and good behaviour. Well done. It is good to see you all working together and enjoying your free time happy in each other's company. The library event we visited was a real pleasure to see. The range of subjects you can study is good and we know the school looks after you with the utmost care. You told us you feel safe and we understand why.

Leaders in the school keep careful records of how well you are progressing and share the information with you well. You know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve. Leaders in the college use this information well to improve their work and we think they have good capacity to improve further. To that end we have asked them to:

- make sure you have work that challenges you whatever your level of ability but particularly those of you who are more able
- see to it that teachers check your progress regularly during lessons and adjust their teaching if necessary
- help you to reach higher standards
- make sure teachers in the sixth form share the best practice so there is less variability in the quality of teaching

I wish you all the very best for your future and hope many of you will read my full report which contains greater detail of our findings.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Taylor

Her Majesty's Inspector

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