

The Kings of Wessex School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123896
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	340453
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Lorna Brackstone 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1191
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	316
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Lythgoe
Headteacher	Chris Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 April 2007
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Age group	13–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Three quarters of inspection time was spent looking at learning. Thirty-nine lessons were observed, fifteen of them jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Fifty learning activities were visited and forty-five members of staff were seen teaching. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior staff and other staff members, two governors, representatives from the community and groups of parents. The team observed the school's work, and looked at documents including the school's plan for development, student tracking systems, attendance data, and minutes of governing body meetings. The questionnaires returned by 203 parents, 213 students and 51 members of staff were scrutinised and the outcomes analysed.

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

- the strategies deployed by the school to improve attainment and progress in mathematics
- improvements in the rates of progress in information and communication technology, business studies, geography and German
- improvements in the progress of sixth form students taking English, physical education and German A levels as a result of intervention by the leaders
- the outcomes for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

Information about the school

This larger than average school serves a large rural area. The majority of its students are White British and very few speak English as an additional language. There are only a few students who are eligible for free school meals and there is a lower than average number of students who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. It is a specialist technology school for mathematics, science and design and technology.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

One student summed up Kings of Wessex as 'amazing' and inspection findings endorse this view. It is an exceptional school with excellent performance. This stems from the strong visionary leadership of the headteacher who continually strives to ensure that all the students are of 'world class' quality. As one parent explained, the headteacher 'believes in giving all students the chances and opportunities they need'. He is extremely well supported in this vision by his senior leaders and governors, the success of which is seen in their outstanding academic and personal achievements. Together they focus on continuous improvement within a culture of care and support. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They successfully build on these strengths and rigorously tackle the few areas for improvement. The school has outstanding capacity to improve further because leaders are never content with mediocrity. Self-evaluation procedures are incisive and involve managers, staff and governors. These procedures are based on a detailed analysis of information which highlights priorities. For example, results in mathematics have risen because of improvements in the quality of teaching. Senior leaders and middle managers are successfully held accountable for their students' performance. Teachers are enthusiastic about their roles and speak highly of the support and professional development opportunities they receive from their managers.

A shared sense of pride exists among all who work and learn here. Students start school with average to slightly above average attainment. They make good progress in learning and attain high standards that are well above the national averages. This is because they are taught well. Much of the teaching is imaginative and purposeful. Constructive feedback and detailed discussions about the next steps to take enhance students' learning extremely well. In outstanding lessons there is an excellent balance between teacher exposition and input from the students. However, at times, students are not given enough time to think and reflect on their learning in lessons. As a result, the quality of teaching is good rather than outstanding. Those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because they are supported extremely well. Students develop as mature, confident, responsible and caring members of this inclusive community. An exceptionally rich curriculum, with outstanding opportunities for additional activities, ensures that students are exceedingly well prepared for their future lives. The tenacious staff approach taken to students' welfare and guidance ensures that every individual receives the best possible care and support. As one parent explained, 'Kings is a fantastic school that provides an outstanding all-round education. Everyone at the

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school works so hard for the children.'

The school's specialism has been very effective in promoting students' high attainment and progress in mathematics, science and design and technology. These specialist subjects not only enhance opportunities available to students themselves but increasingly involve families, the community and local schools in enriching their own experiences.

The sixth form is led and managed exceptionally well. The quality of provision and the outcomes for the students in the sixth form are good. Students make good progress in their learning and value highly the personal and academic opportunities the school provides.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons by giving students more time to think about what they are learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students' high attendance rates and promptness to lessons are indicators of their outstanding enjoyment. Relationships are of the highest order and their enjoyment is seen in their desire to do their best. These contribute to the exemplary attitudes, behaviour and involvement of students seen in school. Consequently, they attain standards that are significantly above the national average and make good progress in their learning. This good-quality learning was evident in the lessons observed during the inspection. Exceptional learning occurred when teaching was of the highest quality and this included sessions in English, history, art, design and technology, French, science, music and drama. The school has an exceptionally strong focus on valuing every student, thus enabling students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most vulnerable to make outstanding progress.

Students explain that they feel safe in school and this is confirmed by staff and parents. They embrace the very rich curriculum and extensive partnership opportunities to ensure that they have a clear understanding of how to keep safe. For example, students fully understand the dangers of the internet because of the high profile given to this by staff, while police surgeries support those young people who may be tempted to become involved in unlawful behaviour.

Students have an excellent understanding of how to maintain a healthy life. They know that the excellent canteen meals are nutritious and only opt for their own packed lunch to avoid the long and busy wait for a hot meal. Regular discussion times with the school nurse ensure that they are very well informed about the dangers of smoking, taking drugs and drinking excess alcohol. They take up very eagerly the ample opportunities they have in school and at the Kings' Fitness and

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Leisure Centre to make well-informed personal lifestyle choices to exercise and/or play competitive sports.

The care and respect students show for adults and their fellow peers in school is extremely impressive. The young people are helpful, considerate and thoughtful. They readily embrace all of the opportunities to take part in the full life of the school and they express a very strong sense of belonging to it. For example, they proudly act as house captains, contribute to staff interviews and willingly run fair trade cafes. The highly effective student council makes a significant contribution to the school and the recent installation of ‘super loos’ and a ‘bike bubble’ to store cycles safely is testimony to the high value placed on students’ views and concerns. Enthusiastic support by students at local primary school events and the eager attendance at workshops and services at Wells Cathedral contribute extremely well to their involvement in the community. The outstanding rate of participation in a local organised event, which celebrates the talent and skills of young entrepreneurs, writers, chefs and musicians, leads to much-coveted awards.

Students have many high-quality opportunities to reflect and explore spiritual, moral, social and ethical issues as well as considering the diversity of cultures and faiths beyond their immediate community. In history, Year 11 students showed an in-depth understanding of the factors contributing to Hitler’s rise in Germany, while in English sixth formers maturely teased out stereotypical themes relating to relationships in Victorian literature. Such detailed understanding is celebrated in the variety of colourful and thought-provoking displays of work across the school.

Students develop an excellent understanding of the world of work. Through extensive teamwork and problem-solving activities in both lessons and when organising school proms, technical teams and national award events, such as the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme, they gain very good experience of managing money. Work placements, shadow experiences in local businesses and part-time jobs at the Kings’ Fitness and Leisure Centre enable them to taste life as an employee. Students report that they are very well supported in making career choices and this is because they are given personalised advice.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1

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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The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Good-quality teaching ensures that students make the best possible progress in their lessons. First-rate relationships and teachers' excellent subject knowledge harness students' enthusiasm and help maintain very high levels of interest. As one student explained, 'most teachers have brilliant teaching styles and connection with the students.' Lessons in information and communication technology are planned well, particularly the 'virtual learning environment', which is used very effectively to support the students' learning. For example, over 200 virtual lessons have been created to support key skills in mathematics. Teachers and students have high expectations of what it is possible to achieve. This is evident in the substantial amount of work that students produce and their good and often exceptional progress. Marking is of excellent quality in English and history, but this is not yet consistent across all subjects. At times, the structure of individual lessons does not allow a sufficient amount of time for students to reflect and think through ideas and their response, and this limits the opportunities for them to extend their learning. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are taught extremely effectively through interesting activities that support the development of key skills.

One of the key ingredients that enables students to make good progress is the teachers' use of the highly effective and sophisticated assessment strategies that are embedded across the school. Staff systematically monitor and track the progress of individuals and groups of students and target interventions where necessary to ensure that no student is left behind. Students are fully involved in evaluating the progress they make in lessons and tests and know exactly what they need to do to improve further. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive regular feedback on their work in their learning support unit and this builds their confidence and helps them to make progress.

The breadth and relevance of the curriculum has improved since the last inspection. This is because there has been an expansion of vocational courses and an earlier start to some GCSE courses. The curriculum offers an excellent variety of pathways which help to personalise students' experiences. The outstanding links with external partners, such as Mendip Rotary Club, the National Trust, and other local schools, support the curriculum extremely well. Curriculum provision is very effectively enhanced through the school's specialist subjects and the expertise in the English department. These subjects provide rich and varied programmes of activities which

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enrich the students’ experiences. Programmes for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are tailored exceptionally well to suit their individual needs.

Teachers know their students extremely well and care for them effectively. There is excellent support for students coming into school and links with middle schools are particularly strong. The mentoring programme for Year 11 students is exceptional and the extensive support given to each individual ensures that no one ‘falls through the net’. Students and parents speak highly of the support they receive from teachers and specialist services. The support provided for vulnerable students is exemplary. A committed team of staff work very successfully to provide targeted and tailored support for individuals. The school’s work with external agencies and families is outstanding and students who face challenging circumstances have the best possible support.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

A shared vision, which is based on high ambitions and secure strategies, has enabled the headteacher, senior team and governors to provide exceptional and inspirational leadership and management. Staff and students are fully committed to this agenda and the pace of improvement since the last inspection has been swift. The headteacher’s leadership has devolved specific responsibilities to leaders and managers. Innovation has been a key factor in the school’s development. For instance, the transformation of the curriculum, the strengthening of guidance and support systems and improvements in teaching and learning now ensure that each individual student is developing successfully, both personally and academically. The work of the school is monitored and evaluated extremely effectively and the school has an accurate picture of itself. Governors are particularly well-informed and use their own individual expertise to support, challenge and help form the future direction of the school.

Safeguarding procedures are exceptionally strong. Appropriate checks are carried out on all staff and other visitors to the school and there is careful risk assessment of activities for students, including those in work placements. All staff receive regular training to update them on safeguarding procedures. Equality of opportunity is promoted extremely well and a culture of respect characterises the school. Promotion of equality of opportunity is also seen in the attention to individual needs and the highly effective work supporting students with special educational needs and/or

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disabilities. For example, students with dyslexia are supported well by staff who have received specialist training, and personalised guidance is available for those applying to university.

Relationships with parents are strong and there is a high level of satisfaction. The school makes an outstanding contribution to community cohesion. In this harmonious environment, individual talents are appreciated and valued. Partnership work is at the heart of the school’s extended community provision which gives adults extensive involvement in projects such as ‘IT for the Terrified’, the Cheddar Arts programme with performances based in the school’s theatre, and regular opportunities to keep fit at the Kings’ Fitness and Leisure Centre. Further afield, visits to Europe, voluntary service in Uganda and fund-raising projects for a school in Africa promote well the wider dimension of community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Sixth form

The sixth form is good. Standards at the end of Year 13 are above average. There is strong performance in most subjects where students make good progress. These include not only the school’s specialist subjects but art, physics, drama, English language, biology, information and communication technology, media studies and music. Boys attain as well as girls and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities overcome any barriers to learning because they receive exceptional additional support. Students show extremely positive attitudes to learning and retention rates in the sixth form are good. They stay safe and live healthy lifestyles because they are made fully aware of drugs and alcohol-related issues. Community involvement is excellent and includes fund-raising for charities and participation in

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the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award scheme. Their high levels of motivation are strongly supported by committed and skilled teachers. Effective teaching promotes good learning. Assessment is thorough and is used well to raise achievement. Students are clear about their targets and are eager to meet them.

The sixth form is led extremely well. The curriculum is matched well to individual needs and aspirations. A good range of courses, both academic and vocational, is taught. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities enriches the experiences of students and participation is high in their international visits, trips to theatres, galleries, museums and universities. Opportunities are available for students to develop their public speaking skills, take part in conferences and extend their sporting talents. Support and guidance are excellent. Students are very well prepared before joining the sixth form and induction is thorough. Attendance at the frequent tutor group meetings ensures they have access to detailed individual advice. They feel well-prepared for the next stage of education or employment because of the guidance they receive. Expectations are high for their future and most progress to higher education with some securing Oxbridge places.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors endorse the view of the vast majority of parents and carers, who responded to the inspection questionnaire, who consider that it is ‘a brilliant school’. One student, who had recently joined the school, explained to his Mum that ‘the teachers at this school care, they want me to do well. I never felt that before.’ Inspection findings could not endorse the negative responses that a small minority of parents made to some of the specific questions. Very few parents added negative comments to their responses but those who did raised concerns about the mathematics department and the provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Outcomes and provision for mathematics were a focus for the inspection and investigations confirmed that there had been good improvements in this department. Inspectors judged that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because they are taught extremely well. A very small proportion of parents raised concerns relating to unacceptable behaviour and inflexibility with school uniform. However, inspection findings could not substantiate these comments.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Kings of Wessex School 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 203 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1191 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	71	35	117	58	13	6	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	84	41	112	55	5	2	1	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	77	38	109	54	13	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	76	37	105	52	16	8	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	63	31	129	64	6	3	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	46	23	129	64	21	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	18	132	65	24	12	2	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)	66	33	116	57	5	2	8	4
The school meets my child’s particular needs	62	31	116	57	16	8	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	77	38	91	45	21	10	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	45	22	111	55	22	11	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	69	34	116	57	11	5	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	89	44	100	49	9	4	4	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 all 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 pupils' 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.

5 February 2010

Dear Students



Inspection of The Kings of Wessex School, Cheddar, BS27 3AQ

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome at your school. We really enjoyed talking to you and hearing about all the things you are involved in. You are great ambassadors for your school and community. Most of your parents who completed the inspection questionnaire were very positive about the quality of education and care you receive.

You attend an outstanding school that has continued to improve since the last inspection. You attain high standards and make good progress in your learning because of your exemplary attitudes, first-class behaviour and the excellent relationships you develop with each other and your teachers. The care, support and guidance you are given are of the highest quality and you know that there are always people in school who can help you with a problem or a concern. The wide range of extra-curricular activities that you take part in and your contributions to the life of the school and your local community are second to none.

Other outstanding elements include.

- The leadership and management of the school.
- The regular and rigorous assessment of your work which ensures you know how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve.
- The action taken to make sure you are very well prepared for your future lives.
- The depth and breadth of the stimulating curriculum.
- Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

You receive good-quality teaching which enables you to make good progress in your learning. Some lessons are of outstanding quality because there is a balance between the teacher's talk and individual thinking time. We have asked the school to make sure that all lessons have this appropriate balance.

Thank you once again and, on behalf of my team, I wish you all the very best during your remaining time at school and in the future.

Yours sincerely

Lorna Brackstone
Her Majesty's Inspector

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