

The Kings of Wessex School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123896
Local Authority	Somerset
Inspection number	292830
Inspection dates	25–26 April 2007
Reporting inspector	David Townsend HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1185
6 th form	302
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of Governors	Mr P Lythgoe
Headteacher	Mr C M Richardson
Date of previous school inspection	2–5 December 2002
School address	Station Road Cheddar Somerset BS27 3AQ
Telephone number	01934 742608
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Age group	13–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school that serves a wide rural area. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is low. The number of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is also low as is the number for whom English is an additional language. The school is a specialist technology college. It has had Foundation School status since September 2006 and is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's self-evaluation that The Kings of Wessex School provides a good standard of education and has some outstanding features. As one parent rightly commented, 'It is a school of which to be proud'.

There is a shared commitment on the part of leaders, staff and governors to raising achievement. This is an inclusive school with a number of key strengths. The school's work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being is excellent. The students' enjoyment of school is outstanding. The specialist provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities is excellent, as is the provision within the Hearing Impaired Unit.

Achievement and standards are good. Standards are above average in Key Stage 3 and are much higher than national averages in Key Stage 4. Students make good progress from Year 9 to Year 11 from their above average starting points. Sixth form students also make good progress. Boys sometimes achieve less well in relation to their capabilities. Teaching and learning are good and there is some outstanding teaching. However there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and, in particular, learning across the school which are impeding consistently high achievement.

Students' personal development and well-being are good and outstanding in the sixth form. Students' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Care, guidance and support are good. Students feel safe and secure in school and know how to seek help when it is needed. The school provides a good curriculum and excellent enrichment opportunities. The choice of subjects on offer has improved markedly since the last inspection.

The quality of leadership and management is good, as is the school's capacity to improve. The headteacher provides very good leadership, ably supported by a strong senior team and governing body. The school's self-evaluation is mostly accurate and has led to well targeted improvements since the last inspection. For example, systems for evaluating teaching and learning have led to a marked reduction in satisfactory and weak teaching. However, there is still further work to do. For example, teaching approaches are too structured which discourages students, especially higher attainers and boys, from learning independently and studying in greater depth and in ways that match their preferred learning styles. Development plans are not clear enough about how actions will be evaluated, particularly their effect on pupils' achievement.. Consequently, leadership and management are good rather than outstanding as the actions of senior managers have yet to result in consistently high achievement for all.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school makes good provision for its sixth form students. Teaching is typically good and consequently students achieve well and reach above average standards. Teachers have excellent knowledge of their subjects and achieve a very positive rapport with their classes. Many build in opportunities for independent learning to

which the students respond enthusiastically. The curriculum is good with a wide range of academic courses on offer and there are plans to broaden choices more with the introduction of new enrichment courses so that Year 12 students will select five subjects in all. Care, guidance and support are good. Students appreciate the time teachers give to deal with academic and personal problems and find the individual monitoring sessions with their tutors very useful. This contributes very positively to outstanding personal development. Students' attitudes to learning are very good. The contributions students make to the school and to the local community are exceptional. For example, Sixth Form students organise the annual charities week, which raises £14,000 for chosen causes.

What the school should do to improve further

- Implement innovative ways of giving all students, and especially the more able, more opportunities to learn more independently.
- Ensure the impact of the school's plans for raising achievement, especially that of boys, can be evaluated more precisely.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Analysis of recent results and of progress in lessons indicates that students make good rather than outstanding progress during their time in school. The school sets challenging targets for the students which they generally meet.

Students enter the school in Year 9 with standards above the national average. Results in the Key Stage 3 tests have been consistently above average in recent years. However, although overall progress is good, fewer students achieved the higher levels in English than in mathematics and science.

Standards in Year 11 are well above average. The proportion of students attaining five good passes in the GCSE examinations continues to rise and, in 2006, reached 77 per cent. The percentage attaining five good passes including English and mathematics has also risen steadily and was 64 per cent in 2006. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is improving and is good overall. However, progress in mathematics remains satisfactory. Boys make less progress than girls in some subjects, whilst girls' achievement is improving at a faster rate. The school has analysed the results and is taking action to target boys' achievement, such as running a mentoring scheme to support these learners on a one-to-one basis. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported and make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well nurtured in all subjects and is good. Many students participate

enthusiastically in music and the arts and benefit from the many opportunities the school provides to learn about other cultures.

Students' enjoyment in learning and in all the extra-curricular activities is excellent. They display very positive attitudes and behave well, developing confidence, maturity and pride in their achievements. More confident students are capable of contributing more to their learning through developing greater independence. Attendance is good. Students report little bullying and feel safe. Parents value the harmonious relationships in the school. Students know how to keep fit and eat well, enjoying the school's healthy meal options and participating in many sporting opportunities.

The school council is very active, currently working on planning the 'Green Travel' scheme but students do not themselves chair this group, which limits the potential for students to demonstrate their leadership qualities. Students make many other good contributions to community life locally, such as reporting in newspapers and more widely through charitable fund raising. Students leave school with skills which equip them well for working life. Although vocational provision is limited, students learn properly about work-related learning and enterprise because these are systematically covered in the main curriculum and in citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teachers are subject specialists and know the examination requirements for their subjects very well. They use this to good effect when planning lessons. Preparation is thorough and resources, including computers, are used well to add variety. Lessons proceed at a good pace. The conclusion to lessons is sometimes rushed and teachers do not take enough time to check that expected learning has taken place.

The school has concentrated on developing teaching in recent years. The school's 'Teaching Framework' clarifies the features of teaching required in lessons and establishes a common structure. Teachers explain clearly to students what they are expected to learn and direct activities carefully to secure good learning. However, this structured approach can sometimes lead to teachers over-controlling students. Teachers' questioning is sometimes too rapid, leaving students too little opportunity to answer at length.

While a tight focus on examination requirements secures good learning, it prevents the more able from taking initiative and exploring subjects in the greater depth needed for outstanding learning. Nevertheless, the school has successfully raised achievement by improving the focus of teaching. Technology is used well to help teachers present ideas and the work of the 'innovations team' has successfully trialled more flexible approaches to classroom practices.

Relationships are excellent and this promotes mutual respect and very good attitudes to learning. Teachers use a range of assessment techniques, including asking students to evaluate the quality of their own and other students' work. Students know what grades they should obtain and receive guidance on how to improve. Students enjoy their lessons and comment on how everyone in the school is focused on helping them succeed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. The choice of subjects available at GCSE, AS and A levels has increased since the last inspection. However, there is still limited flexibility for progression at different rates or through alternative accreditation but the school does have plans to increase vocational courses from September. In keeping with the school's specialist status in technology, information and communication technology (ICT) provision has improved. A new, state-of-the-art modern foreign languages centre has opened and computing is used to good effect to give a fresh dimension to all learning. All subject areas are expected to contribute to literacy and numeracy development so students are well prepared for the next phase of their education. Work-related learning and careers education are both carefully planned. The citizenship syllabus gives appropriate emphasis to the value of healthy lifestyles and the need to stay safe. Students say they appreciate the excellent opportunities to engage in extra-curricular activities, to attend residential courses and to participate in visits to museums, theatres and foreign countries. As one learner commented, 'We really enjoy the variety'. This can range from putting on Shakespearean plays to exhibiting their own art.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good and some aspects are outstanding. The effectiveness of identifying and providing for the needs of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including the hearing-impaired, is excellent. Teachers share identified good practice in matching work to the needs of students well although the potential of the most capable is not always fully exploited. All safeguarding issues are addressed robustly and vulnerable students are mentored effectively by individual adults. Personal development for these students is very good.

Advice about future options is good. Outstandingly effective partnerships, for example with the local police, are instrumental in giving students a keen sense both of their rights and of their responsibilities. Parents are fully involved in students' learning and many participate in the discussions held by staff and students about setting learning targets for their children. The role of tutors has been strengthened and academic guidance is now good. The school is aware that tutorial time is still not always well used but more active monitoring of this time is already leading to improvements in this aspect of the school's provision.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, governors and senior leadership group provide very focused and effective leadership and management of the school. They are forward looking and ambitious. They have set a clear agenda for raising achievement further and have developed a strong, cohesive staff team which shares their high expectations for success amongst the students.

The school's specialist status as a technology college has been the catalyst for improvements in the quality of provision and has helped raise students' achievement. A range of partnerships has been forged with local organisations, including local schools. The innovative rural ICT project, through which Kings Of Wessex supports its nine partner first schools, has developed new teaching resource packs for technology and science for younger pupils. It has led to increased breadth and enrichment in the related subjects at the school, such as design and technology and science, and also to the provision of a raft of adult learning programmes for the wider community.

The school has analysed its own performance well and has a clear understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses. Evaluations have focused effectively on how to eliminate weaker teaching but have not been as insightful about how to promote independent learning in class and beyond. The work of those with management and leadership responsibilities for subjects and year groups across the school is good and improving. Governors are closely involved in school life and provide robust support and challenge for the leadership team. Evaluations by leaders are swiftly followed by action plans for improvement. These plans detail clear strategies for tackling weaknesses in students' achievement in the core subjects but are imprecise about the criteria for successful improvement and how the actions taken will be evaluated.

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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage		
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision		
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

¹ Grade 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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

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?	2	2

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	