

The King's School Specialising in Mathematics and Computing

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108275
Local authority	Wakefield
Inspection number	309643
Inspection dates	6–7 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Lowery

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	1,032
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ulric Murray
Headteacher	Mrs Julie Craig
Date of previous school inspection	January 2005
School address	Mill Hill Lane Pontefract West Yorkshire WF8 4JF
Telephone number	01977 601701
Fax number	01977 602259

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector seconded to Ofsted and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The King's School is an 11 to 16 specialist mathematics and computing college. This status, achieved in 2005, was awarded in association with a science college also based in Pontefract. The school, which has a stable population, is broadly average in size. The majority of students are from Pontefract and from White British backgrounds. Levels of social deprivation are in line with national averages, although the proportion eligible for free school meals is low. The school has a smaller number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities than seen nationally. Recently the school has been awarded Sportsmark, Artsmark, an International Schools Award, and the Kite Mark for mentoring and befriending.

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 School is an effective school where students work in a calm and supportive environment. They receive good teaching and, as a result, they are making good progress in their studies. The school has recently undergone a considerable period of change, with a rigorous focus on improving teaching and learning in order to raise standards.

The headteacher has a clear vision and is providing good leadership. A relatively new senior staff team is ensuring that key initiatives, including specialist mathematics and computing status, are enriching the experience young people receive. The school is now thoroughly evaluating its work, which is providing a good basis for further development. However, the use of data, in particular financial and performance information on exclusions, to inform some aspects of long-term planning is weak. Standards overall have risen, with a steady increase in the proportion of students gaining five or more higher level GCSE grades. Standards at the end of Year 9, whilst falling in 2007, are overall above national averages and well above in English. The school is setting challenging targets and its students are making good progress in reaching them. The school recognises it needs to maintain the focus on improving standards, in particular in mathematics; and to plan effectively to meet the needs of the small group of students in Years 9 to 11 who are less engaged with their studies and frequently away from their lessons.

Teaching across the school is good overall, with some, in particular in English, outstanding. The school is rightly focusing on subjects where teaching is more inconsistent and where learning is at a slower pace. Periods of extended staff absence, which reduced the effectiveness of some teaching, have now largely been resolved. Behaviour is good and most students have a positive attitude towards their studies. Where teaching is good or better students enjoy their learning. There is a good range of courses available, especially at Key Stage 4, which increases students' motivation and the opportunities to achieve success. This is enhanced by an extensive programme of extra-curricular and sporting clubs. The school identifies it needs to further extend the range of vocational courses to ensure all learners are engaged with their studies. Students are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles and participation in sport is good, although the impact on levels of healthy eating is poor. Academic and pastoral guidance are good, with effective mentoring support which is appreciated by students. Governance of the school is satisfactory and ensures students work in a safe and secure environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the use of data at a strategic level in order to ensure that provision both engages and meets the needs of all learners.
- Increase the proportion of students who adopt healthy lifestyles.
- Ensure financial planning in the school underpins school improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards on entry are broadly average. Study of students' work in lessons, test scores and exam results indicate that standards are above average by the end of Year 11.

By the end of Year 9, students attain above average standards in mathematics and science, and well above average in English. This represents overall good achievement. Higher-attaining students achieve particularly well in all three subjects. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at A* to C increased in 2007. The proportion of students gaining five A* to C grades at GCSE with English and mathematics included fell in 2007, but remained above the national average. Students' current work and results from modular examinations indicate that the school is on target to reach improved higher level pass rates in 2008. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress across all years. In addition, the small group of students who have repeated periods of exclusion from lessons do not achieve as well as they could.

The school has established effective arrangements to track students' progress and set challenging targets. Since 2005, the school's specialist status, with its focus on improving teaching, has been having a positive impact on improving standards in mathematics and in information and communication technology (ICT). This, in turn, is contributing well to the overall rise in standards across the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school gives good support to its students, assisting them to develop well, as confident individuals. Many enjoy coming to school, wanting to learn and succeed. Attendance levels have improved since the last inspection and are now satisfactory. However, for a small minority of students, who are not engaged in their learning, regular use of the isolation room and high exclusion rates restrict their participation and attendance in lessons. Positive relationships support good learning in the school. Inspectors observed that behaviour is excellent in most lessons and good around the school. Students respect and appreciate the efforts staff put in to help them achieve. Overall spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although multicultural awareness is underdeveloped. Some students have adopted healthy lifestyles, with high participation rates in sport. However, many do not choose the healthy food options and there is some covert smoking on site. Students feel safe and say there is little bullying. There are good opportunities to contribute to the community, including regular charity work. Students are well prepared for their future lives and value the opportunities to organise and involve themselves in the various enterprise activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the quality of teaching and learning is good. There is some satisfactory teaching but very importantly there is also outstanding teaching. No inadequate teaching was observed. The school remains very focused on improving the quality and consistency of teaching and learning, resulting in recent improvements in progress and achievement for most students in many lessons. In the best lessons teachers are enthusiastic and plan lessons with a good pace; they provide a secure environment, where students feel safe and able to take risks with their learning. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson students willingly read out their plays and received appreciative applause. In these lessons students develop good subject knowledge and skills, and demonstrate a positive attitude to learning. Where learning is less effective the pace of teaching is too slow, heavily teacher-led and has too few opportunities for independent study. Specialist status has made a good contribution to the development of teaching and learning, including promoting the increased use of ICT across the school. Overall assessment procedures are good as demonstrated by effective use of questioning to ensure students understand what they have learnt. As a consequence, most students are aware of how well they are performing and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and increasingly meets students' needs and aspirations. There is a wide choice of GCSE and vocational courses, which motivates most students. In addition, imaginative use of early entry to examination courses, including GCSE languages in Year 9, and access to GCE AS level critical thinking, are assisting in meeting the needs of individual learners. The school recognises the need to widen provision, to offer further practical work-related courses, for the small proportion of students for whom current academic and vocational programmes are not suitable. At Key Stage 3, younger students are offered a broad range of subjects, with additional opportunities for literacy and numeracy catch-up classes. A strong 'life management skills' programme tackles personal and social education and citizenship. It is well received by students and provides good preparation for future learning and the world of work. Furthermore there is a wide range of additional activities offered, with good take up by students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral guidance is good and underpinned by an effective team of tutors. In addition, mentors provide a good level of support to vulnerable students. The school provides a safe and caring environment. The breakfast club is popular with younger students, as it provides a sheltered base at the start of the day. Students comment that any problems are dealt with fairly and promptly. The procedures for child protection are in place; staff are aware of their responsibilities and have appropriate training. The school has recently established a comprehensive system for monitoring academic progress and the provision of guidance. As a result, staff effectively monitor academic progress across all year groups and organise additional support

when needed. However, the information from student monitoring, in particular on students excluded from lessons, is not always used effectively to inform future planning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are effective in focusing the school on improving standards, in particular through the monitoring of departments and provision of training, in order to strengthen teaching and learning. The headteacher has a clear vision and is providing good strategic leadership. A restructured senior leadership team is working closely with middle leaders to ensure key priorities are understood and effectively implemented. However, some inconsistency of approach remains, including in assessment practices and marking procedures, which impacts on different levels of achievement in some departments in the school. Leadership has been effective in ensuring greater stability in staffing and that extended periods of staff absence do not impact on students' learning. Self-evaluation systems are now a central part of school management processes, with good inputs from staff and increasingly from students. Older students commented on how they felt they had a stake in the school and how seriously their views were listened to. As a result of the effective self-evaluation, senior staff have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. For example, senior staff identify the challenge presented by a small number of students who are not always engaged in their studies. The school has explicit development plans which focus on the key areas of school improvement. The school recognises, however, that long-term planning needs to be more rigorously aligned with financial planning in order to ensure the most effective use of resources. Senior staff have actively pursued external support in order to address inadequacies in the school's accommodation. Imaginative use of specialist school funding, combined with the school's own capital resources, has allowed for significant upgrading of ICT facilities and a modest increase in teaching accommodation. Parents and students are concerned about the poor state of repair of many of the buildings and believe this adversely impacts on the effectiveness of the learning environment. Governance overall is satisfactory and ensures the school meets all of its statutory requirements. However, governors are not sufficiently focused on long-term planning.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	NA
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed, including the adequacy of staff, to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No



8 February 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The King's School Specialising in Mathematics and Computing, Pontefract, WF8 4JF

I am writing to let you know the judgements we have made following our visit to your school. Thank you for your help and taking the time to talk to us during the inspection. We judged your school to be providing you with a good education. In particular we found:

- the standards you reach and the progress being made are good and improving
- specialist status as a mathematics and computing college is increasing the opportunities and activities open to you
- the teaching and guidance you receive are good, in particular many of you commented how the support the mentors provide is particularly valued
- behaviour is good; most students have a positive attitude to learning, although a few need further support to avoid exclusion from lessons
- attendance has improved to satisfactory levels
- the school is providing you with a good range of courses and after-school clubs
- the headteacher and governors have worked hard to improve the school buildings; however, many of you felt that the accommodation, including the changing rooms, were in a poor state of repair.

It was clear from our discussions that many of you are proud of your school. There are, however, a number of key things which the school can do to make further improvements. These include strengthening how it plans its spending, and to ensure systems are in place to support all learners to achieve success in their studies. We are also encouraging you to adopt healthier lifestyles, in particular with what you choose to eat during the day and for some avoiding the temptations of smoking. I trust you will work cooperatively with your teachers on this.

Good luck with your future studies.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Paul Lowery'.

Paul Lowery
Lead inspector