

The King Edward VI School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122365
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	314279
Inspection dates	9–10 July 2008
Reporting inspector	David Muir HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1441
6th form	476
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Roger Vaughan
Headteacher	Mr Simon Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2005
School address	Cottingwood Lane Morpeth Northumberland NE61 1DN
Telephone number	01670 515415
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The King Edward VI School (KEVI) is a larger than average, 13–18 mixed comprehensive school with a much larger than average sixth form. It draws students from the local market town and its surrounding rural areas. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds with a lower than average number entitled to free school meals and this number is falling. Some students travel three hours a day to get to and from school. The school has a very low proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and very few who are looked after by the local authority. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below average, although this has increased in recent years. The number of students who do not have English as their first language is very low and few pupils join or leave the school other than at the usual times.

King Edward VI is a specialist technology and arts college and is leading or participating in a number of local and national initiatives aimed at raising standards, including having 'Leading Edge' status. In recent years the school has been awarded a number of accolades including: Investor in People, Beacon Status, International School Award. Three members of staff have been regional winners in the national Teaching Awards (the Platos) and one has received a regional award as best member of support staff in the north east.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

King Edward VI School is an outstanding school. It provides an excellent learning environment where students feel safe and their individual needs are well catered for. The school's work on developing the student voice is exemplary and the students benefit significantly from the opportunities which it offers.

Students make excellent progress from their entry in Year 9 until the end of Year 11. They reach standards that are significantly above the national average and the school's monitoring indicates that this trend will continue with the current Year 11s attaining higher standards still. However, the school is not complacent and is working hard to raise standards further. Many students progress well due to the excellent personalised learning opportunities provided by the school. Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy school and play a part in every aspect of its development. They take an active role in the community at school, local, national and global levels, raising money for a number of worthy causes, including funds for the rebuilding of a special school in Nepal. Students' have very positive attitudes and their behaviour in and around school is excellent, making the school a very welcoming place for visitors.

Students know how to keep themselves safe and healthy. They enthusiastically participate in a wide range of after school clubs and activities. Two particularly impressive examples are the Juggling Club which has re-engaged a number of previously disaffected learners, who are now happy to give public performances of their new skill; and the 'KEVI Gnomes' who have designed and are now developing a garden area, which has already won an international award in competition against projects from a number of other countries. Students' moral and social development is outstanding and is evident in their consideration for each other and the world around them. Students are well prepared for their future lives by the independence and leadership skills which the school develops in them.

Teaching and learning are good. A large majority of lessons are good or outstanding. There are very positive relationships between staff and students. The best lessons challenge students with well planned tasks that match the range of learners' abilities. However, there are also examples where there is too much teacher talk and not enough challenge. The school knows this and is working on improvements. Excellent relationships with partnership schools are promoting a consistent approach to assessment to inform the next stage of learning across the schools, through the sharing of best practice and joint training activities. This means that students increasingly know what they need to do to improve in their lessons. The curriculum is outstanding and well supported by the extensive menu of enrichment activities. It enhances the learning of all students and is continually under review to ensure that it meets the needs of the learners. The increasing level of personalisation of the curriculum promotes their excellent progress. Care, guidance and support are excellent. Students settle in quickly in Year 9 and subsequently progress very well. There is effective communication with parents, including information sessions organised by the school. This was particularly significant leading up to this year's examinations when parents were given information and advice which allowed them to support their children in their revision. Excellent links with outside agencies mean that there is a wide range of support available for students.

Leadership and management are outstanding. There is a clear vision and direction which has led to significant improvements throughout the school. The involvement of all members of the

school community has been a key element in driving this vision forward. The school's specialist status in arts and technology has contributed well to the raising of standards across the school. Good progress has been made in relation to the areas identified for improvement at the last inspection. The school provides excellent value for money and is well placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a successful sixth form. The 2007 results in Advanced level (A2) examinations were high, and for Advanced Supplementary (AS) level were above average, maintaining the positive trend since the school's last inspection. The school's evidence suggests that performance in 2008 will be similar.

The vast majority of students successfully complete their courses and are able to access their higher education and career ambitions. The overall pass rate is good. Around half of all passes in A2 examinations are at A or B grades, a higher proportion than is usually found. Given their above average attainment on entry to the sixth form, students' overall achievement and progress are good. Higher attaining students do particularly well, and achievement is notably strong in graphics, English, history, sociology, and psychology. The quality of teaching is good overall with examples of outstanding practice. The best teaching is lively and challenging, and fosters students' responsibility and independence in their learning. Students respond very well to this. They have extremely positive attitudes to learning and are very keen to succeed. Systems for checking on students' academic and personal progress are strong. Data is used effectively to monitor students' achievement and to intervene with support when they encounter difficulties. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and are proud of their school. They say they are very well supported and they appreciate the staff's efforts on their behalf. They feel that the rigorous checks on their progress and attendance are fair and in their best interests.

The sixth form is well led and managed. Following recent review, improvements are planned to strengthen management and student support services. There is a sharp focus on improving teaching and learning where needed. The personal development of students and the support they receive are outstanding. Students feel strongly that their views matter to the school. They enthusiastically play a full part in school life, notably by helping younger students, acting as subject leaders, and taking part in the very wide range of enrichment opportunities. The flourishing Duke of Edinburgh award scheme is but one illustration of the variety provided.

The sixth form is very popular, with more than three quarters of Year 11 students continuing into Year 12, encouraged by a flexible entry policy. Some have relatively modest attainment at GCSE. Students are able to choose from a very wide range of academic A level courses, but there are few alternatives. Whilst most students complete their courses, some do not reach their target grades. A number leave at the end of Year 12. The school acknowledges the need to ensure a closer match in the curriculum between appropriate courses and students' capabilities, as well as their aspirations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall standard of teaching and learning by disseminating elements of outstanding practice throughout the school
- Ensure that the curriculum in 6th form is well suited to meet the needs of all students

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attainment of students on entry is above average in English, mathematics and science. The school builds successfully on this foundation to secure very good progress and students reach high standards at Key Stage 3. In the final year of Key Stage 3, the school's strong partnerships with the feeder schools ensure that students make the same progress as they made in Years 7 and 8 in their middle schools. As a result of good teaching in combination with challenging targets, high expectations and careful monitoring, students make excellent progress to reach high standards at GCSE. The subject areas related to the school's specialisms are strengths of the school and the impact of this is reflected in particularly high standards in both key stages. In most subjects, including English and the school's specialist subject areas, boys and girls reach standards that are significantly above national averages. Internal monitoring indicates that the current Year 11 students are on target to reach higher standards in this year's examinations. There are no significant variations between the achievements of different groups of students. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with significant needs, achieve well. Many reach better than expected grades because of the highly focused individual support they receive including well planned intervention strategies which are implemented effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development of students is outstanding and this is reflected by their excellent behaviour, high achievement and enthusiastic enjoyment of school life.

Students know how to keep themselves safe and healthy and they actively promote this in others through excellent peer support schemes at transition from middle school and beyond. Bullying is rare and when happens is dealt with effectively.

Many students make effective and positive contributions to their own community and further afield, taking responsibility for setting up, organising and running a vast range of enrichment activities. They also contribute to a highly effective student council and engage in numerous overseas aid projects such as the classroom built in Uganda. The responsibilities they are given and trust they are shown, enhance students' self confidence as they progress through school, preparing them well academically and socially for their future working lives. The student voice is an exemplary strength of the school having won national and international awards such as The BT International Seen and Heard Award. Students are involved in planning the curriculum and assessing teaching and learning through roles such as 'student subject leader' which make a tangible difference to the school. Moral and social development is outstanding and is evident in students' consideration for more vulnerable students and their extensive charity work. An example is the 'Success of Creativity' afternoon which benefited St Oswald's Hospice. Although the spiritual provision follows a broadly Christian ethos the school is aware that equal weight must be given to all creeds. One student opined 'You can get so much from here if you commit yourself to the school and the challenges it offers'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. The best lessons are well planned because teachers know the students well. The work matches the full range of students' abilities and all students make at least good progress. In the best lessons teachers have excellent knowledge of the curriculum and there is a variety of well thought out activities which match different learning styles and levels of all students. These lessons also excite and engage the students and their progress is well monitored through active questioning and good assessment of their work. Teaching is good for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They make outstanding progress because their learning needs are supported in a skilful manner.

Relationships between staff and students are very positive and supportive. Students listen carefully and behave well with teachers who use a variety of techniques to improve and support learning. Assessment for learning is being developed with partner schools through shared continuous professional development. Students are increasingly aware of how they can improve in their work through the use of academic targets. In some subjects, there is a consistent approach to marking and the setting of targets but the school is aware that this consistency is not yet school-wide. Robust systems are in place to use a wide range of data to track and set targets for students and to monitor their progress. Well focused professional development for teachers, and growing opportunities to share best practice in partnership schools underpin the excellent progress being made.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which meets the needs of all the students very effectively and meets all statutory requirements. The curriculum engages students and enhances their learning. The curriculum is effectively modified to meet the learning needs of all students. An exemplary and innovative feature of the curriculum is the 'free choice of options' which is flexible enough to cater for differing cohorts. This enables learning to be well matched to the individual needs and aspirations of students. Curriculum enhancement through the use of a wide range of visits and visitors provides the opportunity to engage with the local and business community to encourage the development of life skills. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities have their needs carefully identified, through robust liaison with feeder schools, and are supported very effectively during their time at KEVI.

Collaboration with the partnership schools is well thought out ensuring that the curriculum has continuity and progression from the middle school to the upper school. There are also opportunities for older students to support the learning of younger students, either through visits to the local middle schools or in their roles as learning support assistants in their own school. There is a large array of enrichment activities on offer which have a very high participation rate. The students organise and manage many of these activities and they have a significant positive impact on the personal development and well-being of the students.

Effective curriculum planning and the enrichment programme combine very effectively and allow the students to make excellent progress and enjoy a real sense of success.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care guidance and support in the school are outstanding, with the school providing extremely high levels of pastoral care and academic guidance. The staff know the students very well and are dedicated to raising their achievements. This aspect of the provision is strong for vulnerable students and those at risk of exclusion. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is outstanding. The school has strong systems in place to track the progress of all students and there are outstanding systems in place to provide support for any students whose achievement show signs of slipping. The school makes excellent use of the data that it collects and uses it to monitor the progress of different groups of students as well as individuals. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and child protection procedures are well understood by staff.

Students are very appreciative of the work the school does to support and guide them and they speak highly of the arrangements made by the whole school, including the work of peer mentors, to ensure they settle in quickly in Year 9 and progress well during their time in KEVI. There is effective communication with parents who are very supportive of the school. Excellent links with outside agencies mean that there is a wide range of support available for students should it be required.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher has shown strong leadership in implementing a vision, which has involved all members of the school community in raising expectations and standards. A sense of shared ownership and the involvement of all staff in school improvement has been a key element in driving this vision forward. The school's self-evaluation is accurate, demonstrating an awareness of strengths and areas for development. Lesson observations are regularly undertaken to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and these are accurate, providing a clear picture of the areas needing to be developed in teaching and learning. There is also continuous review of the curriculum throughout the school to ensure that it effectively meets the needs of all learners, including those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The use of data for tracking pupil progress is comprehensive and robust allowing the school to monitor individual progress as well as the progress of groups of students. This data is also used to review progress in individual subjects. This improved use of data has led to an improvement in achievement and standards by providing support for students according to their needs. Specialist school status in arts and technology has contributed well to the raising of standards across the school. An example of this is the excellent work that the school does in ensuring that students are able to settle down very quickly when they transfer from their middle school. The strong links with partnership schools have also been significantly enhanced

by the specialist status. These links have ensured that students make the transition from Year 8 to Year 9 as smoothly as possible.

Staff's performance management objectives link well to subject development plans and the school improvement plan. This ensures that training is focussed so that it directly benefits the students' learning. Collaborative working between the school and its partner schools has allowed staff to build on their knowledge and professional skills.

The school has developed an impressive range of partnerships, with a wide array of organisations, including universities and the National College for School Leadership as well as local schools and Connexions amongst others. The governors provide outstanding support for the school and provide extremely effective challenge and support to the headteacher. The school meets all of its statutory requirements

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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?	1	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

11 July 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The King Edward VI School, Northumberland, NE61 1DN

Thank you very much for the very enjoyable two days that my colleagues and I recently spent at your school. It was made all the more pleasurable by your behaviour and attitude towards us. We were impressed by how willing you were to talk about your school and it was very interesting to hear your views.

You are all very proud of your school and you are right to be, as we found it to be outstanding. There are many areas of your school which are excellent but we found the work around the student voice to be exemplary and is something that you should be very proud of now and into the future. Your personal development is giving you the skills that you need to be able to become successful and confident young adults. The leadership of the school is excellent and has a clear vision of how the school should develop. That vision includes a lot of involvement from you in contributing ideas and getting actively involved. Your teachers know you well and in the best teaching, they plan lessons with activities that meet all of your individual levels of work. Your behaviour is excellent and you are clearly keen to learn new things. We saw that you are learning skills, in lessons and in enrichment activities, which will help you to achieve your ambitions and aspirations when you leave KEVI as you will be well prepared to make decisions about your future.

As a result of our visit, we have asked the school to improve two areas.

- Ensure that the outstanding teaching that we saw is spread throughout the school so that you are taught as well as that in more of your lessons.
- Improve the sixth form curriculum so that there is a wider choice of courses for those of you who do not want to study for A-levels.

You can help with these by using the student voice to pass on ideas to the management of the school to suggest how they can tackle these areas for improvement.

I would like to wish you all the best for the future in your excellent school and thank you again for your very warm welcome.

Yours sincerely

David Muir

Her Majesty's Inspector