

Samuel King's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112378
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	378480
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2012
Lead inspector	Margaret Farrow 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 students	11–16
Gender of students	Mixed
Number of students on the school roll	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoffrey Carrick
Headteacher	Edward Middlemass (Acting)
Date of previous school inspection	22 November 2006
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Introduction

Inspection team

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector

Anne Smedley

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 19 lessons, taught by 14 teachers. An inspector also visited a number of classrooms for short periods, to observe students' behaviour and attitudes in lessons specifically. Meetings were held with groups of students, staff, senior leaders, representatives of the governing body and a general adviser from the local authority. Discussions were also held with a small number of parents and carers who were attending a parents' evening at the end of the first day of the inspection. One parent spoke to an inspector on the telephone. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a number of documents including the school's self-evaluation and development planning, information on students' current attainment and progress and a range of safeguarding documents. Inspectors were unable to take account of responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection because too few questionnaires had been completed. However, the inspection team considered 46 responses to the questionnaire for parents and carers and others completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

Samuel King's is a much smaller than average-sized secondary school and the number of students attending is falling year on year. It is part of a Trust of five rural schools that comprise the North Pennine Learning Partnership. All students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals is below average. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is broadly average; a higher than average proportion of these students has a statement of special educational needs. The school is one of seven small secondary schools that have achieved specialist technology college status as part of the Rural Academy of Cumbria. The school meets the government's current floor standard for academic performance. Samuel King's has experienced significant turbulence in staffing and headship since the previous inspection and has been without a substantive headteacher since January 2011. Until December 2011, an 'acting headteacher' role was undertaken collectively by three senior members of staff. The current temporary headteacher joined the school during the autumn term initially as a consultant. A new headteacher has been appointed and will take up position in April 2012.

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	4
Achievement of students	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of students	2
Leadership and management	4

Key Findings

- In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in leadership and management, including governance.
- Lack of consistent leadership in recent years has limited leaders' effectiveness in driving improvement fast enough and improving achievement. This means that staff have not been held sufficiently to account for their students' progress. As a result, students' achievement and the progress they make from entry into school to the time they leave are satisfactory rather than good, particularly in English and mathematics.
- There are a number of strengths, notably students' behaviour and safety. Students say they feel safe in this small and welcoming school; they are polite, friendly and caring, with positive attitudes to learning. Their attendance is improving and is average.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Around half is good and occasionally outstanding, but it is not consistently good enough over time to make sure all groups of students make better than satisfactory progress. This is because teachers do not always use information they have about students' current abilities to plan work that is matched to their different starting points successfully enough.
- Relationships and communication between the governing body and staff have been at times strained; in part due to a staff reduction process, and a lack of clarity on the responsibilities of a governing body within a Trust. Until recently, the quality of information and advice provided to the governing body has hindered its ability to hold leaders to account well enough, or to take some key decisions, such as the appointment of a substantive headteacher, in a timely manner.
- Over the past year the assistant headteachers have tackled some significant issues effectively. They have overseen day-to-day management of the school well but had little time to carry out a strategic leadership role and raise achievement. Through rigorous and accurate self-evaluation and clear, focused improvement planning, the acting headteacher has quickly galvanised the senior team to drive improvement, and

with some success. Actions taken are already making a positive difference to the quality of teaching and to students' progress in lessons but have yet to show an impact on their outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and ensure all students make at least good progress in lessons by:
 - developing a consistent approach to teachers' planning and to systems to regularly track and assess students' achievements across the school
 - making sure all teachers interrogate assessment information about students' prior learning and use it to plan interesting work and lessons that are closely matched to students' varying starting points
 - ensuring teachers plan the work of teaching assistants carefully
 - ensuring all teachers adhere to the school's marking policy so every student knows how well they are doing and what they need to do to achieve challenging targets
 - developing a coherent homework policy that includes regular feedback
 - extending opportunities for students to take more responsibility for their learning and to develop their independence and collaborative working skills.

- Ensure effective leadership and management by:
 - making sure leaders have a regular strategic overview of the performance of individual and groups of students, to enable the timely evaluation of students' progress and hold teachers to account fully for that progress
 - developing the expertise of subject leaders in monitoring, evaluating and improving their subject area, and involving them fully in whole-school self-evaluation
 - ensuring outcomes of regular monitoring of teaching and learning lead to training to enhance teachers' skills where needed, and to share the good practice evident
 - extending the range of high quality information recently provided to the governing body so it can always hold the school rigorously to account for its work
 - developing the good practice in promoting students' literacy, communication and numeracy skills seen in some subjects, into a planned whole-school strategy.

Main Report

Achievement of students

Numbers taking examinations are very small; this makes year-on-year comparison difficult. Nevertheless, at a time when the proportion of students attaining at least five GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has been rising nationally, the proportion attaining this key measure has not improved and is broadly average. Most parents and carers consider their children make good progress. Observations by inspectors show that students' attainment is generally improving and they are now making at least satisfactory progress in lessons. In around half of lessons observed students were making good progress. There is little variation in the achievements of boys and girls, although the 2011 Year 11 examination results showed that boys' attainment and progress in English was above that of girls. Lesson observations, book scrutiny and the school's tracking data show that students' progress varies across subjects. Students in Year 7 are making good progress

in mathematics; their work is generally of good quality and books show little time is wasted. Key Stage 4 examination results in 2011 indicated that disabled students or those who have special educational needs made similar progress to their peers. In lessons their progress is also satisfactory. They receive sensitive care and support from learning assistants but teachers do not always provide detailed guidance on what assistants need to do to move learning on rapidly from students' starting points. Students leave school effectively prepared for their next steps due to the good development of their personal qualities, social and workplace skills, and good transition arrangements. Nearly all move onto education, employment or training.

Quality of teaching

Virtually all parents and carers say their children are well taught and most think they are making good progress. Due to recent actions taken by leaders, an improving proportion of teaching is judged good or better but the remaining satisfactory teaching continues to hinder students' rate of progress in some lessons. Relationships are good and a calm and purposeful atmosphere typifies all lessons. Where students learn well, for example in art and design, and design and technology, teachers' high expectations and good subject knowledge capture their interest. Opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy skills are capitalised upon well. Teaching is paced, and challenges and encourages students to work independently, in pairs or groups successfully. Students in a Year 11 art class were observed working maturely and independently, utilising a wide range of media and materials with confidence and skill. In an outstanding Year 7 geography lesson, an interesting mix of resources, the teacher's enthusiasm, constant checking of students' understanding and use of challenging questions helped students to thoroughly enjoy their learning and make rapid progress. In such lessons, good use of assessment information about students' prior learning makes sure planning and work is well matched to their different abilities.

In satisfactory lessons teachers are not making effective use of this information, planning is rudimentary and students often all complete the same work despite their different levels. Opportunities to develop students' literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects are missed. Too much 'teacher-talk' restricts students' abilities to take more responsibility for their learning or develop their independence or collaborative skills. Not all students know their targets. There are examples of good marking and feedback to help students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further, but practice is inconsistent.

Behaviour and safety of students

Virtually all parents and carers who responded to the survey say behaviour is good and all consider their children are safe. Students spoken to said also that behaviour was good. It was good or better in most lessons seen. Students arrive promptly to lessons and have positive attitudes to learning. They are generally keen to get on, to contribute to discussions, and respond to teachers' questions and to each others views when working in pairs or groups. Their behaviour around school, in the dining hall, yard and corridors is good, orderly and safe. Fixed-term exclusion rates are very low and there have been no permanent exclusions in recent years. The effective promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development ensures students are friendly and caring. One summed up the views of many when he commented, 'This is a small school and everyone gets along well together'. Some students and a few parents and carers report that behaviour is only sometimes good in lessons. Inspectors spent extra time on day two of the inspection observing behaviour in a range of situations to seek out why these views differed from

observations and comments made on day one. Students spoken to confirmed behaviour is usually good; occasionally when their usual teacher is not taking them or in satisfactory lessons, students are not as well behaved but they do not think behaviour should be judged just satisfactory. Scrutiny of behavioural records shows that behaviour over time is good too. Students are adamant that issues of bullying, including prejudice-based bullying is not an issue, it is not tolerated and on the rare occasions it does occur is well tackled. Practically all parents and carers consider this to be the case.

Leadership and management

The assistant headteachers successfully managed the school on a day-to-day basis and tackled recommendations from the previous inspection. It is only recently, however, that senior leaders, led by the current acting headteacher, have acted strategically in order to take rapid and decisive action to improve matters. They now, for the first time in recent years, have a highly accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and have implemented a clear action plan for improvement, with some success. Increasingly strong performance management processes are tackling underperformance and in-school training is better-targeted at whole-school issues such as improving teaching and learning. This has made a difference to the quality of teaching and to students' better progress in lessons. The impact of the actions already in place shows the school has the capacity to continue to improve. Opportunities to share the good practice in teaching clearly evident in school are, however, limited and the systems for tracking students' progress are inconsistent. While there are examples of good practice in some departments, there is no consistent whole-school approach. This makes it difficult for senior leaders to monitor the progress of students or groups of students regularly at a strategic level, limiting their ability to hold teachers to account fully for their students' achievements or determine the impact of interventions for students at risk of underachieving.

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets students' needs for a number of reasons. The school works effectively with partner schools and the Rural Academy to broaden its range. Specialist subjects of design and technology, and biology are strong and students achieve more successfully in them. The curriculum is enriched well by a wide range of after-school activities and visits locally, nationally and internationally. This helps to broaden students' horizons, further promote their spiritual and moral development and extend their social and cultural development successfully, well beyond the rural communities in which they live. However, there is an inconsistent approach to developing students' literacy, communication and numeracy skills across the curriculum. The use of homework is also inconsistent.

Senior leaders and the governing body, promote equality of opportunity satisfactorily because there is no discernable difference in the progress of different groups of students and they make satisfactory progress during their time in school. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated and this contributes strongly to the harmonious community. Every effort is taken to include students into the life of the school; the provision of transport after school means students can take part in and enjoy the range of activities on offer. The governing body's procedures for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements. The governing body accepts that it has been tactical rather than strategic in the past; dealing with issues such as budget management rather than also providing challenge to the senior team; in part due to a lack of robust data and information. They have refocused and have been trained by the headteacher about their role and are more fully involved in the life of the school. They have recently been provided with clear and unambiguous performance information, helping them carry out their challenge role more successfully.

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 students' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its students well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its students.
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 students. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the students' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Behaviour	how well students behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Students' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well students acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which students are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the students' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe students are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Students' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



10 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Samuel King's School, Alston CA9 3QU

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited Samuel King's recently. We found you to be polite, friendly and generous with your time when we spoke to you in groups, in lessons and around the school. Your behaviour and the way the school keeps you safe are good. You and your parents and carers think that bullying is rare and tackled well. The school promotes your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively through the curriculum, visits out of school and the good range of activities you can take part in after school. By the time you leave school, your attainment in English and mathematics is similar to the national average and you make satisfactory progress given your abilities on entry into the school.

However, there are some important weaknesses which have led us to judge the school as inadequate overall. The school has had many changes of staff and has been without a permanent headteacher for over a year. This has meant that until recently, while senior teachers have made sure the school runs smoothly, there has not been enough focus on checking that all teachers are making sure you are achieving your best. The governing body has not been able to check either because past information provided to them has not been good enough. Since the autumn term, the acting headteacher and senior team have worked hard to improve matters. For example, the quality of teaching has improved, some is good and even outstanding but it is not always good enough to make sure you all make the best possible progress in lessons. The school is developing information systems to monitor the impact of its work but these are not fully in place. We have therefore given the school a notice to improve and asked the senior team to keep improving these areas of the school's work. Inspectors will visit the school after a few months to see how well senior managers are tackling these issues.

Once again, many thanks for your contribution to the inspection. You can help by always trying your best in lessons. On behalf of the team, I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Farrow
Her Majesty's Inspector

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