

Samuel King's School

Church Road, Alston, Cumbria, CA9 3QU

Inspection dates 10–11 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Require improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Require improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' progress, particularly in English and mathematics, is not fast enough.
- Teaching, although now improving, does not allow students to achieve well. Students are sometimes not moved on quickly enough to more challenging tasks as soon as they are ready.
- In some students' books, work is unfinished and poorly presented. This reflects some students' poor attitudes to learning and the lower expectations of some teachers.
- Teachers' marking does not give students consistently clear advice about how to improve their work. Students often do not follow the advice given.
- The spending of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged students has not raised their attainment or narrowed the gaps in achievement between them and other students quickly enough.
- Middle leadership requires improvement. Many subject leaders are new to their posts and are in the early stages of monitoring students' progress rigorously and accurately and raising achievement.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. The school's records relating to elements of safeguarding and students' behaviour are not kept in a manner that enables information to be retrieved easily, checked regularly or reviewed to ensure patterns of behaviour are identified and addressed quickly.

The school has the following strengths

- This is an improving school. The determined and experienced leadership of the headteacher, well supported by governors, has been instrumental in improving teaching, raising students' achievement and eliminating a large budget deficit.
- The very large majority of parents are pleased with the quality of education the school provides. They rightly value the good personal support given to students and recognise that students feel safe at school.
- Students make good progress in French, dance and drama.
- Students are given good advice and support, which enables them to make well informed choices about the next stage of their education, training and employment. Most show tolerance and respect and develop an awareness of the needs of others, which prepares them well for their future lives as citizens of modern Britain.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 14 lessons being taught to full classes and smaller groups of students of all ages and in a range of subjects, including mathematics and English. The headteacher and inspector made several shorter visits to classrooms and looked at students' books together.
- Discussions were held with parents, students, staff, governors and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school's work and looked at students' books, progress data, safeguarding information and other documentation.
- The 35 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were considered, as well as those from school staff.

Inspection team

Ann Ashdown, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average- sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those who are supported by the pupil premium is average. The pupil premium is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- Almost all students are White British.
- A well above average proportion of students joins and leaves the school part way through their secondary education.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school does not use any alternative provision involving off-site education for students.
- The school receives support from Queen Katherine School, Kendal where the headteacher is a National Leader of Education.
- Almost three-quarters of the teaching staff left in July 2014. Five new teachers, including new leaders of English and mathematics, joined the school in September 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement, particularly in English and mathematics, and improve teaching and students' behaviour by:
 - giving students challenging work and moving them on quickly to more difficult tasks as soon as they are ready
 - improving students' attitudes to learning by insisting on high quality presentation and layout of work in books
 - ensuring that the marking of students' work gives them clear pointers on how to improve and making sure that students act on the advice given
 - regularly checking the impact of the school's policy on early entry to examinations to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of all students.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership, management and governance by:
 - ensuring that the spending of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged students is fully effective in raising their achievement
 - ensuring that middle leaders monitor the progress of students accurately and rigorously and quickly bring about improvements in their areas of responsibility
 - making sure that the recording of staff safeguarding qualifications and incidents of students' challenging behaviour enables this important information to be retrieved easily and checked regularly and so that patterns of poor behaviour to be identified and addressed quickly.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The very effective leadership of the headteacher has brought about school improvement through tackling weaknesses in teaching and making teachers more accountable for the progress of students. There has been a period of huge staff change and several heads of department, including those in English and mathematics, have recently taken up their posts. Consequently, leadership and management require improvement because new staff are in the early stages of monitoring students' progress rigorously and accurately and bringing about improvements in students' achievement. Some assessments of current students' attainment in English appear to be overgenerous.
- Staff performance is well managed and the leadership of teaching is strong. Staff feel valued and well supported. Leaders and managers have identified clear priorities for improvement. All staff are successfully working together to create a climate in which good teaching and good behaviour can flourish and have the capacity to achieve their goals.
- The pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged students has not been used fully effectively in narrowing the gaps between their achievement and that of other students. Funding is now being spent more wisely on providing students with helpful individual support in GCSE lessons, rather than on providing a different course. However, the impact of this use of funds on current students' attainment has yet to be fully seen.
- Although disadvantaged students do not achieve as well as their peers, in other aspects of its work the school promotes equal opportunities well. All students have equal access to all school visits and events. The school fosters good relations between students. Through meaningful assemblies and work in lessons, particularly in history, students develop an awareness of and respect for those different from themselves. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The innovative curriculum in this very small secondary school ensures that students have a wide choice of courses which match their needs and develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness successfully. Although the development of students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy requires improvement, students often achieve well in other chosen subjects. A range of exciting trips to places as far apart as Nice and Newcastle, and activities ranging from spinning to skiing, all add to students' enjoyment of learning. Students leave school with an understanding of both British values and those of other cultures, which prepares them well for life in modern Britain.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements; however, the lack of a central record of both staff safeguarding qualifications and incidents of students' challenging behaviour does not always allow this important information to be retrieved easily and checked regularly.
- Through productive links with a partner school staff have access to good quality training and are able to share good practice and improve their skills. The school also receives good support with improving teaching and raising achievement from the local authority advisor who visits regularly.
- Students receive good advice about future career and further education options. The school makes sure, despite the long distances involved, that all students have opportunities to visit a range of possible sixth forms and specialist colleges to choose those which best meet their needs.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is generally effective. Governors monitor the school's work closely, are well informed about its performance data and know its strength and weaknesses. They are particularly knowledgeable about the quality of teaching and are using their considerable expertise to bring about improvements and ensure that good teaching is rewarded and underperformance tackled. Staff performance, including that of the headteacher, is managed well. Finances have been managed very efficiently in that a substantial budget deficit has been eliminated. However, governors have not ensured that pupil premium funding has been fully effective in reducing the gaps between the achievement of disadvantaged and other students. The governors ensure that health and safety requirements are met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. While most students were seen behaving well in the dining hall, in corridors and in the school yard, records show that incidents of boisterous and challenging behaviour do occur.
- In lessons most students want to learn. In some lessons, however, particularly when they are not moved

on to new and challenging work quickly enough, some students lose interest and concentration lapses. In some students' books, work is untidy and unfinished and reflects their poorer attitudes to learning.

- Most students arrive at school and at lessons on time. They wear the correct school uniform and come suitably equipped and ready to learn. Attendance is average.
- Exclusions are above average. A small number of students, who are often new to the school, are excluded for repeatedly displaying particularly disruptive behaviour.
- Incidents of bullying are rare and dealt with effectively. There are no recent records of racist incidents.
- Although there is no formal school council, students say they act as class captains and make suggestions about, for example, future fund-raising events. They are keen to take responsibility and many older students act as good role models for younger students.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement. Although safeguarding procedures meet requirements and have many strengths, records of staff safeguarding qualifications are not kept centrally and are not checked on regularly to ensure that they are up-to-date. Records of incidents of challenging behaviour are often detailed, but a log of these is not kept centrally to enable patterns of poor behaviour to be identified and addressed quickly.
- Detailed records of checks on staff suitability to work with students are kept. Careful checks are made on those entering the school building and visitors are readily identified by their badges.
- Students say they feel safe in school and parents agree that the school looks after their children well. Staff know students exceptionally well in this very small secondary school and ensure that they receive good personal support. The school works well with specialists, such as counsellors, to provide expert help for students when this is needed.
- Students are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe. They have a sensible attitude to risk-taking. They are keenly aware of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and know how to stay safe when using computers and mobile 'phones. Students appreciate that there are different types of bullying but are, rightly, confident that on the rare occasions it occurs in school, it is dealt with swiftly.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Work in students' books shows that their progress requires improvement, because they have not received consistently good teaching over time in literacy, reading and mathematics. In English, previous work shows gaps in students' understanding of basic literacy skills. More recent work shows that these gaps are beginning to be filled. Most Year 7 students are now able to identify basic persuasive writing techniques such as 'flattery' and 'expert opinion'. Students are given opportunities to read during morning registration sessions, but the range of books available is sometimes limited and does not challenge students to improve their reading skills.
- Teachers' marking does not give students sufficient precise guidance consistently on how to improve their work. Consequently, they are often not clear about how to take the next steps in their learning and improve their grades. When useful advice is given, students do not always follow it and make corrections and improvements to their work.
- Teachers have varying expectations about the quality of presentation of work. Consequently, in some students' books work is poorly presented and laid out.
- Students do not learn enough or produce enough work in some subjects, where there is no sense of urgency for them to complete tasks quickly and they are not moved on to more difficult work as soon as they are ready for it. Students of all abilities, including the most able and those students who are disabled and who have special educational needs, sometimes lose interest because work is insufficiently challenging.
- Recently improved teaching in some subjects, such as mathematics, is now leading to students developing skills and understanding much more quickly. Gaps in students' knowledge are steadily being filled and they are responding to the teachers' high expectations. Students gained a good understanding of simple and compound interest as they completed a challenging task, which involved working back from the answer to identify the question that had been set.
- Across the school, there are examples of students making faster progress as a result of better teaching. In dance and drama, students achieve high standards in their personal performance and in French, students in Year 7 are working at standards well above those expected for their age.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' progress requires improvement because from their starting points not enough students make good progress in their learning in all subjects. Work in students' books, examination results, the school's tracking data, and its own accurate self-evaluation all confirm that students' achievement, particularly in English and mathematics, is not yet consistently good.
- Students enter the school with standards which are broadly average, although they vary considerably because year groups are very small. Students who took GCSE exams in 2014 came into the school with average standards and according to published data reached well below average standards at the end of Year 11. However, these data are based on their first entry to GCSE examinations and masks the fact that the proportion of students who gained five or more GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, rose from 26% to 54% when examinations were retaken.
- The school's rationale for entering students early for GCSE examinations is to give them examination practice in English and mathematics and to widen their choice of option subjects in Years 9, 10 and 11. This practice does not appear to be limiting the potential of the most-able students. However, the school recognises the need to review this practice to make sure it meets the needs of individual students and allows the school's achievements to be recognised fully.
- Students make good progress in French, dance and drama.
- The numbers of disadvantaged students who took examinations in 2014 is too small for their results to be reliably reported in detail. However, extra funding to support these students has not been effective in raising their achievement and accelerating their progress quickly enough.
- The progress of the most able students is similar to that of their peers. They do not receive work which is sufficiently challenging to enable them to make good progress.
- Most disabled students and those who have special educational needs and students who join the school part way through their secondary education make similar progress to that of their peers. However, some of these students make faster progress because they receive good personal, individual support which helps to build their confidence and accelerate their pace of learning.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	112378
Local authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	442374

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	99
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andy Morsman
Headteacher	Ian Johnson
Date of previous school inspection	14 May 2013
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