

King Edward VI Church of England Voluntary Controlled Upper School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124856
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328235
Inspection date	11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson 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	14–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1040
Sixth form	340
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Mr Geoff Barton
Date of previous school inspection	23 March 2006
School address	Grove Road Bury St. Edmunds Suffolk IP33 3BH
Telephone number	01284 761393
Fax number	01284 767474

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the progress of different groups of learners, student achievement in Key Stage 4, the extent to which monitoring procedures are sufficiently embedded, and whether the quality of provision meets the needs of the majority of learners. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records. Other evidence included the scrutiny of curriculum and evaluation documents, observation of the school's work, interviews with staff and parental questionnaires.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

King Edward VI Church of England Voluntary Controlled Upper School is a larger than average school serving the town of Bury St Edmunds, where the level of disadvantage is lower than what is found nationally. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is below average. The majority of students are White British; very few have English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. Attainment on entry is above average. It has been a specialist sports college since 2003 and a training school since 2004. It holds the Artsmark Gold, Healthy Schools and Investors in People awards. The school is oversubscribed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has used its specialist status to raise standards and to provide students with a wealth of opportunities within and outside of the curriculum. This makes a major contribution to their personal development and well-being, which is outstanding. Students enjoy school, forge good relations with their teachers and peers and develop the personal qualities needed to succeed in their future lives. The vast majority of them progress into the sixth form, which is outstanding. The school has the overwhelming support of parents, many of whom praise the highly effective leadership of the headteacher.

In this stimulating and supportive environment, students make good progress and attain standards that are above the national average. In Key Stage 3, standards have been above the national average for the past five years. The majority of students achieve well but the rate of progress slows in Years 10 and 11. It declined in 2007 but improved in 2008 because of better monitoring of students' progress and effective mentoring to support those at risk of underperforming. In Key Stage 4, 71% of students achieved five A* to C grades and 56% of students gained five C grades including English and mathematics. A higher than average proportion of students attained A* or A grades in over two thirds of subjects and results were exceptionally high in a number of subjects. Almost all students attained at least five GCSEs and all left Year 11 with at least one. Results in design and technology, German and Spanish were below average and difficulty in recruiting specialist teachers in mathematics is having an adverse affect on some students' progress. Similar to the national trend, girls attain better than boys do. The achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities improved significantly this year due to better sharing of information between staff and increased awareness of individual students' needs. Current data shows that the majority of students are on track to meet the targets set for them.

Observations by inspectors confirmed the school's view that the quality of teaching and learning is good. Regular monitoring has helped to promote greater consistency in teachers' planning, use of information and communication technology (ICT) and day-to-day assessment in lessons. Teachers place a high value on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, which is good. They set high expectations and in return, students work hard, show an interest and respect their teachers. Students 'love' the 100-minute lessons and say that teachers make learning enjoyable. A few inconsistencies remain in the use of questioning and in adding challenge for the most able. Teachers' marking is variable and does not always inform students about their progress or what to do to improve their work. At times, teacher talk dominates lessons and restricts time for group work and independent study.

A good curriculum includes a wide range of GCSEs and some vocational awards. Physical education staff have led the way in personalising learning and in developing a range of qualifications including Business and Technology Education Council sport, GCSE dance and leadership awards. The proportion of students working as community sports leaders is exceptional. Lunchtime and after-school clubs, and healthy food at lunchtimes add significantly to students' health and well-being. Students enjoy all aspects of their learning and enthuse about media studies, music and performing arts. Difficulty in recruiting staff has led to citizenship taught within English lessons as a short-term expedient. All subjects include opportunities to promote literacy, numeracy, ICT and work-related learning, providing students with the skills needed to secure their future economic well-being. However, not all students have a work-experience placement.

Staff are committed to providing good quality care and support for all students. All safeguarding arrangements are in place. Students are kept safe and free from bullying, and close monitoring ensures their satisfactory attendance. Several parents commented favourably on the exceptional support provided for vulnerable learners, including the safe haven provided for them at lunchtimes and the understanding shown to concerned parents by staff. Teachers set high standards but not all students meet them, which leads to a high rate of exclusions. New arrangements have been introduced to retain challenging students in school but more time is needed for these to impact fully. Students are treated as young adults and their views respected. For example, through the school council, they have contributed to the design of catering facilities and the new learning centre. Students appreciate the guidance they receive about GCSE options, sixth form study and future careers, but academic guidance is less effective. Procedures to monitor students' progress have lacked rigour and consequently, at times, not all students have achieved the targets set for them. Senior leaders have responded to this by implementing revised procedures that are beginning to make a difference, but more time is needed for them to become firmly embedded across all subjects.

Good leadership and management are focused on enabling young people to flourish both academically and socially and to enjoy their time at school. Outstanding partnership working with other schools, support agencies and parents has secured its role as a hub for participation and learning in the local area. The school makes an important contribution to promoting community cohesion. The headteacher has built a team of effective senior leaders; members know the school well and show a corporate willingness to move the school from a good to an outstanding one. Effective self-evaluation acknowledges that a few pockets of underachievement exist and that monitoring needs to be much more rigorous. Most subject and pastoral leaders actively seek improvements within their areas of responsibility, but a small minority need to be held more accountable for the standards achieved in their subjects. They show a growing understanding of how to use assessment data to set challenging targets and to check to see that all students meet them. Capacity to improve further is good. Good governance has ensured the strategic development of the school, including the addition of some excellent new facilities, and ensured good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is outstanding. The outstanding curriculum is well matched to the needs of students of above average ability, all of whom join the sixth form to pursue A-level studies. The vast majority aspire to go on to higher education. Excellent facilities for independent learning and an exceptional level of care, guidance and support provide students with an ideal environment in which to learn. Teaching and learning are good. Students enjoy school, act responsibly and share excellent relations with staff and each other. The sixth form is well led and managed. Staff set high expectations and the head of sixth form and their tutors closely monitor students. Retention rates are high and those staying on to complete their studies in Year 13 continue to make good progress and attain above average standards. In 2008, results exceeded overall school targets. Over 90% of students studying English, mathematics, physical education, ICT and drama achieved A to C grades, which is outstanding. Results in the three sciences, health and social care and general studies are above average but below average in art and design, business studies and politics. Students' personal development and well-being is outstanding. They lead healthy lifestyles and enjoy a range of sporting and cultural activities and school visits, which enrich their lives and help them to mature into sociable

and articulate adults. Students say there are 'millions of opportunities' to get involved in school and community events. Many engage with the local community as young leaders and volunteers and a number of students act as mentors and provide exceptionally good support for younger students in mathematics lessons.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in design and technology and modern foreign languages.
- Ensure that revised procedures to monitor students' progress become firmly embedded across the school so that teachers and managers know exactly how well all individual students are doing and can intervene early to ensure that they achieve what is expected of them.

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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	1
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	3	2
The behaviour of learners	2	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

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	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	1

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	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of King Edward VI Church of England Upper School, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3BH

Earlier this week another inspector and I visited your school. We found that it provides you with a good education and that the sixth form is outstanding. Thank you for allowing us to join you in lessons and to talk with some of you. We also spent time meeting with your school leaders, several teachers, the chair of governors and read many letters from parents. Throughout the inspection, your behaviour was very good and you made us feel most welcome.

We were particularly pleased to see the high standards you attain in all key stages and the many things the school provides for you to promote your personal development and well-being. We judged this to be outstanding. I was particularly impressed by the impact specialist sports status is having in the school and in the local community and by the wealth of opportunities in sport, music and the arts for you to take part in. I also found the students I chatted with to be articulate, polite and great ambassadors for your school, so well done to you.

We found that some of you don't do as well as you could do because your progress is not monitored as well as it could be and that standards are below average in a small number of subjects. Therefore, we have asked your senior teachers to make two improvements to your school.

- Raise achievement in design and technology and modern foreign languages.
- Improve procedures to monitor your progress so that teachers and managers know exactly how well all of you are doing and can offer you additional help if you need it to help you achieve your very best.

Mr Barton leads your school very well. You can help him to improve your school further by asking your school council representative to share your views about the school with him.

Best wishes for the future.

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector