

Inspection of an outstanding school: Kennet School

Stoney Lane, Thatcham, Berkshire RG19 4LL

Inspection dates:

1 and 2 November 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils proudly display the numerous sports and rewards patches down the fronts of their jumpers that demonstrate their commitment to the Kennet values. The student leaders of the school council educate their peers about integrity and kindness. They lead assemblies and contribute to the tutor time programme to provide a pupil perspective of these values. All pupils understand that leaders have high expectations of what they can achieve. They trust leaders to set them on the right path for a positive future.

Students in the sixth form are exemplary role models for their peers. They demonstrate an impressively mature approach to their studies and have high aspirations. All pupils have access to a rich and varied careers programme. This helps pupils make informed choices about their next steps.

Pupils feel safe in school. They know that adults will help them if they report any bullying. Pupils, parents and carers praise the pastoral care provided. All pupils and their families are well known by their 'House' team. Staff use this knowledge to identify if a pupil needs extra help to engage with school. When needed, pupils get effective support for their mental health from the school counsellor to improve both their attendance and focus in school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have a very strong understanding of what pupils need to know and the skills they need to be successful in the future. They have developed an ambitious curriculum that reflects this. Pupils can study a wide and varied breadth of qualifications at key stages 4 and 5. Pupils are well supported to select an academic path that suits their interests and abilities. All pupils have equal access to the same curriculum, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Leaders have ordered learning so that knowledge builds over time. Planned opportunities help to recap learning so that pupils have enough time to develop important skills. This is evident in subjects such as computing, where pupils practise writing and trialling binary coding.

Pupils with SEND in the specialist resourced provisions receive highly effective support from well-trained staff, so they can access the curriculum. Leaders clearly identify the support that pupils with SEND need. Teachers use detailed support plans to adapt lessons so that pupils achieve ambitious learning goals. Pupils with SEND achieve exceptionally well.

However, while the curriculum has been carefully planned, teachers do not always check where pupils are secure in their learning and where they might need more help. This means that teachers do not restructure learning when pupils are finding it too challenging. Teachers can move on to new learning too quickly without checking that all pupils confidently know the most important knowledge. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

Opportunities to develop pupils' love of reading are prioritised. Each morning, teachers read to pupils from the 'Kennet Canon'. These well-selected texts further explore themes that pupils are learning about in lessons. Pupils who struggle to read receive effective support to help them catch up through phonics catch-up groups.

When all pupils returned to school after absence because of COVID-19, leaders recognised that pupils needed clearer expectations around behaviour to settle them back into school life. Most pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of these rules. Leaders take appropriate action if they hear unacceptable language. However, not all pupils report incidents as some pupils accept unkind name-calling. Leaders know this and are working with staff and pupils to ensure a consistent approach to deal with any poor behaviour. Additional support is also being put in place for a small minority of pupils who find their behaviour more difficult to manage. Leaders recognise the need to ensure that all staff are aware of this support to help these pupils better re-engage with their education.

The school values thread through each part of school life. Pupils learn about respect and kindness in tutor time, assemblies and through the identified classroom rules. Leaders have developed a number of programmes to promote pupils' personal development. For example, in the Year 7 'Rising Stars' programme pupils engage in a range of endeavours, such as raising money for local charities or joining a club. Pupils develop pride in themselves and recognise their own value through regular rewards and house prizes. Inter-house competitions and debates promote healthy competition. Trips and visits are well planned to deepen pupils' learning about the world outside the classroom.

Staff are extremely proud to work at Kennet School and speak highly of the excellent training they receive. The 'open door policy' means they receive regular feedback to develop their teaching. Trust leaders and governors challenge school leaders to ensure that their strong vision for school improvement is being enacted in the classroom.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that all staff receive the training they need to identify and report the signs that pupils may be at risk of harm. They are quick to seek additional help from external agencies for pupils that need it. Leaders meet regularly with the local authority to ensure that they are aware of any local safeguarding issues that pupils may face outside of school.

The school's personal, social and health education curriculum helps pupils learn how to stay safe online and outside of school. Pupils can talk confidently about how to take care of both their physical and mental health.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders do not ensure that all teachers regularly check how well pupils have understood the intended learning of the curriculum. This means that some pupils do not have a secure foundation of knowledge on which to learn more. Leaders must ensure that all teachers use effective assessment strategies to identify and quickly close gaps in pupils' learning.
- Not all staff consistently implement the school's behaviour policy to ensure high expectations of behaviour at all times. As a result, unkind language and behaviour are too commonly accepted by pupils. Leaders must ensure that all staff understand the role they play in establishing a culture of positive behaviour.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in May 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136647
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10227093
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1884
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	360
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Jon Cole
Headteacher	Grace Rigg (Acting headteacher)
Website	www.kennetschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 and 12 May

Information about this school

- This school is part of Kennet School Academies Trust.
- The school makes use of five alternative provisions for a small number of pupils.
- The school has two specialist resource bases. These are for pupils with either a hearing impairment or a physical disability.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, modern foreign languages and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding lead, spoke with pupils and staff, checked school records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school, and spoke with trustees and governors.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the chief executive officer of the trust, senior leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, trustees, including the chair of trustees, and governors, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils from meetings and informal conversations and from the 529 pupils who responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the 288 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including 250 free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff surveys and gathered the views of staff and pupils throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

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