



Northgate School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122161
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292327
Inspection date 18 October 2006
Reporting inspector Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Queen's Park Parade
School category	Community		Northampton
Age range of pupils	11–16		NN2 6LR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01604 714098
Number on roll (school)	80	Fax number	01604 777822
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mike Kendal
		Headteacher	Sheralee Webb
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2004		

Age group	Inspection date	Inspection number
11–16	18 October 2006	292327

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This secondary age school provides for pupils with moderate to severe learning difficulties. A number also have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and others have additional needs, which include communication difficulties, sensory impairment and physical disability. Most of the pupils are White British whilst just under a fifth are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Only one pupil has English as an additional language. A small number are looked after children. When the school was inspected in September 2004 it was deemed to have serious weaknesses.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Northgate is now a good school and is very well placed to improve further. The school's previous designation as having serious weaknesses no longer applies. The reasons for this are linked to the very good progress made since the last inspection, as a result of the hard work and dedication of the whole staff team. High quality interventions by the senior leadership team have ensured that teaching has improved considerably and is now good. This has in turn resulted in good achievement. Whilst standards in the school are significantly below average, because of pupils' learning difficulties, they nonetheless make good progress in their learning. Pupils really enjoy being in school and their good attendance and behaviour is testament to this. Many have had unhappy and sometimes fractured educational experiences in their previous mainstream schools, and parents said how much happier their children were since going to Northgate. One mother was sure that the school had 'transformed' her daughter's life. Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe and secure, because they know staff will look after them and deal with any difficulties quickly and effectively. Their personal development, confidence and self-esteem are all good as a result of the high quality pastoral support that they receive. Pupils are, though, not given enough opportunity or encouragement to evaluate their own progress against negotiated targets. A notable characteristic of the school's success is the seamless teamwork between teachers, their very able assistants, all the other staff in the school and the many professionals that visit and support individual pupils.

Other improvements in provision have been well established and a good curriculum now provides relevant experience for all pupils. The thoughtful grouping arrangements ensure that pupils receive properly focused teaching to meet their particular needs, although not all planning takes full account of pupils' diverse needs and learning styles. The use of using literacy, communication and numeracy across all subjects helps pupils achieve well. However, the influence of information and communication technology (ICT) is not as widespread. The good care, guidance and support offered to pupils are well judged to help meet their needs, while encouraging greater independence.

Leadership and management are good. The inspirational and enthusiastic headteacher has worked in effective partnership with her able senior leadership colleagues to motivate, coach and encourage their staff. In this way, much productive development work has been undertaken and staff have consequently become more skilled and confident. However, they do not yet make full use of assessment information. The leadership team are valued and well supported by all their staff colleagues, who are keen to continue the good progress already made. The depleted governing body continues to struggle with the challenge of filling vacant places and, whilst the recent appointment of a new chair promises a much more focused approach to supporting strategic planning and challenging the school, governors still have some way to go to properly fulfil their duties.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan lessons more effectively, including making better use of assessment information, to take full account of pupils' needs and learning styles.
- Involve pupils more in negotiating their targets and evaluating progress towards them.
- Use ICT more effectively across the school, both as a teaching tool and to support pupils' learning.
- As a matter of urgency, bring the governing body up to its full membership complement so that governors can do their job more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Whilst standards are significantly below average, pupils make good progress and achieve well in their studies right across the school. Different groups achieve equally well in lessons, although the comprehensive information that is collected about pupils' achievements is not yet used fully to track and compare their progress. Older pupils gain impressive results in a range of accredited courses, preparing them well for further study or training beyond school.

The progress made in lessons is good, although pupils are not always helped to understand and celebrate their achievements against identified objectives. Individual education plans provide relevant and challenging targets for pupils to work towards and they rise to these challenges well, particularly those relating to their personal development. Pupils with ASD are helped to make very good progress in developing coping strategies to overcome their anxiety and resistance to learning and consequently benefit from the wider curriculum offered to them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development is good. Pupils show good cultural and spiritual awareness as a result of the good programme of enrichment activities, visits and special times, such as assemblies. They make a good contribution to the school and wider community. For example, they support the work of an overseas charity in Kenya through imaginative fund raising activities. They participate enthusiastically in a wide range of sporting activities, encouraged by the good example of visiting members of local football and rugby teams. Pupils clearly enjoy school, which is reflected in their improved attendance, enthusiastic responses in lessons and their good behaviour. Pupils are mostly considerate to one another and show respect to the staff and school environment. Any instances of difficult or challenging behaviour are managed well by all staff, and pupils involved try hard to improve.

Good progress in learning and strong links with local schools, colleges and the Connexions service means that pupils are developing good workplace and other skills. These successfully contribute to their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good overall. Very effective coaching and mentoring by senior staff has helped to improve lessons, so that all teaching is at least satisfactory and the majority good and occasionally outstanding. Pupils are motivated by their learning, taking pride in their own achievements and those of their classmates. Active participation is expected of pupils, thus helping to maintain a good pace in lessons. Highly effective teamwork helps to maximise learning opportunities, including, on occasion, those for independent learning. There is not enough use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning. Planning for all activities, learning materials and teaching approaches does not always take full account of the diverse abilities and learning styles in the class. New approaches to assessment and moderation of standards have helped to establish a common understanding about levels of achievement across all subjects, although assessment information is not sufficiently well used in planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. New developments are helping pupils with ASD to become increasingly well prepared for adult life. Specialist facilities such as the gymnasium and recently refurbished food technology room have improved access to aspects of the curriculum for all pupils. Strong involvement in physical and creative activities, including swimming and high quality drama experiences (sometimes with their peers from mainstream schools), aids pupils' health, fitness and social development. Experiences are further enhanced through a wide range of enrichment and after-school activities such as lunchtime and breakfast clubs. The school makes good use of national and local strategies such as the Healthy Schools' award to increase the curriculum's relevance to the changing and more complex needs of pupils admitted to the school.

Recognising this changing profile, the school has extended the opportunities for accreditation for older pupils of different abilities through GCSE entry level courses and the Gateway and ASDAN award schemes. The school has good partnerships with other schools, local colleges, employers and the Connexions service. ICT resources are much improved, but are not used to their full potential in order to facilitate effective communication and learning across the curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good because a strong emphasis is placed on pupils' well-being. Good health, safety and child protection procedures, coupled with strong links with outside agencies, ensure pupils are adequately safeguarded. Parents greatly value this care and support. There are high levels of respect for others and pupils show real concern for the safety and well-being of each other. They are secure in the knowledge that there is always an adult they can turn to. Staff know their pupils well and use this information to set targets for the next steps in their learning. Pupils are very well guided in the development of their basic and other academic skills. Those with additional difficulties are well supported through enhanced provision that enables them to take full advantage of what is on offer in school. There is, though, the occasional danger of staff being overly supportive and, thereby, not encouraging pupils' independence. Behaviour support plans, focused staff training and the judicious use of fixed term exclusions have had a significant impact on how well pupils manage their own behaviour. Child protection procedures are effective and good attention is paid to ensure the health, welfare and safety of all. Links and close liaison with parents and other support agencies are productive and helpful in ensuring that the needs of vulnerable pupils are recognised and met.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher has effected considerable improvement since the last inspection through her dynamic leadership and nurturing of a shared partnership with everyone in the school. This has ensured that every member of staff feels valued as part of a successful team. Recent developments have created an extended leadership group whose members make a significant contribution to achieving the clearly expressed aims and ambitions of the school. This is shown, for example, by the realistic plan to achieve specialist school status for performing arts. Subject leaders are also being helped to have a growing impact on the development of the curriculum and teaching and learning, such as in the much more effective provision for English. Consequently the whole staff team have contributed to pupils' improved achievement and progress. Very good management of staff difficulties, recruitment and induction of new staff and well delivered training have assured continuous improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

The school knows itself well through structured monitoring of what it does and how effective it is. This has led to rigorous and effectively targeted interventions, which have resulted in significant improvements to leadership and management, the curriculum, standards in English, behaviour and attendance. Governors could make a greater contribution to supporting and holding the school to account if they had a complete membership. They have, though, worked successfully with the headteacher and her able administrative staff to manage the budget well to aid impressive improvements to the accommodation and outside environment.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

Thank you for your help during our recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting you all and talking to you about your feelings and experiences. We agree with you that you go to a good school.

Some of the things we liked about your school

- Teachers plan interesting lessons and you are enthusiastic about your learning.
- You work hard and learn successfully about a lot of things.
- Most of you behave well and those of you who find this difficult try very hard to improve.
- All the staff do their very best to care for you and support your learning, making sure that everyone does as well as they can.
- Your headteacher has made a very real difference to your school because she has helped all the staff to work well together and make things better.
- Your parents are very happy with what the school has done for you.

We thought your school could be even better if

- teachers think more about how you learn when planning your lessons
- you are more involved in setting your own targets and thinking about how well you are getting on with them
- everyone uses computers more
- there are more governors, so that they can do their job better.