

Northgate School Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122161
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	340096
Inspection dates	11–12 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Charles Hackett

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	109
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Kendal
Headteacher	Sheralee Webb
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2006
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Age group	11–199
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors spent approximately thirty per cent of their time looking at pupils' learning, visited 10 lessons, taught by 10 different teachers, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of pupils and parents. They observed the school's work and looked at school policies, development planning, data on pupils' achievements and recent other external reports on the school. The team analysed questionnaires returned from 45 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of specialist arts status on progress for all groups of pupils
- how well teaching and the curriculum provide equality of opportunity for pupils with different special educational needs and/or disabilities
- the impact leadership and management are having on the development of the school and the quality of its work.

Information about the school

Northgate School Arts College caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. These include severe and moderate learning difficulties (SLD and MLD) and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). A small number of pupils come from minority ethnic groups and a very few are in the care of the local authority.

The school achieved specialist status for the arts from September of 2008 and was awarded the Careers Mark. A new sixth form started in September 2009 as part of a pilot scheme managed by a local consortium of mainstream and special schools.

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: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Northgate School Arts College is an exceptional special school where the needs of each pupil are given meticulous levels of attention. Led by an inspirational headteacher, the school has developed into a very high quality provision that is greatly admired by parents and other agencies. The school's mission statement 'Learning through Creativity' forms the cornerstone of its work. Much thought has been given to how music, drama, art and media studies can be used to stimulate learning and enjoyment. These formed the basis for the school's successful bid to be a specialist arts college and, as the school prospectus proudly proclaims, 'are the foundation for engaging, inspiring and motivating pupils'. Together with the good emphasis placed on literacy, numeracy and information communication technology in the teaching of all subjects, they provide all pupils with excellent opportunities to learn.

Pupils make good and often outstanding progress, not only in their studies in the classroom but also in their personal development. Pupils want to learn and in all lessons observed enjoyed being successful and completing the tasks they were set. They gain in confidence because of the excellent support given to them by all staff and the fact that they feel safe in school. Behaviour is excellent but evidence suggests that in the past this has not always been the case. Through establishing very effective behaviour management strategies, pupils' behaviour has improved significantly to the extent that now pupils are very polite and courteous, behave very well in lessons and out of school and are excellent ambassadors for the school.

Most students are very good attenders, with over 16% having no absences at all last year. There are, though, a very few whose attendance is poor and this reduces the school's overall attendance figures.

Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together in lessons to support pupils' learning. For example, in a drama lesson for a group of ASD pupils the teaching assistants were fully involved in guiding pupils to follow instructions and understand the expectation for a static pose without 'upstaging' others when the music was stopped. Similarly an older ASD group were well supported by the adults in the class in making written comments about the life of Dickens.

Self-evaluation is good and used well to determine aspects to develop and thus enhance the quality of the provision. For example, assessment for learning (AfL) and the developing role of curriculum leaders were both recent aspects identified for

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development and now both are strong features of the work of the school. The significant progress the school has made since the appointment of the current headteacher and the previous inspection demonstrates that the school has an outstanding capacity to improve even further. This is exemplified by the excellent procedures in place to develop the skills of staff. This has led to a significant number of teaching assistants being trained to be teachers and staff having their potential for more senior roles and responsibilities recognised and these staff now, either in this school or others, occupying senior positions.

Pupils are fully included members of the school community and make valuable contributions to how it is managed. For example, a few in wheelchairs joined an accessibility group and together with staff have recommended adaptations to the building to improve accessibility. Many pupils are involved in a range of community initiations, including supporting some groups of elderly local residents. They are also involved in international projects. A photograph on display showing a child in Tanzania opening a 'Christmas box' with a label clearly showing its origin as Northgate is an impressive example of the many projects to which pupils have made contributions. Information is maintained on how these projects offer pupils the chance to understand life in different communities but there is only a limited development plan that shows how the school will enable pupils to widen their understanding of local and global issues.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the current term, refine and further develop the current community cohesion development plan to show how all subjects will contribute to extending pupils' understanding of local and global issues.
- Immediately take more effective action to improve the attendance of the very few pupils who are poor attendees.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils' learning is at least good in almost all lessons. A strong feature is the strong motivation pupils have to engage in the different activities they have opportunities to attempt. For example, in design technology Year 7 pupils were very busy energetically using coping saws to cut out pieces of wood, ensuring they were adhering to the safety rules they had learnt previously. Likewise in a Year 8 mathematics lesson pupils eagerly showed their knowledge of 'quarter to' and 'quarter past' on both analogue and digital clocks.

Detailed records of pupils' progress show that most pupils make good or outstanding progress in Years 7 to 9 in English, mathematics and science. This continues in Years 10 and 11, especially in science, but last year progress in mathematics was less evident, although satisfactory overall. A new specialist appointment has now been made to address this dip in progress. No differences in rates of progress are apparent in the different special educational groups in the school or in the progress

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of those from different ethnic backgrounds or in the care of the local authority.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. They appreciate the many varied opportunities to engage in physical activities, such as drama, yoga, horse riding as well as the more conventional physical education activities. Lunchtime activities are popular and during the inspection pupils were eagerly looking forward to their after-school clubs of tag rugby and street dancing. Pupils are confident that they are safe in school and during their visits off site. They listen carefully to staff and follow instructions well. This contributes significantly to the success they have on community and work experience placements, and while attending taster courses at local colleges. All of this contributes well to their preparation for their future economic well-being.

Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is given a high priority. The school’s specialist status in the arts contributes significantly to this because it supports pupils’ greatly improved self-esteem and confidence. They develop the ability to reflect on what they have achieved and celebrate the achievement of others through, for example, their participation in drama productions. Pupils’ social skills are greatly enhanced through the many links the school has with other schools and organisations.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	*2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

² In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils’ age.

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How effective is the provision?

Everything the school does is designed to boost pupils’ confidence and self-belief. Teaching strategies play their part in this. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson for the starter activity pupils had to pick out a ticket with a topic written on it. They then had to speak for 30 seconds on this to the rest of the class. All in the class tried this and many achieved this remarkably well.

Pupils are encouraged to evaluate how well they have achieved. In a Year 9 science lesson pupils had to individually explain to the class what had happened to the seeds they had planted the previous week. Almost all were able to identify why their seeds had grown well or not and what changes to the conditions were needed to improve the results. On rare occasions teaching is less effective because the tasks set are beyond some members of the group. For example, in a Year 10 physical education lesson pupils were asked to hit a shuttlecock into a small sized container. This was too difficult for most of the group.

Much thought is given to making the curriculum relevant. For example, a lesson timetabled for all groups is ‘learning for life’. Here the emphasis is on giving pupils practical skills and knowledge to enable them to be as independent as possible. This focus is accelerated in Years 10 and 11 where a comprehensive programme of community visits, work experience and college taster sessions ensures that pupils are well prepared for joining the most appropriate post-16 course at college. The high quality of this work has been recognised in the acquisition of a Careers Mark award.

The school is rigorous in its approach to ensuring pupils are safe. It adopts recommended good practice across all areas of its work, ensuring that the site is secure and pupils’ visits off site are all meticulously risk assessed. Very careful attention is given to each individual pupil to address their needs. All pupils benefit from weekly one-to-one support opportunities where their progress and targets are reviewed. Where staff feel more specialist support is needed a referral to the learning mentor is made. This process is very well managed and ensures that pupils can be provided with specialist support in a diverse range of aspects. These have included bringing in a wheelchair-using volunteer to help pupils now confined to a wheelchair adjust to their disability. They have also included helping pupils deal with personal hygiene issues.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

The school has reached its current level of effectiveness largely as a result of the determination of the headteacher to create a high quality learning environment. She has empowered staff to take on responsibilities, which in turn has created a committed staff team where morale is high and everyone feels valued. This ensures that each and every pupil’s learning and well-being are given the highest possible priority. Communication between school and their homes is very good and this leads to parents feeling they are fully involved in supporting their children’s learning.

The school is very proactive in developing its partnerships with other schools and agencies. This has led to many initiatives to develop the provision. The newly formed sixth form is one of these and, although it is still only running as a pilot, a good start has been made in the range of learning opportunities being developed.

Governors contribute very well to the development of the school. Led by a chair and vice chair, whose skills complement each other well; they know the school intimately and make important contributions to its development. They offer an appropriate challenge to the senior team and play their part in ensuring pupils are very safe and well provided for within the school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form is still understandably in its infancy with regards to its development, and it is not possible to judge students’ outcomes at this stage. The provision has been very well planned to complement other facilities within the local authority and be an important ‘stepping stone’ in the transition of students with severe learning

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difficulties from a school setting to a college environment.

The leadership and management of the department rest with the headteacher, who has ensured that the provision is very appropriate and accessible to other schools within the local partnership.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	*
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The overwhelming majority of parents are very positive about the school. Many stress how good the school is at communicating with them. For example, one parent commented that ‘parents are very well informed and totally involved in any consultations about all aspects of your child’s development’.

Many highlighted in their comments the high level of commitment from staff to support their child. ‘The staff are exceptional and dedicated’ is how one parent explained this. ‘This school is the best thing to happen to my son’ is another positive response from a parent to the work of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northgate School Arts College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 109 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	38	84	7	16	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	33	73	12	27	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	26	58	18	40	1	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	64	14	31	0	0	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	34	76	9	20	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	60	15	33	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	67	15	33	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	31	69	9	20	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	34	76	10	22	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	62	17	38	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	58	18	40	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	31	69	14	31	0	0	0	9
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	76	11	24	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.



13 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northgate School Arts College, Northampton, NN2 6LR

Thank you for being so polite and friendly when, together with two colleagues, I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed the visit and found your school to be a very special place. My report says your school is outstanding and there are lots of reasons for this. These include the good progress you make, your own contribution to the school, the many activities you do and the excellent way all the staff care and support you. A special mention is given to the headteacher, who does a brilliant job in inspiring everyone to make sure your school is as good as it is.

To be an even better school I have suggested to staff they should:

- improve the plan for how they will help you understand everything that is different in the world around you
- do more to improve the attendance of a very few of you who miss too much school.

You can do your bit to keep improving the school by continuing to work hard and behave well.

Keep up the good work.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector

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