

Northgate School Arts College

Queen's Park Parade, Kingsthorpe, Northampton, NN2 6LR

Inspection dates 31 January–1 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students make outstanding progress. They do exceptionally well from their range of starting points.
- Every student leaves school at the end of Year 11 with externally recognised qualifications.
- Parents are particularly impressed by the gains their children make in learning to do things on their own and improving their confidence and self esteem.
- The inspirational executive head teacher and her very strong senior leadership team are never content, but are constantly striving to improve the school even further.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers know their students very well and fine-tune lessons to make sure everyone learns very rapidly, whatever level they are starting.
- Teachers make lessons lively and fun. They make sure they know what students' interests are so that they can build lessons around them.
- Many, but not all staff, use visual prompts confidently to help students who need them to understand what they should do.
- The sixth form is also outstanding. Students achieve extremely well because of the excellent teaching and the many opportunities they have to become more independent. They are very proud of everything they achieve and they are very well prepared for the next stage in their life.
- Students trust their teachers, feel very safe and have excellent attitudes to their learning.
- Their behaviour both in and out of lessons is excellent. It helps to ensure that the school is a very safe environment in which everyone is valued and can thrive.
- Students learn to accept each other's needs. They become very supportive of each other and flourish in the school's friendly and understanding atmosphere.
- The very experienced governing body both supports the school's work and challenges senior leaders to improve it even more. They question the leadership carefully as to how it is improving teaching and how well students are doing.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 20 lessons, nine of which were joint observations with a senior leader. Inspectors also looked at students' work and heard them read.
- Meetings were held with students, governors and a range of staff, including senior and middle leaders.
- The inspection team looked at a number of documents, including records relating to self-evaluation, behaviour, safety, safeguarding, attendance and checks on teaching and learning. Records of the students' progress were also examined.
- The inspectors took account of the 27 responses in the online questionnaire (Parent View) and results of the school's own parent surveys, as well as the views from the parents' forum and 17 completed staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Lynda Walker, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kate Robertson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Northgate School Arts College converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2011. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- It is a purpose built special school for students aged 11–19 that encompasses specialist facilities for art, science, food technology, resistant materials technology and physical education.
- All of the students have a statement of special educational needs and all are from the local authority. Although primarily a school for students with moderate learning difficulties, the numbers of students who have an autistic spectrum disorder and/or have severe learning difficulties have increased.
- The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium is average. This is extra funding given to a school by the government to support groups of students, including those who are entitled to free school meals
- A new sixth form building is due to open in 2013. The school is part of a sixth form consortium which means the students can take part in a number of work related courses both in their school and other special schools. The other schools involved are Billing Brook, Friars, Maplefields and Isebrook special schools. Apart from the sixth form consortium, students do not have lessons in other schools or units.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure more staff are fully confident in the use of visual supports and prompts for students who have an autistic spectrum disorder and those who have more severe learning difficulties.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students' achievement is excellent because teachers ensure that the work they give students matches their different ability levels extremely well and challenges all of them to make further progress.
- All students achieve external awards in a broad range of subjects, many at GCSE and Entry Level.
- The school keeps detailed records on how well students are doing and is quick to take action if their progress slows. This means that there are no significant differences in the rates of progress made by different groups, such as those who have an autistic spectrum disorder or moderate learning difficulties, or between students from different ethnic groups.
- The school's additional funding from the pupil premium is used very well to provide extra adults to work with students in English and mathematics. This extra support is contributing to students' accelerated progress in these areas. Given that numbers are very small, there is no significant difference in the Year 11 standards of students eligible for free school meals and those who are not.
- Students in the sixth form make exceptional progress in communication, English and mathematics because skills in these areas are very well taught, through courses that are very well matched to their current levels of work and abilities.
- The students who have more complex needs and those who have an autistic spectrum disorder make excellent gains in their communication skills and personal development. The way in which classes have been grouped means the school can make the most of staff expertise and ensure the very effective support of teaching assistants in their lessons.
- Giving exactly the right support for students' next steps, whether in their academic or their personal development, underpins everything the school does. For example, students have personalised timetables. Teachers and other adults use students' targets very well to challenge students in lessons. Students all know their targets and they very honestly reflect on whether they have met them at the end of every lesson.
- Students' individual records are meticulously maintained and demonstrate a wide variety of both academic and personal achievements. Internal moderation procedures confirm the validity of teacher assessments.
- Parents are very pleased with the progress their children make. They comment on the excellent progress their children have made in their academic work and personal skills, their ability to work on their own and attitudes to school because of the high expectations the school has for their child.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching meets the needs of the students extremely well and enables them to make outstanding progress. Staff have an excellent understanding of the needs of the students and ensure that lessons are planned effectively to meet individual needs.

- Teachers use students' interests very effectively to make sure lessons motivate and enthuse them. The students say they love their lessons because the teachers make them fun and exciting.
- Teaching assistants make a very strong contribution to lessons. Like teachers they have excellent relationships with students and are very skilled at knowing when to give them additional help or when to wait and allow students extra time to think things out for themselves.
- Teachers use questioning very skilfully to check students' understanding and adapt their teaching when necessary to improve learning even more. In a Year 9 English class, for example, on different genre and conventions, the teacher's excellent introduction meant that he very quickly discovered what students already understood and built effectively on this so that they were all able to make up their own characters for a story about a superhero.
- Staff use praise and encouragement very well to provide immediate feedback to the students. This spurs them on to do more, enabling them to focus on the next steps and how to improve their learning.
- There is a thorough and consistent approach in all lessons to the development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Teachers are alert to opportunities to develop these areas, even when teaching other subjects or topics, and these extra chances to practise make an effective contribution to students' excellent progress.
- Trained staff use visual prompt cards, signing and new technologies effectively to support students with an autistic spectrum disorder and those with more complex needs. Occasionally though, teachers miss opportunities to use visual support and prompts to help students who have autistic spectrum disorders to understand what is expected of them.
- The school is aware that as the complexity of needs of the students being placed at the school increases, more staff will have to take a lead on teaching students with more severe learning difficulties. Not all staff yet have the confidence to use these strategies consistently in all lessons. The school has started training for both staff and parents to develop their signing skills and understanding of appropriate strategies to support communication and personal and social development.
- The very rich and varied learning experiences that the students take part in helps them to develop the personal skills that they can use in real life situations. The 'Theme Days' and the schools emphasis on 'learning through creativity' particularly help to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Students have very positive attitudes to learning. As they move through the school they become confident learners who can work without constant support.
- All staff have very high expectations of the students. Those that have individual behaviour plans are supported extremely well and as a result are able to make progress in their learning. Those who have a history of behavioural needs on entry very quickly improve and learn to manage their behaviour because staff and students have such high expectations of each other and because clear messages are given about these expectations.

- Excellent support through the school and sixth form pastoral and tutor systems promotes students' personal, social and emotional development extremely well.
- The friendly and welcoming atmosphere in the school and the respect that the students have for each other means that they are not afraid to express their views. They feel listened to and feel that they make a very good contribution to school life and helping others through various fundraising events.
- Students say they love being at school. Some even said they would really like to live at the school because it was a great place to be and there were lots of different things to do which helped them to learn about all sorts of things.
- Students feel very safe at the school and their parents confirm this. Student safety and well-being is a constant priority, and all safeguarding requirements are met. Detailed risk assessments are carried out and are meticulously followed. Students themselves have a very strong sense of how to stay safe and know who they can talk to if they have any concerns.
- Parents and students say that bullying rarely takes place and that if it does they have every confidence that staff will deal with it well. Students have an excellent understanding of the different forms bullying might take and demonstrate great tolerance and understanding of each other's needs.
- The students are very supportive of each other and are aware that some find it difficult to make and maintain friendships. The school council have decided to have a 'friendship bench' in the playground so that anyone who feels lonely or sad can be befriended.
- Attendance has improved and good attendance is celebrated through assemblies, class and individual rewards.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The exceptional vision of the executive headteacher is fully shared by the leadership team, staff and governors. This means everyone who is involved with this school is committed to ensuring that the school is a centre of excellence where every student can succeed as well as possible, both academically and personally.
- Rigorous checking on how students are doing and how well lessons help each to learn ensures high standards. Staff have a very good understanding of student progress and new staff are brought up to speed extremely well so they quickly find out how well each individual student is doing and their next steps in learning.
- Rigorous management of performance in relation to teaching and learning has ensured that teaching is outstanding. All teachers have targets to ensure students' rapid progress, to improve their own professional development and to support the school's plans for improvement.
- Teaching assistants are also set challenging targets and given effective training. The positive impact of these things can be seen in the excellence of their support in lessons.
- The school maintains an extensive range of partnerships with other schools, businesses and community groups. These combine with the very wide curriculum and activities on offer in school to provide a rich range of experiences for the students.

- Excellent enrichment and use of partnership working in the sixth form promotes students' independence and the practical application of their reading, writing and numeracy skills. For example, the students make money through their 'Team Enterprise' projects, which they spend on equipment or treats for their classes.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governors are highly knowledgeable and well informed about the school's work. They ensure that the skills that they bring to the school contribute to the drive for excellence that exists throughout it. The governing body is rigorous in the way it challenges and holds the school to account for the quality of its work, and has excellent systems for challenging leaders about what the school does. Governors know how pay rises are linked to teachers' performance, and understand how to use data about progress. The governing body also ensures that the financial resources, including additional funding such as the pupil premium and capital grants, are managed effectively.

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	137354
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	403829

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

Type of school	Academy special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	145
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Kendall
Headteacher	Sheralee Webb
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01604 714098
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