

Northfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123346
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	359416
Inspection dates	16–17 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	60
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Foxcroft
Headteacher	Mark Blencowe
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2007
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Age group	11–18
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Boarding provision

Social care Unique Reference Number

Social care inspector

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors and one social care inspector. Eleven lessons were observed, involving 10 different teachers, and meetings were held with groups of students, a range of education and residential care staff, and the Chair of the Governing Body. They observed the school's work during the day and in the evening, and looked at a variety of documentation including assessment and attendance data, behaviour and incident logs, and safeguarding documentation. The 13 questionnaires returned by parents and carers were analysed, as were those completed by staff and students.

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

- The procedures for tracking and analysing students' progress and the use of this information in supporting individuals and in setting targets.
- The provision and outcomes for the students with the most complex needs who are taught in the specialist unit.
- The impact of the residential provision in supporting students' learning and personal development and enriching their curriculum.
- The school's effectiveness in preparing students for leaving school by raising their attendance, and by providing an appropriate range of accredited courses and work-related learning opportunities in school or through partnerships.

Information about the school

The school has a residential facility, approximately half a mile away from the school, for a small minority of students. There are currently 12 boarders, although the boarding arrangements are flexible. Students may board for one to four nights each week depending on individual circumstances. Although the school is co-educational, there are no girls on roll. The school does not have a Sixth Form although from time to time it does have older students. The only post-16 student currently on roll is taught alongside Year 11 students for the vast majority of the time. A small group of students who the school judges to have particularly complex needs and challenging behaviour are taught in a specialist unit attached to the residential provision.

All of the students have a statement of special educational needs for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Virtually all of them have a White British heritage. Over half of the students are known to be eligible for free school meals, and a small minority are looked after children.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Northfield is a satisfactory school. Both the main school and the newly established specialist unit provide a satisfactory quality education. The quality of the residential provision is good. While the boarding facility enhances many aspects of residents' personal development, residential care staff are not enabled to support their school-based learning in a planned and structured way. The parents and carers of day students do not have the opportunity to do this either.

Students' attainment is low but they learn and progress at a satisfactory rate during their time in Northfield and all students, including those in the specialist unit, achieve satisfactorily. In a minority of lessons, teaching is good, but it is satisfactory overall. Relationships are generally positive, but staff do not exploit this by consistently using assessment data to best effect. Individual long-term learning targets lack precision, and the majority of lesson plans do not clarify individuals' learning objectives for that session. Therefore, the activities provided do not always fully match their needs, and so attention wanders. Behaviour is satisfactory. The satisfactory curriculum makes good use of opportunities for community-based learning, but daily tutorial sessions lack sufficient structure and they do not properly fulfil their intended purpose most of the time.

Although attendance is low, students make satisfactory overall gains in their personal development. This reflects the satisfactory level of care, guidance and support and satisfactory safeguarding procedures that the school provides. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, although a few students find it particularly difficult to appreciate the needs, feelings and well-being of others. Therefore, a very small minority of them have been involved in racist, sexist and other incidents, although the school responded to them very well and dealt with them effectively with the very good input of the school-based police officer. The school does not, however, extend this by working with the students to establish structured action plans aimed at reducing the potential for such incidents to reoccur.

Recent innovations, such as the opening of the specialist unit, are evidence of leaders' ambition to develop the school. There is satisfactory capacity to do so in a sustained way. Leaders' ambition is informed by an adequate, broadly accurate school self-evaluation process that keeps them in touch with how well the school is functioning. Management systems ensure that monitoring information about all aspects of students' performance, both academic and personal, is collected, but the procedures for using the findings of its analysis to make a profound impact on student outcomes are not sharp enough. Personalised packages of support and guidance are triggered and whole-school strategic plans are developed, but not to an extent that is driving forward school improvement rapidly. Governance is satisfactory overall, although the governing body is acquiring a good grasp of the school and of what is needed to improve its performance.

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About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of students' learning and progress by:
 - ensuring that teachers routinely match appropriately challenging activities to students' capabilities in order to promote independent learning
 - continuing to increase the rate of attendance
 - improving tutorial periods to increase the amount of planned taught time
 - implementing a planned programme that enables parents, carers and residential care workers to support students' learning out of school.
- Make more effective use of the monitoring information that is collected to better support and guide students' learning and personal development by:
 - negotiating with each student precise learning targets and the action plans to achieve them, and by sharing them with parents and carers so that they can be more involved in their children's progress and development
 - writing individual action plans to guide those students who are involved in incidents of racial and sexist behaviour, or who frequently demonstrate other forms of unacceptable conduct, to improve the self-management of their behaviour.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry is low because most students have a history of disrupted education caused by non-attendance, unacceptable behaviour and periods of exclusion. Students progress at a satisfactory rate in acquiring key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills. These achievements enable them to successfully follow an adequate range of accredited examination courses, including GCSE, although very few ever attain grade C or better. They also celebrate success in achieving qualifications such as first aid certificates, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and recognition as sports leaders. Students who are identified as requiring targeted support to boost their reading skills make good progress. The students with particular additional needs, such as those in the specialist unit whose especially challenging behaviour has impeded their learning previously, benefit from the small group setting. They re-engage with learning and make satisfactory progress. In the lessons observed, learning was satisfactory overall, although it did not always proceed smoothly because it was often disturbed by a series of minor disruptions. Progress against individual learning targets is adequate, but generally the targets suffer from a lack of precision and so there is no guarantee that they are sufficiently challenging in all cases.

Students make satisfactory progress in their preparation for leaving school. Those who have the communication skills, self-esteem and social awareness required to work in a real life situation benefit from work experience placements and, in a few cases, attendance at college. As a result, leavers' destinations in 2010 were generally positive, with the very large majority of students going into education, employment or training. Students make

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satisfactory progress in their understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and of the precautions that they need to take in order to remain safe. The school-based police officer provides an excellent neighbourhood link and this helps students to make a satisfactory contribution to the local community, such as building planters at an old people's home.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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

How effective is the provision?

Staff generally have appropriate subject knowledge, and they use information and communication technology well as a teaching tool. Questions are used well to develop learning, and praise and encouragement celebrate students' successes. Learning sometimes proceeds at a good pace, but only in a minority of lessons, because teachers plan activities that recognise individual students' capabilities and build on their prior achievements. This step-by-step approach to encouraging measureable gains in learning is not evident in all lessons, however, as not all staff use assessment information so well. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to helping students to control their behaviour and in supporting their learning. This support is appropriate and planned for in some cases, but at other times it becomes necessary as the lesson proceeds. This occurs when staff have not provided activities that are set at just the right level of challenge to promote independent learning as much as possible.

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Students receive a satisfactory range of planned learning activities. They are supplemented very well by visitors into school, such as speakers on knife and gun crime, and the dangers of joyriding, and visits to sites of interest, like different places of worship. These events make a very good contribution to students' academic and personal development. Residential stays, in places like Devon and Barcelona, enhance this further as well as developing in students a sense of the responsibilities of living in a community and an understanding of cultures other than their own. Tutorial sessions are intended to enable class tutors to promote literacy and numeracy skills in a cross-curricular way, but not all tutors structure them and this is a lost opportunity to maximise the time that is available for learning. Other lost opportunities result from the school's approach to homework, which is voluntary, and from the absence of other mechanisms for encouraging residential care workers, parents or carers to become involved in students' learning. Students in the specialist unit enjoy the modified curriculum, which meets their needs and interests appropriately.

Staff show great concern for students' care and welfare, and provision such as the breakfast club makes a good contribution to their well-being. Leaders' concerted effort to improve the rate of attendance is proving successful. Their work and the input of the school's own attendance and welfare officer have improved attendance. A high level of staff supervision maintains a safe environment and ensures that student disagreements do not get out of control. Staff react quickly to serious incidents and they resolve immediate situations. The school does not then seize the initiative and subsequently work with students to devise detailed action plans aimed at preventing further incidents of a similar sort. Current individual behaviour/ education plans do not fulfil this function effectively as they are constructed too loosely. As these documents form the basis of individuals' academic support, too, planning for educational support suffers from the same lack of precision.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders have achieved their ambition of changing the way the school manages incidents requiring physical intervention. By adopting a more 'de-escalating' approach to confrontations, staff have achieved a significant reduction in the number of times that physical interventions have to be used to defuse situations. The students confirm that they appreciate this new approach. Safeguarding arrangements are satisfactory, with all required procedures in place. Leaders have been equally successful in responding to the needs of those students with the most challenging behaviour and poor attendance by establishing the specialist unit. The school has forged satisfactory links with partners and

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so a few individuals' learning needs are met through inclusion sessions at a local mainstream school or college. These developments are indicative of the school's satisfactory procedures for providing equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination.

There are satisfactory links with parents and carers. By providing flexible arrangements, leaders secure good attendance at annual reviews of special educational needs and good representation at student progress meetings. The school does not, however, involve them enough by sharing with them their children's learning and behaviour targets or by enabling them to support their children's learning through, for example, homework. Arrangements for promoting community cohesion are satisfactory. The school has a detailed understanding of the students and of the circumstances in which they and their parents or carers live. Even though few students live in the immediate vicinity, close liaison between leaders and the school-based police officer ensures an effective channel of communication between the school and the local community.

The school's emphasis on students' behaviour and how it can be best managed and improved has resulted in leaders concentrating on this in lesson observations rather being focused on students' learning and academic progress. They recognise that they have not sufficiently encouraged the staff from teaching lessons that tend to focus on behaviour management with few opportunities for students to take risks in their learning, to producing consistently vibrant, stimulating sessions that use creative resources to motivate students to want to join in and behave well. The governing body is also aware that it receives far more information about aspects of students' behaviour than about their learning. It has taken steps to address this but school leaders are at an early stage of routinely delivering the detailed evaluations that are requested of them.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

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Boarding provision

The boarding provision is of good quality. The majority of recommendations in the last inspection report have been met. The building and grounds have been cleared of hazards, and the residential site is now reserved exclusively for use by the school. The head of care is undertaking an appropriate professional qualification, and procedures for staff supervision have been reviewed. Recommendations relating to the recording of sanctions and internal monitoring procedures have not been fully implemented.

Boarders enjoy consistency and continuity of care provided by a small, competent and committed care team. There are sufficient staff on duty at all times to meet both individual and group needs. Staff feel well supported, and they receive appropriate professional development opportunities. External monitoring by the governing body is well established and this has a positive impact on the quality of care provided. Internal monitoring of key records is routinely undertaken by the head of care. Action is taken on any patterns or trends identified during such analyses, but this is not clearly recorded.

Students' views are sought on matters relating to their day-to-day care, and they are encouraged to be involved in key discussions about their future. Admissions to the house are well planned and they provide an opportunity for the young people to experience boarding before making a commitment. Aims of the residential placement are recorded in accessible care plans that are drawn up in consultation with parents, carers and the young people. These are routinely reviewed and progress is recorded. Boarders are well supported to maintain contact with their families.

Boarders are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle. They receive a good variety of healthy, nutritious food and are routinely consulted about menus. Special diets are catered for fully. Students have the opportunity to assist in the preparation of the evening meal, and this promotion of self-help skills makes a good contribution to their preparation for adulthood. All boarders have regular access to a range of physical activities in the evening, which adds to their experiences in school.

Prime responsibility for boarders' health remains with parents and carers. Care staff take on responsibility for health matters if required or requested to do so, and they do this effectively as they are trained in the administration of medication and first aid. However, they do not collate the details of the support provided on these occasions into a single, easily accessible document. Robust systems ensure that medication is safely administered, stored and dispensed.

Safeguarding and boarders' welfare are clear priorities. Staff receive annual training in safeguarding and they have a good understanding of their child protection responsibilities. The school has good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. There are established procedures for the vetting and recruitment of care staff to ensure that boarders are only cared for by suitable adults. Established practices and procedures ensure that boarders are protected from abuse. Their welfare is promoted in a safe and caring environment. Boarders bear this out as they feel safe and supported, and have confidence in taking concerns and issues to staff. They confirm that bullying is not an issue and that staff always deal with any incidents that do occur. Staff are aware of the protocols to follow in the case of a resident going missing, although such incidences are rare. Good procedures ensure that boarders are protected from the risk of fire and other potential hazards.

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Boarders’ behaviour is generally well managed. Young people are aware of staff’s expectations, and they agree that the house rules are fair and understand that they are there to help to keep them safe. Boarders show good progress in being able to reflect on their behaviour and to modify it accordingly. Physical restraint is rarely used within the boarding provision. All measures of control are recorded, although there is some inconsistency in recording the effectiveness of sanctions. There is good promotion of equality and diversity within the provision.

The accommodation provides ample space for boarders’ needs. Staff take effective steps to provide a practical but homely residential provision, although some items of furniture are damaged or showing signs of wear and tear. Most boarders have their own bedrooms, which they personalise. Boarders enjoy their residential experience and feel supported by staff who know them well and take an interest in them. Good individual pastoral support is provided when required. Becoming resident has had a positive impact on their attendance at school for the large majority of boarders. Good communication is maintained between residential and school staff. Staff provide support for those boarders who voluntarily take school work back to the house, and they also help some students with their reading. However, neither of these activities is carried out with close coordination between the two sets of staff.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

ensure that sanction records include an evaluation of their effectiveness (NMS 10)

collate all medical information into a health care plan or similar document (NMS 14)

ensure that the residential accommodation is furnished to an acceptable standard (NMS 24)

identify any actions that are taken following the internal monitoring of records. (NMS 32)

These are the grades for the boarding provision

The effectiveness of the boarding provision	2
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Views of parents and carers

The rate of response from parents and carers was low compared with other special schools. Completed questionnaires present a mixed picture. All parents and carers agree that the school does a good job in some respects, such as in showing their children how to remain healthy and in preparing them for leaving school. A very small number support their positive view with comments such as 'The school has worked wonders with our son.' There is, however, large disagreement about other features of the school. For instance, a quarter feel that they are not encouraged to be involved in their children's education, and this matches precisely the view of the inspection team. A similar number indicate some concerns about their child's safety, although none provided any additional information about why they hold that view. The team explored this during the inspection but it could not substantiate their concern.

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The majority of respondents indicate that they agree with the statements in the questionnaire rather than strongly agreeing with them. This aligns closely with the view of the inspection team that provision and outcomes are satisfactory.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northfield School 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 13 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 60 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	4	31	8	62	1	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	2	15	8	62	3	23	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	5	38	6	46	2	15	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	2	15	9	69	1	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	4	31	9	69	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	2	15	8	62	3	23	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	5	38	8	62	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)	3	23	9	69	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	54	5	38	1	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	6	46	5	38	2	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	38	5	38	2	15	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	5	38	6	46	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	5	38	6	46	2	15	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Northfield School, Oxford OX4 6DQ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. Special thanks go to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us. Northfield is a satisfactory school. The residential unit is good.

Lessons are satisfactory and you are given a reasonable variety of opportunities to help you to learn. You make satisfactory progress in your work. You also make satisfactory progress in growing up as young people, although some of you get involved in too many unpleasant incidents with other students. You show appropriate understanding of how to have a safe and healthy lifestyle. The staff give you a satisfactory standard of care, guidance and support.

The people who run the school do a satisfactory job. They have ideas about how to make the school better and we have asked them to do the following in order to help them to achieve this.

- Make sure that teachers always provide you with work that is set at just the right level so that you can tackle it on your own.
- Get more of you to attend school more often.
- Encourage you to progress more quickly by working closely with your parents or carers and residential staff so that they can help you to learn after school.
- Make better use of tutorial time each day.
- Give each of you clear targets and action plans so that you have something to aim for; in your work and development as young people.

All of you can help them to make these improvements by going to school as often as you possibly can, working hard, and respecting the welfare and safety of other students and staff at all times. Finally, I wish each of you success in the future, especially if you are taking examinations and leaving school this year.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell

Lead inspector

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