

The North School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	118832
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	379690
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2012
Lead inspector	Robert Ellis HMI

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1123
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Johnson
Headteacher	Lesley Ellis
Date of previous school inspection	29–30 April 2009
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Robert Ellis	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Brown	Additional inspector
Andrew Lyons	Additional inspector
Cyndi Milliband	Additional inspector
Mandy Snook	Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 50 lessons taught by 47 different teachers, and held discussions with groups of students, staff, the Chair of the Governing Body and a Vice Principal from a local college. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at development plans, the school's tracking data showing students' progress, teachers' lesson plans, and students' work. Joint lesson observations were conducted with staff. In addition, inspectors analysed the questionnaire responses of 117 parents and carers, 139 staff and 157 students, and took their views into account.

Information about the school

This is a larger than average non-selective secondary school with a sports and rural dimension specialisms in an area where selection takes place. Most students are White British, and few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is around 13%, which is just below average. Around one in four students have been identified as having special educational needs, predominantly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, plus specific and moderate learning difficulties. The proportion of students who have a statement of special education needs is above average. The school has a specialist unit that provides for a small number of students who have autistic spectrum disorders and it is also recognised for its work with students who have specific learning difficulties. The school meets the current government floor standard.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school that is determined to improve. It is improving rapidly because of good leadership. Although it has good features, it is not good overall because, although the quality of teaching is improving, the proportion of good and outstanding teaching is not yet high enough. The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory.
- Most students make at least satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points and abilities but, for some who are eligible for free school meals, their attendance and achievement could be better. In contrast, disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress. Attendance is improving and students say that they feel safe. Achievement in the developing sixth form is satisfactory.
- Teaching is typically satisfactory and improving. The support and guidance provided for students with complex learning difficulties help them to make good progress. Lessons and other activities often provide students with memorable experiences but a small minority of lessons are not engaging and do not challenge students sufficiently. Assessment information is not always used consistently to ensure work is pitched at the right level for all students and marking is not always helpful or developmental.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is typically satisfactory and the school is usually a calm and orderly place. Students' behaviour is, in the main, managed appropriately, but there are exceptions and some learning time is lost as a result. There are effective arrangements for ensuring students are safe and can recognise and respond to risks.
- The school is led and managed well. An ambitious vision for the school is shared by all staff. Teachers' performance is managed effectively and teachers are strongly encouraged to develop best practice to raise standards and improve teaching quality. Aspects of the curriculum are innovative and provision helps to promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development strongly. The school has very productive partnerships to support students' learning and development.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring

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visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress and attainment of all groups of students, particularly those who are eligible for free school meals, through strengthening teaching so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - routinely using assessment information well to match tasks and activities to the needs, interests and capabilities of the different groups of students
 - ensuring consistent management of students' behaviour by consistently providing lessons that engage and challenge students and promote their enjoyment and independence
 - ensuring that regular marking of students work provides helpful guidance on how to improve and meet personal targets
 - continue to support and challenge students who have poor attendance, with a particular focus on students who are eligible for free school meals, so that their attendance improves.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Achievement is satisfactory, including in the sixth form, and is improving. Students enter school with prior attainment that ranges from broadly average to well below average. They make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points and achieve standards that are increasingly in line with the national average. GCSE results have shown a rising trend since 2009. However there remain differences between outcomes in different subjects and progress in mathematics is better than in English.

Students with disabilities and those with special educational needs, including autism, are supported very well, and make better progress than similar students nationally. The school has eliminated differences in outcomes for most of the different groups. However, students who are eligible for free school meals, many of whom have complex barriers to learning and join the school at various times throughout the year, perform less well than their peers. Outcomes in the recently introduced sixth form show an improving trend but there is significant variation between courses.

In lessons, students were observed to enjoy school and make satisfactory and sometimes good or better progress. A very small minority of students do not have positive attitudes to learning and their inattentiveness and low-level inappropriate behaviour sometimes slows the pace of learning. Students generally have good relationships with their teachers and want to learn.

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt that their

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children make good progress; although this is the case for an increasing proportion, students' overall progress is currently satisfactory.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is typically satisfactory and is improving. Most parents and carers report that their children are taught well. Most teaching seen during the inspection was at least satisfactory, with a significant proportion being good or better and a small proportion that was outstanding. Scrutiny of students' past work and discussion with them indicate that this is typical of the quality of teaching they routinely experience.

Teachers generally have high expectations of what students can achieve and have developed good relations with students. The better lessons are delivered at a brisk pace, and teachers and other adults in the classroom use questioning well to help students improve their thinking skills and test out what they have understood. The less effective lessons are less engaging and teachers do not use assessment information effectively to ensure that tasks and activities are closely matched to the needs and interests of the different groups of students. Students speak highly of the opportunities that the sports specialism offers and like the Olympic theme currently being woven through all subjects. Teaching in the sixth form is at least satisfactory and in many of the subject areas it is good. Students are very positive about sixth form teaching and learning. They say that they get good quality advice and guidance so that they can make informed choices about what to do next.

Students' literacy and communication skills are promoted satisfactorily. Most lessons provide good opportunities for students to develop their personal and social skills and reflect on current issues. For example, students in a geography lessons were investigating population control and reflecting on how this might impact on different people's beliefs and customs. This and similar activities promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.

Marking of students work is inconsistent. Examples of regular, constructive marking were evident, but there was too much variation in the quality of marking. Consequently, students do not always get the help and guidance that they need in order to know exactly what must be improved. Oral feedback in lessons was more effective and most students know their targets and how well they are progressing toward them.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is typically satisfactory and sometimes good. Students seldom require little more than gentle prompting from staff to moderate their behaviour. Students say that they feel safe in school and are confident that there are adults or older students they can turn to if they have a problem. Most students attend school regularly because the school has effective systems to support students who do not attend as regularly as they should. While attendance is improving, the attendance of those eligible for free school meals could

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be better.

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed the view that their children were looked after well and felt safe in school. A small minority of parents and carers felt that lessons were often disrupted by inappropriate behaviour but students say that disruption seldom occurs and most teachers deal effectively with any challenging behaviour. However, a small minority of staff and students who responded to the inspection questionnaire do not think behaviour is managed consistently, and inspectors agree. During the inspection, most lessons seen proceeded in an orderly manner and little time was lost due to poor behaviour. In a few lessons, teachers were too tolerant of low-level disruptive behaviour and did not apply the school policy for managing behaviour effectively so this resulted in students making less progress than they might have done. Students have an awareness of the different forms of bullying; they say that all types of bullying are rare and that if it is reported, it will be dealt with quickly and effectively. The proportion of students who are excluded from school for short periods is reducing rapidly but remains above the national average.

Students demonstrate an appropriate understanding of how to avoid the risks that they might face. For example, students were clear about potential hazards from substance abuse and the dangers associated with the use of the internet.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and her senior leadership team are driving improvement at a good rate. Effective monitoring of all aspects of the school's work ensures that they are aware of the school's strengths and areas for development. Accurate self-evaluation informs planning and identifies appropriate priorities for improvement. Middle leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and contribute to improvement. All staff are held to account by their line managers. The governing body is effective in supporting and challenging the school to improve.

Leaders and managers show a strong determination to challenge and support teachers to improve their practice, and the improving profile of teaching and learning demonstrates that they are having success. All staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire felt that the school made appropriate provision for their professional development and judge that leaders and managers are doing all they can to improve the quality of teaching. Inspectors found that the school's monitoring of teaching and learning provides an accurate picture of the profile of teaching. Improvements to teaching, accelerating progress and rising standards in a number of subjects demonstrate good capacity for further improvement.

The school is developing a curriculum that suitably meets students' needs and is responsive to local employment requirements. Aspects of the curriculum are innovative; for example, the school has its own farm which helps students learn about animal care and husbandry, and is also used for land-based courses. There are a broad range of courses that lead to accreditation at various levels. Good partnerships with other local schools and colleges ensure that there are appropriate

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routes for students to follow into the sixth form, either at the school or elsewhere. There is a good range of well-attended enrichment activities, including a basketball academy. The sports specialism successfully boosts students' self-esteem and self-worth and the school has the honour of hosting the Olympic torch during its journey through Ashford later this year.

The school's safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and ensure students feel safe. This is a very inclusive school where all students are valued regardless of their background or ability. Equality of opportunity is central to the school's purpose and discrimination is not tolerated. Gaps in attainment against national averages are narrowing. All aspects of students' personal development are promoted well, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Good pastoral care and sound academic guidance make a significant contribution to students' achievement, particularly for those students with complex needs, to ensure that they are prepared well for their futures.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



23 March 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of The North School, Ashford TN24 8AL

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we visited your school. My particular thanks go to all of you who took time to fill out our questionnaire or to talk to us about your school. We found that yours is a satisfactory school that cares for you well.

Most of you work hard in lessons and make satisfactory progress in your learning and development. We were pleased to see that you enjoy school and you told us you feel safe. The school has good arrangements to ensure that you are kept safe and secure. Behaviour in lessons is often good but sometimes a few students behave inappropriately and disrupt your learning. The school provides you with a good range of subjects to study and we were pleased to see that so many of you are thinking of staying on in the sixth form. Most teachers make sure that work is set at the right level for you, but this is not always so, as sometimes work is too easy or too hard. Most of you know what your targets are, and how to achieve them, but the teachers marking does not always tell you what must be improved. Adults who are responsible for improving the school know what needs to be done and are working hard to help you achieve as well as you can.

We have asked the school to do some things to help you learn even better.

- We want teaching to be good or better so that all of you achieve well.
- We would like those students who do not attend regularly to try harder to get to school and achieve more.
- We are asking all teachers to make sure they do not tolerate poor behaviour and make all lessons as interesting as the best.
- We would like teachers to make sure you get work that is set at just the right level so that you can be more involved in your learning and develop greater independence.

Yours sincerely

Robert Ellis
Her Majesty's Inspector

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