

Northgate High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	124840
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	395320
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2012
Lead inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
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	1713
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	550
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Angus McGready
Headteacher	David Hutton
Date of previous school inspection	5 February 2008
School address	Sidegate Lane West Ipswich IP4 3DL
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

John Mitcheson	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Cox	Additional Inspector
Mina Drever	Additional Inspector
Sean Wyartt	Additional Inspector
Justina Ilochi	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 37 lessons. An inspector accompanied by a senior leader visited a further seven part-lessons as part of a learning walk. In all, 44 teachers were seen. Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, three groups of students and two members of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including 602 questionnaires from parents and carers, 133 from staff and 149 from students.

Information about the school

Northgate High School is much larger than average. It has a large sixth form. The majority of students are White British. A small but significant proportion of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly Black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and other mixed backgrounds. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, mostly specific and moderate learning difficulties, is below average. Student mobility is lower than average. The school specialises in modern languages and science. It is regularly oversubscribed. The school meets the government's current floor targets, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

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

Key findings

- This is a good school. Standards are consistently high. The large majority of students attain at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Current data indicate this will be maintained this year. It is not outstanding because a small minority of students do not make the progress expected of them. Until recently, procedures to monitor their achievement have not been rigorous enough to avoid their underperformance.
- The sixth form is good. Monitoring procedures are much better than in the main school and teaching is often outstanding. Most students make good progress and attain high standards in Advanced-level awards.
- The quality of teaching is good. A whole-school focus on developing teaching and learning and sharing best practice has led to significant improvements. Teaching is often good or outstanding, but some inconsistencies are evident. Not all teachers use assessment information to plan work suited to students of different abilities, or share this information with students so they know how well they are doing and what to do to improve.
- Behaviour is good. A significant minority of parents and carers raised concerns about disruption in lessons. Students said that it occurs in a few lessons but when it does it is managed appropriately by staff. They all agreed that school is a calm, safe and enjoyable place to be. Attendance is above average.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a clear vision for improving the school further. He enjoys the full support of staff and the governing body. Self-evaluation is accurate. Development planning rightly prioritises improving the use of data. It is not collated centrally or disseminated effectively by a senior leader. Good governance provides regular support and challenge for senior leaders and maintains the school’s high profile in the local community.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all students make sufficient progress and achieve equally as well as others by:
 - firmly embedding the recently introduced procedures for monitoring individual students' progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4
 - using the information gained from this monitoring to plan work matched to the different needs and abilities of all students, and regularly checking that these plans translate into high-quality learning in every lesson
 - enabling teachers to identify and intervene early to provide additional support for the small minority of students showing signs of underperforming
 - sharing monitoring data with students so they have a thorough understanding of how well they are doing and what to do to improve
 - delegating full responsibility for the systematic collection and regular dissemination of assessment data to a member of the senior leadership team.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The overwhelming majority of parents and carers who returned questionnaires felt that their children were taught well and were making good progress. Inspection evidence and the school's data confirm this view. Standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 3 have been consistently well above national averages for the past three years. Current data indicate that this trend will be maintained this year. Most students attain the expected levels in English, mathematics and science and the majority of them attain the higher Level 6. Based on their above average starting points, this represents good progress. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding national expectations is equally high in all other foundation subjects.

Standards achieved in Key Stage 4 are consistently high. This year, over 80% of Year 11 students are predicted to attain at least five GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics, and this exceeds the school's own target. The percentage making expected progress in English and mathematics is higher than national averages. However, this masks a significant gap between achievement of most students and a small minority who are known to be eligible for free school meals or have special educational needs. Senior leaders have responded to this by strengthening procedures to monitor their progress and ensure that lessons include tasks matched to their specific needs and interests. Revised curriculum planning and interventions to support students' reading and numeracy skills are improving the learning of students with special educational needs. Current data indicate that these students are making better progress and this gap is narrowing.

Girls tend to outperform boys at a rate similar to the national trend, but this gap is

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closing as approaches to increase boys' engagement in lessons are implemented. Students achieve well in most subjects, including the specialist areas of science and modern languages. They make better progress in mathematics than in English. To address this, additional time has been allocated to English this year. Most students read well and carry their reading books with them. The majority of Year 11 students enrol into the sixth form. They are joined by students from a wide range of other schools attracted by the broad range of courses and the consistently high standards achieved in them each year. Based on their above average starting points, students make good progress. In 2011, almost all students attained three Advanced-level awards and the majority went on to continue their studies at universities.

Quality of teaching

Observations of lessons, mostly carried out jointly by inspectors and senior leaders, confirmed the school's own view that the quality of teaching is good. Regular monitoring and teachers' collaboration to improve teaching and learning have secured a number of strengths. The vast majority of teachers share good relationships with students. This contributes significantly to their good behaviour in most lessons and their enjoyment of school. A range of resources, including interactive whiteboards and computers, are used well to stimulate students' interest. An increasing number of teachers actively engage students in their learning through practical tasks, small games and by leading group work.

In the best lessons, teachers' detailed subject knowledge, high expectations and good questioning skills combine to test students' understanding and generate good quality debate. Students work independently in small groups for sustained periods of time, assisted by timely interventions from teachers to support and challenge them. A few groups have dedicated support from teaching assistants which promotes their learning. Planning ensures that students of different abilities are sufficiently challenged and engaged fully in learning. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, students worked well together in groups to agree upon effective methods for revising, and then shared their findings with the class. Later, they were grouped together to critically review poetry, enabling the teacher to circulate and provide them with expert guidance and advice on how to improve.

In a minority of lessons, students' progress is no better than satisfactory due to some notable inconsistencies in teaching. Not all teachers are implementing the common features of good practice identified by the school's teaching and learning focus group. For example, in some lessons teachers spend too much time talking, which limits opportunities for students to learn independently. They do not include suitable tasks to challenge the most able or meet the needs of the least able students. The quality of marking and feedback is variable across and within subjects. Teachers use their own assessment procedures to monitor students' progress, but the resulting data are not collated centrally or disseminated to all teachers to ensure that individual students remain on track to meet the expectations set for their ongoing achievement.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour in the sixth form is outstanding. In the main school, the vast majority of parents and carers agreed in their questionnaires that the standard of behaviour is good. Concerns raised by a small minority of parents and carers about disruption in lessons were pursued vigorously by inspectors. They found that in a few lessons good behaviour waned when teachers' planning did not capture and retain the interest and engagement of students of different abilities. However, the positive views expressed by students, low exclusion rates, the few recorded incidents of bullying and the falling number of referrals to the withdrawal unit all pointed to good behaviour. Throughout the inspection, most students were polite, courteous and respectful of their teachers. They say school is a friendly place where they feel safe and free from all forms of bullying. They know which members of staff to approach if they have concerns.

The outstanding support for students who have a physical disability is praised and highly valued by parents. Decisive action to improve the quality of support for learners who have other special educational needs has improved the behaviour of some of the students who exhibit the most challenging behaviour. The improved support and high-quality care provided for younger students in the foundation curriculum are promoting positive behaviour for learning and enabling them to reintegrate back into regular lessons. Care and support for a small minority of older students engaged in alternative off-site provision have been strengthened to ensure that they engage fully in GCSE courses.

Leadership and management

Self-evaluation is honest and accurate. The headteacher knows the school's strengths and weaknesses. He has recognised that while the school enjoys considerable success in generating consistently high standards of attainment, the monitoring of students' progress is not yet rigorous enough to ensure that all of them make sufficient progress and have an equal opportunity to achieve what they are capable of. Good leadership and management of the sixth form have secured consistently high standards and good-quality support and guidance for students. Leaders and managers have acted promptly to tackle a slight dip in students' progress last year.

Senior and middle leaders work collaboratively to provide a good curriculum of GCSE qualifications matched to the interests and abilities of most students. This, and an excellent programme of enrichment, adds significantly to students' enjoyment and achievement and promotes a rich, vibrant environment in which to learn. Their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is evident in their contribution to the school's caring and supportive ethos, and their engagement with a wide range of local sporting and cultural events in the local community. The impressive return of over 600 questionnaires from parents and carers, almost all of them expressing their overwhelming support, reflects the high level of engagement they have with the school and its staff.

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New procedures to accurately gauge students' progress over time are not fully embedded. Currently, it is unclear who in the senior leadership team other than the headteacher has full responsibility for ensuring that the management of data becomes systematic and it is used routinely across the school. A recent restructuring of the senior leadership team has focused staff on improving the quality of teaching and eradicating the inconsistencies that lead to students' variable rates of progress. Improvement planning rightly prioritises strengthening lesson planning to meet the needs of all abilities, particularly those taught in mixed-ability groups in Key Stage 3, including English. Improved leadership and management of teaching and learning are bringing about improvements. The governing body holds senior leaders to account and ensures that all statutory requirements are met. Procedures for safeguarding students, including the single central record, are regularly maintained.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.



18 May 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Northgate High School, Ipswich IP4 3DL

Earlier this week we visited your school to meet with you and your teachers, and join you in lessons. Thank you for making us feel most welcome, especially those of you who agreed to meet with inspectors to share your views, and those who completed questionnaires. You were great ambassadors for your school.

Northgate High School provides you with a good education. It helps you to reach high standards in GCSE examinations. Most of you are well prepared for the next stages of your lives after Year 11 and Year 13. You behave well in lessons and around the school. Behaviour and attitudes in the sixth form are exemplary. You told us that school is a friendly place to be and you feel quite safe. Your enjoyment of school is reflected in your high attendance and eagerness to participate in a wide range of enrichment activities.

Although most of you do very well in examinations, your school is not yet outstanding because a few of you do not achieve what you are capable of. The school is aware of this and is taking action to improve it. We have asked your senior teachers to make sure that:

- you all achieve equally as well as each other, by tracking your progress and sharing this information with you so you know how well you are doing and what you need to improve
- work is matched to your different needs and abilities, and regular checks are made to make sure that this happens in every lesson.

The headteacher leads your school well. You can help him by sharing with him your thoughts on what else needs improving.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson
Her Majesty's Inspector

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