

Northfield School

Knights Road, Blackbird Leys, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX4 6DQ

Inspection dates

14–15 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Some pupils are not receiving an education. For others, reduced timetables and off-site providers are used inappropriately, as staff cannot manage some pupils' behaviour.
- Pupils' attendance is worryingly poor and has been for some time. Responsible stakeholders have done too little to tackle this.
- There is no sustainable leadership structure in place. The quality of governance in recent times has been concerning. Now, the school is wholly dependent on the expertise of outside support.
- The local authority's response has been insufficient to bring about positive change. Officers have not fully understood the risks attached to some pupils' circumstances.
- The school is in financial deficit. In the past, funds have not been sufficiently accounted for. There are no plans in place this year for the spending of additional funds, such as pupil premium.
- Safeguarding is ineffective. The reporting and recording of concerns about pupils are unreliable and scant. Some staff, including designated leads, have received insufficient training.
- Exclusions are too high. Unofficial exclusion is used inappropriately. Governors and others with responsibility have not exercised their lawful duty to exclude pupils when appropriate.
- Pupils make inadequate progress from their starting points. The school's curriculum and educational offer does not meet the objectives in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans well enough.
- Staff have had insufficient training and performance management. As a result, many staff are not sufficiently skilled to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Not all pupils have an equal chance to succeed, as the curriculum is not fit for purpose. Inclusion and equality are not promoted strongly enough.

The school has the following strengths

- New senior leaders, with support from the local authority, have stoically taken charge at a time when the school is in crisis.
- The acting leadership team and new governors are providing some consistency for parents, carers and staff.
- Pupils benefit from the expertise of some adults in some subjects. In art, music and physical education (PE), pupils participate and engage in learning activities.
- Some support is contributing exceptionally well to providing wise counsel to new leaders.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently review and sharpen safeguarding processes so that:
 - leaders and relevant staff fully understand safeguarding requirements and ensure that statutory processes are in place
 - systems and record-keeping, particularly those relating to child protection, are rigorous
 - safer recruitment processes are observed
 - all staff receive appropriate training and have oversight and understanding of Keeping Children Safe in Education 2018
 - the school's safeguarding policy meets requirements
 - leaders ensure that pupils who attend alternative providers are kept safe.
- Strengthen the quality of leadership and management by making sure that:
 - a sustainable leadership and teaching structure is established
 - pupils receive their entitlement to a full-time education and attend regularly
 - the suitability and effectiveness of any alternative education arrangements are reviewed
 - the curriculum meets the needs of pupils, including the targets in their EHC plans, more effectively
 - staff receive sufficient training to carry out their roles effectively, including those related to the behaviour management of pupils with the most complex needs
 - pupils' inclusion and equality of opportunity are promoted more strongly
 - staff performance management is regularly monitored and reviewed so that staff are held more firmly to account
 - the school's finances are kept under watchful review and evaluated for value for money
 - the school's website meets requirements.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, make good progress in all aspects of learning, by:
 - developing the skills and expertise of staff, so that pupils who exhibit the most challenging behaviour are catered for well
 - ensuring that pupils have access to and benefit from appropriate support that

meets their needs

- ensuring that activities appeal to pupils and match their learning needs well.

- Improve the personal development, behaviour and welfare of pupils, by:

- reducing the number of bullying incidents

- analysing patterns of behaviour so that effective action can be taken to improve it.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- Pupils are at risk. Many do not attend school and are in vulnerable situations. Since pupils returned to the main site in October 2018 after the completion of building work, the situation has deteriorated further. Local authority officials and school leaders have not readmitted all pupils. This is because there is a shared acknowledgement that the school can neither meet the needs of some pupils nor cope safely with pupils' behaviour.
- Oxfordshire local authority identified the school as a cause for concern in October 2017. However, local authority officers are only just beginning to uncover the extent of the decline. Although this is now becoming clearer, responsible stakeholders are still trying to establish a secure foundation on which to build the school's recovery. Leaders and local authority officials agree openly that the school's overall effectiveness is inadequate.
- Over several years, the school has suffered from temporary and poor-quality leadership arrangements. Staff have worked without direction. During this time, leaders at the most senior level were not held to account for spending, staffing, standards or pupils' safety and welfare. Leaders did not address the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection. These areas, which included improving both pupils' attendance and teaching and learning, have deteriorated further.
- Following a consultation to close the school, staff, parents and pupils are feeling unsettled. Some staff and pupils have left during this time. All remain anxious about the school's future. Furthermore, capacity for securing sustainable improvement is poor. The current strategic leadership structure is short term. Those who are leading at this problematic time are wholly dependent upon a significant level of external support.
- The school's curriculum is not fit for purpose and does not promote fundamental British values or pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Furthermore, the curriculum is poorly taught and too little attention is afforded to meeting pupils' SEND needs. This means that some pupils refuse to participate and consequently make insufficient progress during their time at Northfield. Leaders say that the school's offer is 'not addressing pupils' needs sufficiently'.
- Senior leaders' oversight of school spending over time, including funding for pupils with SEND, pupil premium and the Year 7 catch-up funding, is inadequate. For example, the annual requirement to evaluate pupil premium spending was last completed in the school year 2014/15. The school is in a deficit financial position, which is likely to grow this year. Furthermore, there are no plans in place this academic year for how leaders plan to spend additional funding.
- Leaders have not monitored the quality of teaching and learning routinely. Performance management mechanisms in the past did not meet requirements. Leaders are just beginning to address this shortfall and establish a more appropriate system. This is at an early stage and staff are not yet held to account. Some staff do not manage pupils' behaviour adequately.
- Inclusion is not promoted strongly enough. Too many pupils are on reduced timetables.

These arrangements are often too prolonged and not supported by a sound educational rationale. Not all pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed, as some pupils do not receive the hours of education to which they are entitled, and others do not attend well. Furthermore, for many pupils, their engagement with schooling deteriorates as they move through the school.

- School policies are not kept under regular review. For example, the complaints policy has lapsed since it was due for review in October 2017. Other statutory processes, such as the setting of equalities objectives, are not observed. The school's website does not meet requirements. Key information, such as that relating to equalities, pupil premium and SEND, is either missing or outdated.
- Despite the significant turmoil in recent months and shortcomings over several years, the recently appointed acting headteacher and acting deputy headteacher have managed to instil a sense of confidence in staff and parents. One parent commented: 'Northfield has had a challenging year... How the acting headteacher has managed to maintain a positive team in this period I really don't know.'
- The national leader of education (NLE) has been instrumental in triggering positive action. Following a thorough report on the quality of the school's SEND provision that pulled no punches, local authority officers rightly acted and intensified their support of the school. Nevertheless, local authority officers candidly shoulder 'some of the responsibility' for the position the school finds itself in. Officers know that their work has had too little impact on improving standards over recent months.
- Although inexperienced, temporary leaders are motivated to improve the quality of provision, aiming to keep pupils safe and provide them with an appropriate education. With the support of the NLE, leaders have produced an accurate self-evaluation document. They have also constructed a raising achievement plan, but this has not been shared with staff. The plan is not fit for purpose, but it does provide a vision on which to build.
- The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- The quality of governance has been weak for some time. In April 2018, the local authority issued a warning notice due to a breakdown in leadership and governance. Officers were concerned that governors were failing in their duty to ensure a clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. As a result, the previous governing body resigned en masse. The local authority has now stepped in, appointing an interim executive board (IEB) from July 2018.
- Members of the IEB bring a range of skills and expertise to their roles. However, it is early days. Nevertheless, they hold a realistic view, describing the current provision as 'unacceptable'. They know that the needs of SEND pupils are not met well enough. Members are rightly concerned about a whole host of shortcomings, including, but not exclusively, the placement of pupils, the use of unofficial exclusion, the school's safeguarding processes, the quality of teaching and learning, and pupils' attendance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- Until very recently, and during the last academic year, pupils who did not attend school were unaccounted for. While the new leadership team is now satisfied about the whereabouts of pupils, actions to ensure that pupils are safe, particularly those who attend an alternative provision, are insufficient. For example, leaders have not yet sought assurance that staff in other settings have had the appropriate level of checks to work with children.
- Safer recruitment processes have not been followed. For example, some staff were appointed into leadership positions unofficially. Now, retrospectively, staff are applying for positions previously held, and leaders are seeking references for some who have worked at the school for a while.
- Most of the school's designated safeguarding leads are not trained to an appropriate level. Those responsible lack clarity about who to refer to when they are concerned about a pupil. Designated safeguarding leads do not always attend core-group meetings for pupils who are subject to child protection arrangements when required. Procedures outlined in the school's policy are not followed closely enough.
- The recording and reporting of concerns are unreliable. Staff report verbally to a designated safeguarding lead and, as a result, written records are completed retrospectively. This means that insufficient detail is often recorded. Furthermore, the school's actions and outcomes for pupils are not always captured. Some concerns, such as those reported during absence follow-up phone calls, are not reported appropriately.
- The school's safeguarding policy, although amended recently, does not refer to the latest statutory guidance. For example, leaders have not considered the new requirement to protect children from sexual harassment.
- Pupils over the last few years have been educated in buildings that are not fit for purpose. In recent times, the local authority stepped in and declared the premises unfit for teaching and learning. After years of being non-compliant, including with fire regulations, the recent work has ensured that building regulations are now met. Nevertheless, the buildings' layout, design and upkeep are far from ideal. All those with responsibility for the school agree.
- While the buildings were temporarily closed, some pupils were educated off-site on a part-time basis. During this time, pupils received a restrictive and narrow education. Several serious incidents took place, as the temporary premises were unsuitable for pupils with a high level of need. Some pupils and staff exhibited unacceptably high levels of anxiety during this time. The impact of such turmoil has left many staff and pupils still feeling unsettled and apprehensive.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- Leaders know that provision for pupils who exhibit the most challenging behaviour is insufficient to meet their learning needs. Some of these pupils are not currently engaged in schooling.
- Pupils' attendance, whether on-site or in an alternative provision, is poor overall. This limits their engagement in schooling and adversely affects the progress they make.

Alternative offers are not well aligned to pupils' EHC plan objectives.

- Some teachers do not adapt or modify tasks quickly enough when pupils lose interest or their engagement wanes. This results in pupils switching off, getting bored or leaving the classroom of their own accord. Situations can then escalate quite quickly, and staff struggle to re-engage pupils successfully. This is particularly the case in Year 10 and Year 11.
- Staff have received insufficient training to carry out their roles effectively. During the inspection, pupils were often seen colouring in, doing word searches or sitting without tasks to undertake. Some staff simply try to contain pupils but with mixed success.
- School leaders are only just beginning to establish a system for tracking and analysing pupils' progress. This is not yet mature enough to enable leaders to analyse how well pupils are learning.
- Work in pupils' books shows that tasks do not match their needs well. For example, pupils are receiving a narrow and restricted experience in mathematics. Some pupils attend other provisions to access mathematics and English lessons that meet their needs better.
- Planned tasks do not interest or engage pupils sufficiently well in some subjects. Pupils do not value their own efforts, and some comment that they are not enjoying learning.
- Pupils behave well for some adults and in some subjects. For example, art, music and PE sessions are usually well attended. Pupils say that in these sessions adults are 'respectful of their needs' and are 'good listeners'.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate.
- Some pupils told inspectors that the school is not helping them achieve their goals. They are concerned that lessons are regularly disrupted by fighting and say that some pupils have 'no friends here'.
- Pupils who spoke to an inspector were unanimous that bullying is a concern. They say that it is not dealt with effectively by staff and that in some instances it is made worse by staff intervention. Leaders' own self-evaluation of the school describes incidents of bullying, including prejudiced and discriminatory behaviour, as 'frequent'. The number of racial incidents is high and rising.
- Despite the recent refurbishment to make the buildings safe, the premises are still not pleasant to work or learn in. Staff are doing the best they can.
- Some pupils who have experienced a breakdown in placement are offered places on a programme called 'next steps', a joint initiative between Meadowbrook College and Oxfordshire's SEND support service. However, in one example, a place was offered in July 2018, and due to awaiting the appointment of staff, this is not yet underway. Pupils wait too long to access the right provision.
- Pupils' behaviour in the younger years is generally better. In some subjects and for

some adults, pupils try harder and engage in what is on offer.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is inadequate.
- The management of pupils' behaviour is inadequate. It is widely understood at the most senior level that the school cannot meet the needs of, nor manage, pupils who exhibit the most challenging behaviour, particularly in Year 10 and Year 11. As a result, some pupils are not able to return to school. In some cases, pupils are accessing sporadically an alternative offer in other provisions. In other examples, some stop attending, or are excluded, and are not provided with an alternative, suitable placement that meets their needs.
- Absence has been unacceptably high for the last three years. In recent times it has increased further. Pupils' attendance this academic year is only slightly above 50%. Many pupils are persistent absentees. Some pupils, including those in alternative provision, who have not attended for several months remain on roll but do not receive an education.
- The rate of exclusion is too high and well above that seen nationally. Furthermore, some pupils who are at risk of permanent exclusion do not attend. Reduced timetables or an offer of alternative provision are some of the strategies that are inappropriately used to manage or contain pupils' behaviour.
- Leaders often use fixed-term exclusions to deal with both disruptive behaviour and more serious incidents, including verbal abuse, threatening behaviour and physical assault. There is clear evidence previously of the use of 'unofficial' and therefore illegal exclusions that have not been properly logged. Consequently, the recorded figures of historical exclusion rates, although high, are unreliable and the real figures are likely to be even higher.
- Many pupils have been excluded more than once. This reflects underlying shortcomings in the school's approach to behaviour management. Leaders do not analyse pupils' patterns of behaviour.
- Lessons, particularly in Year 10 and Year 11, are often interrupted by pupils' disruptive behaviour. Moreover, some lessons are unable to get underway. During the inspection, pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 did not engage in cookery sessions and wandered up and down corridors or in outside spaces instead. Staff do not have the skills needed to re-engage pupils successfully or help pupils regulate disruptive behaviour.
- In many sessions, although pupils attend, they show high levels of disengagement. For example, rather than participate in the activity on offer, pupils will distract others by calling out or whistling. At other times, pupils will put their head in their hands and simply not join in.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- Too many pupils are underachieving because they are neither attending school often enough nor in receipt of a full-time education. Furthermore, of those pupils who attend the school, some refuse to participate in some subjects. Some pupils leave Northfield without gaining qualifications or accreditations.
- Too few pupils make adequate progress from their starting points, as the curriculum is poorly designed and does not meet their needs. Pupils quickly disengage when learning tasks are either not appropriate or simply lack appeal.
- Leaders' and staff expectations are too low. Pupils, including children looked after and disadvantaged pupils, are underachieving considerably.
- Despite recent efforts to engage outside professionals more often, this is not yet making a difference. Leaders are frustrated at the lack of response from agencies, including child and adolescent mental health services and social care. This means that pupils' needs, including their mental health needs, are not met well enough.
- Some pupils leave school having gained accreditations. Last year some Year 11 pupils experienced success, including at GCSE entry level in mathematics, English and science. Just under half of leavers achieved some GCSEs, including in English language, mathematics and art.
- Some pupils make good progress in a narrow range of subjects, specifically PE, art and music. For example, some pupils gain Trinity College accreditations in music examinations. As a result, some pupils gain a sense of achievement in these subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	123346
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10051994

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	10 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Mrs Sian Rodway
Acting headteacher	Mr Tristan Powell
Telephone number	01865 771 703
Website	www.northfield.oxon.sch.uk
Email address	office@northfieldschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2015

Information about this school

- In April 2018, the governing body was issued with a warning notice on behalf of the local authority. Following this, the full governing body resigned and left the school. In August 2018, the local authority established an interim executive board.
- Between May and October 2018, the school buildings were closed as the local authority condemned them as unfit for teaching and learning. During this time, pupils only received a part-time education, being educated either off-site at Hill End Residential Centre or in portacabins on site. Some staff left.
- In July 2018, the local authority began a consultation to close the school. This has since been retracted. Instead, the local authority intends to build a new school on this site, which it plans to open in 2021. However, plans are at an early stage and are not fully agreed.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the school's leadership, teaching and governance arrangements. The previous headteacher, who

joined in September 2017, resigned following a period of absence, and left in July 2018. The school's deputy headteacher took up the post of acting headteacher in September 2018, having previously acted as headteacher in the academic year 2016/17. This is a temporary arrangement. Unofficially, the assistant headteacher stepped up to the role of acting deputy headteacher in October 2018.

- The acting leadership team is supported for five half days per week by an NLE, brokered by the local authority.
- Northfield School provides for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Some pupils have other learning difficulties, and some have autism spectrum disorder conditions.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has added an additional key stage, key stage 5. There are currently no pupils in key stage 2 or key stage 5. The local authority took the decision not to admit new pupils into Year 6 or Year 7 this academic year.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. The proportion of pupils who are supported by the pupil premium is well above that seen nationally.
- In 2017/18 the school exceeded its planned admission number. This is because additional places were commissioned but the Department for Education was not informed. There is also some confusion as to whether the school is co-educational. Currently, 51 boys attend and no girls.
- Some pupils attend alternative provision used by the school. These include Abingdon and Witney College, Oxford City College, Meadowbrook College, Oxfordshire Football Development Scheme, South Oxfordshire Food and Education Academy and Trax.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information because some of the necessary information about the school's spending of pupil premium and sports funding, governance information, the SEND report and equalities objectives are missing from its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors met with the acting headteacher, the acting deputy headteacher, and an NLE who is providing additional leadership support to school leaders.
- The lead inspector met with three representatives from the local authority, including the deputy director for education, the head of service for school improvement and the school service manager, who acts as the school's improvement adviser.
- The lead inspector also met with the chair and vice-chair of the interim executive board.
- Inspectors visited a variety of lessons in different year groups and subjects, all accompanied by either the acting headteacher or acting deputy headteacher and reviewed some work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors discussed pupils' progress and attainment with leaders.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils informally and met with eight pupils from Year 7 to Year 11.
- Parents' views were considered through the six responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, including five free-text comments. An inspector spoke to a parent by telephone.
- Inspectors took account of 11 survey responses submitted by staff and four responses of pupils to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised records and documentation relating to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, pupils' individual records and school improvement planning.
- Inspectors reviewed the checks made on staff about their suitability to work with children.

Inspection team

Elizabeth Farr, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Dom Cook

Her Majesty's Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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