

Northern House School (City of Wolverhampton)

Valley Park Campus, Cromer Gardens, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV6 0UB

Inspection dates

18–19 December 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has not been good over time. Some inconsistencies in the standard of teaching remain.
- Since the school opened, not enough pupils have made good academic progress. Pupils have left the school with too few accredited qualifications.
- Although it is developing, the curriculum offer was not good in the past. It did not provide well-planned opportunities for pupils to gain key knowledge.
- Too many pupils, particularly in key stage 4, do not attend school regularly.
- Despite recent improvements, more pupils than average are temporarily excluded from school. Too many key stage 4 pupils are excluded for short periods of time.
- The school was not well led and managed in the past. Many of the positive developments are relatively new and not fully embedded. They are yet to have a full impact on the quality of provision.

The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher and the current leadership team are having a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- The school is improving. Pupils are making better progress than they did in the past.
- Staff care about the pupils. Personal development is a core part of the school's work. Staff help pupils develop their self-confidence by giving them opportunities to succeed.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour effectively and help pupils to improve their conduct. Incidents of poor behaviour are reducing.
- Safeguarding procedures are effective. Keeping children safe is seen as everyone's responsibility within the school's strong culture of safeguarding.
- Governance, provided by the board of trustees and the local governing body, offers appropriate support and challenge to leaders. Trustees and governors have taken decisive action to improve the school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching learning and assessment, so that all groups of pupils make at least good progress, by ensuring that:
 - teachers routinely plan activities that interest, enthuse and meet the needs of pupils
 - consistently plan challenging activities.
- Improve pupils' outcomes by:
 - ensuring that pupils are provided with key knowledge in a well-planned curriculum
 - providing key stage 4 pupils with more opportunities to gain a range of accredited qualifications.
- Improve personal development, behaviour and welfare by taking effective action to improve attendance and reduce exclusions, particularly of key stage 4 pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by evaluating, refining and embedding new systems and structures that are now in place to further improve the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The current leadership team, which has been in place since April 2018, is taking effective action to improve the school. However, there have been many changes in leadership since the school opened and it has not been well led over time.
- Current leaders have created a more positive and ambitious culture which encourages all to prosper. Positive relationships between leaders, staff and pupils are helping pupils make better progress.
- Staff are positive about the changes that have taken place. They enjoy coming to work and value the training that they receive. Leaders, trustees and governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They monitor provision closely and use the information they collect to help to improve the school. However, many of the systems and structures that are now in place are relatively new and they are yet to have a marked impact on the quality of provision.
- The curriculum is still developing. In the past, it did not provide pupils with key knowledge or help pupils make good progress. It led to few accreditation opportunities. It is too early to assess the impact of the new curriculum model.
- Over time, the curriculum has promoted personal development effectively. When it is delivered well, it makes a marked contribution to pupils' improved behaviour and emotional well-being. An increasing range of extra-curricular activities also help to enrich pupils' learning.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively and opportunities to learn about fundamental British values are taken. Pupils are taught about the rule of law, democracy and liberty. They learn about cultures that are different to their own and they are tolerant of the beliefs of other people. Leaders and staff openly promote diversity and equality of opportunity.
- Leaders use additional funding well. Primary sport premium has increased the range of physical activities available to pupils. It has helped some pupils learn to swim, others to take part in competitive sport and has been used to encourage targeted pupils to become more active. Year 7 catch-up funding has supported pupils to improve their knowledge and skills in English and mathematics and the pupil premium has been used for a range of interventions that have contributed to disadvantaged pupils making improved progress. Funding for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is used for staffing and resources to improve the provision throughout the school.
- Parental satisfaction with the school is increasing and most parents and carers would now recommend the school to another parent. Regular contact, attendance at events and close working relationships between parents and staff help the pupils to improve their behaviour, attendance and progress.
- The trust took decisive action to improve the school's leadership by appointing the headteacher of the PRU as executive headteacher of both schools in April 2017. The executive headteacher and the head of school have made further changes to the

leadership structure more recently.

- The trust continues to offer a range of useful services and effective support to the school. It provides training and development opportunities, leadership support, assessment moderation, quality assurance and financial assistance. It has also commissioned useful external support to help to improve the school.

Governance of the school

- Governance is provided by the board of trustees and the local governing body. Both offer appropriate support and challenge to leaders.
- Those responsible for governance have a wide range of skills and experience that they use to hold leaders to close account. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and work well with leaders to further improve the quality of provision.
- The local governing body is well led, and it is becoming more effective. Meetings focus on the school's priorities and governors challenge leaders through asking well-informed questions. They have attended a range of training and visit the school regularly.
- Governors and trustees carry out their statutory duties effectively. They strive to ensure that resources are appropriately managed, that additional funding is used well and that safeguarding procedures are strong.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Keeping children safe is seen as everyone's responsibility within the school's strong safeguarding culture.
- All staff are well trained and kept up to date about safeguarding matters. Processes for reporting issues are clear and known by staff. Referrals are timely, and appropriate action is taken if required. Leaders and staff have a detailed understanding of their responsibilities and they follow up concerns thoroughly.
- Record-keeping is precise, and information is stored securely. Appropriate checks are made on staff and visitors and the maintenance of the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks is an example of good practice.
- Pupils, staff and parents believe that pupils are safe. There are established procedures in the school to keep pupils safe and pupils are taught how to stay safe in an age-appropriate manner. Issues that are pertinent to the local area are covered within the curriculum.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is improving but it is still inconsistent.
- When teaching has less impact, activities are not planned to meet the different needs of the pupils. Tasks do not consistently build on prior learning so, at times, they are too hard but, more often, they are not challenging enough. When staff do not have high enough expectations of the pupils, they do not make the progress of which they are

capable.

- Time in lessons is not used consistently well. Too often, there is a lack of a clear focus on learning and verbal feedback does not always tackle misconceptions or address lack of knowledge. Activities do not consistently fully engage pupils and pupils are rarely given opportunities to learn from their mistakes.
- There is evidence of some good practice in the school, particularly in key stage 2 and in vocational subjects in the secondary phase. When teaching is most effective, staff create a positive learning environment. They use their secure subject knowledge and probing questions to help pupils to learn.
- Teaching assistants are usually well deployed, and staff work well together. Staff adapt learning in response to pupils' social and emotional needs and use positive relationships to help pupils to learn. Pupils respond well to praise and rewards. They often work productively together.
- The teaching of English and mathematics in the secondary phase is still developing. Staff promote reading and mathematics effectively in different subjects, but pupils are given few opportunities to write at length in subjects other than English. This hinders the progress that pupils make in developing their writing skills.
- Systems are in place to ensure that assessment is accurate, and the school gives parents clear information about how pupils are progressing in different subjects. Regular meetings between parents and staff provide opportunities to review pupils' progress and to discuss ways of helping pupils to improve.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement. Although improving, pupils' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive. At times, pupils do not fully participate in activities and there are still occasions when learning is disrupted.
- Staff care about the pupils and personal development is a core part of the curriculum. Emotional well-being is nurtured, and healthy eating and regular exercise are promoted effectively.
- Staff help pupils develop their self-confidence by giving them opportunities to succeed. Personalised support, combined with better teaching and higher expectations, is now helping pupils to develop the characteristics of successful learners. Former pupils, who are apprentices at the school, are excellent role models.
- Effective careers education helped almost all of last year's Year 11 pupils move on to appropriate college courses, training or employment. Current pupils have appropriately high expectations of what they can achieve in adult life.
- Pupils are showing greater respect for themselves and other people. Older pupils help younger ones with their reading, pupils raise money for charities and the school has an active school council. Pupils also visit a residential care home for senior citizens on a

regular basis.

- Bullying is rare, and pupils are confident that staff will deal quickly and effectively with any incidents should they occur. The use of on-site alternative provision, such as safeguarding against aggressive, anti-social behaviour (SAAAB), is helping pupils develop more positive attitudes.
- Pupils feel safe. They are taught to use the internet appropriately, and they learn how to stay safe in a range of situations. For example, they are taught about how to protect themselves from the dangers of grooming and radicalisation.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement, but staff are becoming much more effective at managing pupils' behaviour.
- Most pupils who find it more challenging to behave appropriately are effectively helped to improve their conduct. Permanent exclusions are rare, and the numbers of fixed-term exclusions are declining. However, too many key stage 4 pupils are still excluded for short periods of time.
- Staff are trained in de-escalating situations and records indicate that they use physical intervention appropriately. Instances of poor behaviour are declining.
- Most pupils attend regularly, and a few have excellent attendance. Others have been helped to improve their attendance, but overall absence rates are too high. Improving attendance, particularly for key stage 4 pupils, remains a key priority for the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over time, pupils throughout the school have not made good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- As a result of a poorly designed curriculum and inconsistent teaching, Year 11 pupils left the school with too few accredited qualifications in the past. Despite this, almost all of last year's school leavers moved on to college courses, training or employment. Additionally, most of this year's Year 11 pupils have appropriate destinations in place.
- As teaching is improving, current pupils are making better progress, particularly in key stages 2 and 3. Older pupils who attend regularly are also making improved progress. The head of school has made changes to ensure that key stage 4 pupils are now benefiting from a reshaped curriculum offer which allows them to access more accreditation opportunities. However, the new curriculum is not yet fully embedded.
- Since the academy opened, disadvantaged pupils have made better progress and attained higher standards than other pupils in the school. However, their outcomes do not match those of other pupils nationally who have similar starting points.
- Pupils in every year group are given opportunities to read a range of texts. They read to staff and they are encouraged to read independently. Pupils are helped to use the sounds that letters represent to decipher words. As a result of effective support, outcomes in reading at the end of key stage 2 were higher than those in writing and mathematics in 2018.

School details

Unique reference number	142086
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10053432

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	William Powlett Smith
Executive headteacher	Adam Price
Telephone number	01902 551564
Website	northernhousewolverhampton.schooljotter2.com
Email address	enquiry-wol@northernhouse.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Northern House School (City of Wolverhampton) is a small special school for pupils aged 7 to 16. It opened in January 2016 as part of the Northern House School Academy Trust. There are five schools in the trust.
- The school shares its site with Northern House School (PRU). The executive headteacher leads both provisions and both have their own head of school.
- The board of directors of the trust has overall responsibility for governance. However, the operational running of the school is delegated to the local governing body.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils have social, emotional and mental health needs identified as their primary needs.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is much higher than the national average.
- Most pupils are White British. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic

backgrounds is similar to the national average.

- The school does not use off-site alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited a range of lessons and observed learning with school leaders on both days of the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils formally and informally and observed behaviour in lessons and during social time.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, both assistant headteachers and a group of staff.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust and the chair of the local governing body. He spoke to the chair of the board of trustees and a representative of the local authority by telephone.
- The lead inspector considered the 16 responses and the 11 free-text comments made by parents via Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Various documents were scrutinised, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan and information about students' progress, behaviour and attendance. Documents relating to safeguarding were checked and inspectors looked at published information on the school's website.

Inspection team

Simon Mosley, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Ashley

Ofsted Inspector

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