

# Inspection of Northern House School

South Parade, Summertown, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 7JN

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Inspection dates: 18–19 September 2019

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Inadequate**

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The quality of education

**Inadequate**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Inadequate**

Personal development

**Inadequate**

Leadership and management

**Inadequate**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils' experiences at the school have deteriorated since the last inspection. Some pupils are very happy and are doing well. Others find the many staff changes very stressful and unsettling. This hinders their well-being.

Staff at the school are kind. Parents and carers value this and make sure their child attends regularly. Staff work hard to look after pupils, but they do not meet pupils' needs. Some staff do not plan activities matched to what pupils need to learn or to the targets in their education, health and care (EHC) plans. This limits pupils' progress.

Pupils feel safe and many like their teachers. Staff greet pupils at the start of the day and help them to get focused for learning. However, leaders have not made sure that pupils are safe when they are learning in alternative provision.

Trust leaders do not have a clear idea of what they want to provide for pupils. Pupils' behaviour has got worse over time. Leaders blame funding and staffing difficulties. They have not considered what needs to change at the school.

Some pupils do lots of different activities. However, leaders have not checked if all pupils get these opportunities or if some miss out.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders at the trust, who are not based at the school, do not know what they want pupils to learn or to achieve during their time at Northern House. They left this decision to the previous headteacher. They have not made sure that pupils' needs are met. Consequently, pupils do not receive the quality of education or care that they should.

Some trust leaders were worried about a fall in standards two years ago. They did not act quickly enough. When they checked how the school was doing they found that standards had further declined. They decided that they did not have the resources to make the required improvements. They agreed to end their leadership of the school as soon as a new trust could be found. This had not happened by the time of the inspection.

The quality of education has declined since the last inspection. Leaders bought learning plans off the shelf to help teachers to deliver different subjects. However, teachers have not matched these plans to what pupils already know or what they need to learn. Pupils do lots of different activities that do not fit together or build on their knowledge. This is confusing and hampers their learning. Teachers have found it harder to plan lessons when they do not know who will support them in the classroom. Pupils also find this uncertainty very stressful.

Pupils who take the national tests at the end of Year 6 have done well in recent years. Many current pupils are not making progress because they are not learning what they need to. For example, reading is not taught well across the school. Leaders want staff to listen to pupils read every day. This has not happened. Some pupils are taught about letters and the sounds that they represent (phonics) so that they develop the early reading skills they need. Others are not. Across the curriculum, including in mathematics, physical education and geography, teachers do not fit activities to pupils' EHC plan targets. Subject leaders have ambitious plans to improve the quality of pupils' learning, especially in English and mathematics. However, they have not had the time or support from leaders to implement these.

Leaders have not planned how to support pupils' personal development carefully enough. The weekly assemblies and occasional special events such as World Book Day are not enough to help all pupils to develop the qualities they need to flourish in today's world and live alongside others. Some pupils have had experiences that broaden their learning and development and help them to appreciate the world around them. For example, some have been on residential visits. However, others do not get such a rich set of experiences. Leaders have not thought about checking to see that every pupil gets something.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes have also deteriorated. Previously, leaders have not supported staff well enough to manage behaviour. Teachers are trained to use restrictive physical intervention (RPI) to help pupils. They want to prevent them from hurting themselves or others. There has been a concerning increase in the use of RPIs in the last year. The number of incidents has fallen since the arrival of the new headteacher, but it is too soon to be sure it has improved.

Many of the problems are due to difficulties with staffing but these have been made worse by poor leadership. Leaders have not made sure that staff have the training that they need. Staff turnover and absence have been very high. Leaders have not thought about why this might be and what might need to change at the school. The new leadership team have a strong vision for what they want pupils to achieve at the school. All staff are very positive about the changes the new headteacher has already made. They feel supported and know what they need to do to improve the school, but it is early days.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Trust leaders responsible for checking safeguarding do not understand statutory requirements. This means that they cannot make sure that leaders safeguard pupils properly.

School leaders have assumed that pupils are safe when they are not at school. The local authority has arranged for a very small number of pupils to go to another provider for some of their learning. Leaders have not checked the safeguarding arrangements at this provider. They have also not thought about the risks to pupils

in the wider community. They have not taught pupils how to keep themselves safe from these risks.

Leaders have followed recruitment processes well, recording information clearly. They have also worked well with families and made sure they get the help they need.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Safeguarding is not effective. Leaders do not demonstrate a strong understanding of safeguarding issues and procedures. They need to have a secure knowledge and be prepared to think the unthinkable. Leaders also need to make sure that pupils learn how to identify risk and keep themselves safe when not at school.
- Staff want pupils to do well but have not been able to achieve this. School leaders have a strong vision for the quality of education, but this is very recent and not yet implemented. Trust leaders are going to hand the school to another trust. In the meantime, they need to shape their view of the specialist education these pupils need, and support school leaders to deliver it.
- Subject leaders have well-considered plans for the teaching of their subjects. They need to have the time and support from senior leaders to make sure that staff follow these plans. Leaders need to make sure that these plans, when implemented, make the intended difference for pupils.
- Teachers have many resources to help them plan lessons. They need to adapt these to the specific needs of pupils. For example, they need to consider pupils' targets from their EHC plans. Teachers also need to sequence learning activities so that pupils build on their learning successfully.
- Leaders have not made sure that pupils have a wide, rich set of experiences. They have not thought about how to support all pupils' personal development. While some experiences have been offered, not all pupils have benefited. Pupils need to have a curriculum that extends beyond national curriculum subjects. It needs to prepare them for life in modern Britain.
- Behaviour incidents have risen over time with RPIs reaching concerning levels in the last year. Leaders must take more effective steps to understand why these are happening and address this. They must also make sure that staff are fully trained and supported to manage behaviour without resorting to RPI.
- The high absence and turnover of staff have unsettled the school. Plans often do not get put into practice and leaders have to keep training new colleagues. Leaders need to consider the reasons for this absence and turnover and address them.
- It is recommended that the school does not appoint newly qualified teachers.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138643
<b>Local authority</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10111399
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	84
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	William Powlett Smith
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alison Priddle
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.northernhouseoxford.schooljotter2.com/">www.northernhouseoxford.schooljotter2.com/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	1 March 2016

## Information about this school

- Northern House School is the sponsor school of Northern House Academy Trust, set up in 2012. On 17 June 2019, the trust gave notice of its intention to re-broker all its schools and cease its work.
- The chair of the trust has changed since the last inspection in March 2016.
- The headteacher had been in post since the start of the academic year. She is the second person to hold this position since the previous inspection.
- Other members of the senior team and a large proportion of staff have also changed.
- The school provides specialist education for up to 86 pupils aged five to 11. All have EHC plans for social, emotional and mental health needs. Many also have autism spectrum disorder.
- A very small number of pupils attend Path Hill Outdoors to help them transition to Northern House full-time.

## Information about this inspection

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.

- We held meetings with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, including curriculum leaders. We also met with the home-school link worker, groups of staff and teaching assistants. We spoke with teachers and other staff around the school including sports coaches and staff supervising lunch.
- I spoke with the chair of the trust by telephone.
- I met with the chair of the local governing body, who also oversees safeguarding for the trust.
- I met with the trust's chief executive officer.
- We evaluated the quality of education by looking in detail at the teaching of reading, mathematics, geography and physical education. We discussed the curriculum design and delivery with leaders, carried out lesson visits, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers, from the lessons visited, about the subjects. I also listened to pupils read.
- We evaluated the effectiveness of safeguarding by reviewing leaders' knowledge, records and actions. This included looking at the school's single central record and a sample of case files. I met with the designated safeguarding lead and spoke to pupils and staff. I also contacted the local authority's designated officer for safeguarding.
- We spoke to pupils about the school and took account of the 15 responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey.
- We considered the views of staff from conversations and the 11 responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- We spoke to parents at the start of the day and considered the 18 responses by parents to Ofsted's Parent View, including 13 written responses. We also considered one letter from a parent.

## Inspection team

Lucy English, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Goddard

Ofsted Inspector

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