

Inspection of a good school: Northfield School and Sports College

Thames Road, Billingham, Teesside TS22 5EG

Inspection dates:

14–15 January 2020

Outcome

Northfield School and Sports College continues to be a good school.

However, inspectors have some concerns that standards may be declining, as set out below.

What is it like to attend this school?

Following a period of decline, the school is beginning to improve again. The new headteacher, staff and governors know the school well. Together, they are working tirelessly to bring about the changes needed to help current pupils achieve more than others have over the past three years. However, it is too soon to see the full effect of their actions on pupils' learning.

Nearly all pupils enjoy coming to the school and behave in a positive way. In lessons, most pupils are happy to answer questions. Low-level disruption is rare. There are a handful of pupils who do not do as the teachers require at the first time of asking. Similarly, there are a small minority of teachers who do not follow the school's behaviour management policy regularly or accurately. This frustrates pupils.

Most pupils say that bullying is not a problem in the school. A sizeable number of staff are available for pupils to speak to if they are worried about something. Pupils can also call upon the help and guidance of specially trained staff or advisers if they need to talk about a concern.

Parents and carers spoken to were very supportive of the school, especially when describing the care and support for pupils' personal development. Initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Year 7 school (a school within a school) help pupils to develop leadership skills or make a smooth transition to 'big school'.

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

The new headteacher has inspired a renewed sense of purpose across the school. Staff morale is strong. Staff say the headteacher and other leaders are 'genuine' in their attempts to lessen their workload and improve well-being. For example, staff commented that they are able to plan more engaging lessons now, as time has been made available

due to changes in the way they mark pupils' work. Similarly, staff enjoy free fruit, gym membership and getting together during 'tea and toast Fridays'. Every member of staff who responded to Ofsted's online survey said that the school is well led and managed.

Staff are unified and motivated. This is supporting leaders' efforts to reverse the declining standards over the last three years. Since the previous inspection in 2016, Year 11 pupils' progress across the curriculum has been well below the national average. Pupils have underachieved in mathematics, science and languages in each of the last three years.

Senior and subject leaders are now much clearer about what they expect to see in the curriculum and the classroom. Subjects such as mathematics now follow schemes of work that are challenging and taught in the right order to get the best from pupils. Most lessons include effective activities to help pupils remember important ideas. Teachers ask lots of useful questions to make pupils think deeply. Pupils often challenge their own thinking further by completing tasks such as the 'push your thinking' questions. Unfortunately, for some current pupils, there are gaps in their understanding because the curriculum in some subjects has not been well planned or taught over time. For example, some pupils in key stage 4 are unable to describe with accuracy the process of photosynthesis in plants. Other key stage 3 pupils cannot describe the difference between 'ascending' and 'descending' in mathematics. Basic errors such as these are getting in the way of pupils knowing more.

Pupils are doing much better in subjects such as English and information and communication technology (ICT). In these subjects, a suitable curriculum has been in place for longer. Teachers' instructions are clear and understood well by pupils. Teachers expect a lot from pupils. Pupils engage well in their work and lessons. This leads to current pupils achieving more over time.

Pupils behave maturely the vast majority of the time. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour are improving. There is a new approach to behaviour that celebrates the positives. This is helping pupils to behave and is reducing disruption. Pupils' attendance is improving. The school's own information indicates that boys and disadvantaged pupils are more likely to misbehave or remain absent from school for longer.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are doing much better in school lately. The new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) is helping to ensure the pupil information given to staff is clearer. Leaders support the SENCo in her efforts to ensure staff are well trained. They understand pupils' additional needs. Leaders know there is more work to do in this area to continue to improve.

The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is a real strength. Leaders ensure the religious education and personal, social, health and economic education curriculum are designed well. This improves pupils' understanding about other communities and religions in Billingham and beyond. For example, pupils visit a range of different religious buildings or learn about different faith festivals. The curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is taught in themes such as 'community, exploration or discovery'. Pupils develop a more detailed understanding about current affairs such as refugee movement and support their own well-being during mindfulness sessions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding leaders have a detailed understanding about the risks pupils may face in the area. Leaders work carefully to help pupils avoid unsafe situations. Effective partnerships have been developed with a wide range of external agencies, such as Barnardo's and the police. This ensures that pupils are kept up to date about national and local issues. During the inspection, Year 9 pupils benefited from an external speaker linked to the topic of sex and healthy relationships.

The school's internet is protected by an effective 'firewall'. Leaders invite counter-terrorism experts into the school to check pupils cannot access inappropriate websites.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Although pupils' attainment is beginning to improve, pupils' progress in a number of important subjects has been poor for too long. Pupils who left the school between 2016 and 2019 have not been as prepared for further education, employment and training as they could have been. Furthermore, the legacy of weaker curriculum planning, coupled with issues in staffing in some parts of the school, has meant that current pupils have some significant gaps in their understanding. This is especially the case for pupils in key stage 4. Leaders must continue their efforts of late to ensure that the curriculum in all subjects is carefully planned, sequenced and gives pupils frequent opportunities to recap and build on their prior learning. This is especially true in mathematics, science, languages and some of the subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum in all subjects is implemented effectively and leads to pupils making stronger progress over time.
- Pupils with SEND, including those with a hearing or visual impairment, have not been supported in the past as well as they could have been. The SEND information teachers received was too cumbersome. Although this is improving, leaders should ensure that staff receive further high-quality training and support to ensure that they are aware of pupils' additional needs and how they can plan lessons to help pupils with SEND achieve more.
- Pupils' behaviour across the school is positive in most instances. As the quality of education has improved, so has pupils' attendance. However, boys and disadvantaged pupils account for most absences and fixed-period exclusions. Leaders should ensure that they work with pupils and their families to ensure that these pupil groups attend more often. Leaders should also ensure that the minority of boys and disadvantaged pupils who do not behave as well as their peers reduce the instances of less positive behaviour that leads to them being excluded or reprimanded in lessons.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 7 July 2016.

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 are the school and you are 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

Unique reference number	111731
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10134951
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1396
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Miriam Stanton
Headteacher	Richard Henderson
Website	http://northfieldssc.org/
Date of previous inspection	6–7 July 2016

Information about this school

- A new headteacher took up post in January 2019.
- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.

Information about this inspection

- We undertook deep dives into mathematics, science, ICT and English. To do this, we met with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons in these subjects and listened to pupils read. We also scrutinised pupils' books and other kinds of work produced by pupils who were part of the classes we visited. In addition, we had discussions with teachers and a group of pupils from the lessons observed.
- We met senior and subject leaders, teachers, administrative and support staff.
- I spoke on the telephone with a school improvement adviser.
- We scrutinised pupils' work during lessons and with subject leaders.
- We held informal and formal discussions with many pupils and observed interactions during social times.

- We observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of evidence, including the school's planning documents, behaviour and attendance records, safeguarding files and records, recruitment checks and bullying logs.
- We took into account the 200 responses from parents and carers who completed Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire. There were 205 responses from pupils to the pupil survey and 111 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

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