

Inspection of an outstanding school: Northgate School Arts College

Queen's Park Parade, Kingsthorpe, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN2 6LR

Inspection dates:

10 and 11 May 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. Inspectors are recommending the next inspection to be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy and enjoy learning in this calm and caring environment. They feel safe and know they have trusted adults who will help them when needed. Pupils say, 'we are encouraged to be amazing,' which fits with the school's motto of 'Be your best self.'

There are high expectations for all pupils to achieve as well as they can. Pupils have high ambitions for themselves. This is evident in exam successes and pupils' destinations when they leave the school. For example, some pupils choose to go on to employment or further education. However, teachers' inconsistent use of checks to make sure pupils understand what they are learning means that pupils do not always learn and remember as well as they could.

Pupils start preparing for adulthood as soon as they arrive. They recognise that the school helps them prepare well for their futures.

Staff know all pupils' needs well. Pupils respect adults and their peers. Most pupils behave well. Staff support pupils successfully to manage their own behaviours.

Parents and carers cannot speak more highly of the care and attention their children receive. A comment, typical of many, is 'Northgate is a superb school that genuinely brings out the best in children.'

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. It is well sequenced and builds on the knowledge leaders want pupils to know over time. Leaders ensure that all pupils follow the right pathway to support their special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Teachers support all pupils well to access the curriculum. They adapt their teaching to meet pupils' needs. For example, pupils have time to regulate their own emotions, so they are ready to learn.

There are inconsistencies in how teachers use assessment to check pupils' understanding. Some teachers regularly check what pupils know and use this information to plan what pupils will learn next. However, the consistent use of such checks in all subjects is at an early stage. Leaders' work to undertake monitoring of teaching and learning is yet to bring about consistency in how well teachers use assessment in all lessons.

Leaders have prioritised reading for all pupils. They use a phonics scheme to help pupils who are still at the early stages of reading. Support is in place for pupils who fall behind with their reading. Some teachers do not ensure that they match the learning activities well enough to the phonics pupils know. Most pupils read the books that match their phonics knowledge. Many pupils are confident readers and read with fluency. There is a vast range of books available in the school library.

Students in the sixth form enjoy a wide range of opportunities to develop their life experiences in the wider world. They are supported to work in the front of house at their shop, selling clothes. Students grow and sell their own food through working in the vocational area the 'Horti Hub.' These opportunities support students' self-confidence. They have access to a range of vocational courses as well as being able to complete qualifications in computing, mathematics and English. These opportunities help prepare students well for their next steps.

Most pupils are ready to learn and take their education seriously. They know the value of doing well and work eagerly to achieve their personal target. Pupils gain reward points in recognition of their hard work. Staff deal with any low-level disruption effectively and this does not impact on others' learning.

The opportunities for pupils' wider development start in Year 7. They can apply for internal apprenticeships in the school library and kitchen. Pupils say they enjoy these roles and are proud to have a responsibility. Other roles include being sports leader. Older pupils enjoy supporting sporting activities for younger pupils at lunchtime. The school council takes on an active role in school. It has gained the ideas from pupils on how to improve the school. They have designed a new trim trail for the outside area.

Pupils have a good understanding of other faiths. They know the importance of respecting difference. Pupils understand what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like. Some are less sure about different cultures and the fundamental British values. Pupils know the importance of being an active citizen. They enjoy putting on events to raise money for local charities, including a local hospice and homeless centre.

The leadership team has recently gone through a period of change. This has impacted on their ability to make the necessary improvements to the delivery of the curriculum. Governors work closely with leaders to provide support and challenge.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know the pupils and their families well. Leaders ensure that staff know how to identify any pupils who are potentially at risk of harm. Staff report any concerns they have. Leaders deal with concerns effectively. They work well with external agencies to get the right support for pupils.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online. The pastoral team supports the mental health and well-being of all pupils well.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are some inconsistencies in how well teachers check what pupils know, including of phonics, to help identify and fill any gaps in pupils' learning, and to plan what pupils will learn next. Consequently, pupils sometimes complete activities that are not appropriately matched to what they know and do not always remember what they learn. Leaders should ensure that their checks on the curriculum and how it is taught, including the teaching of reading, ensure that all teachers use assessment effectively to support pupils in their learning.

Background

When we have judged outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in February 2013.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

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	137354
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10254971
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	260
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	84
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Diane Chandley
Headteacher	Sheralee Webb
Website	www.northgateacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Northgate School Art College is a specialist school for pupils with autism spectrum disorder, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and social, emotional, and mental health difficulties.
- Pupils study one of three different curriculum pathways.
- All pupils have education, health and care (EHC) plans.
- There is a breakfast and after-school club managed by the school.
- The provision for sixth-form students is off site, at 'The Beehive'. There is a school café and shop also off site, this is called 'The Place to Bee'.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic and have taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector held meetings with the headteacher, the head of school and the deputy headteachers. She also met with members of the local governing board, including the chair.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: reading; mathematics; computing and geography. Inspectors met with subject leaders, teachers and groups of pupils. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding procedures, including the single central record and child protection and safeguarding policies. She met with the designated leader for safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online parent survey, Parent View.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff gathered through meetings with groups of staff and through responses to Ofsted's online survey for school staff.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and during break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils during formal and informal meetings.
- Inspectors looked at documents relating to self-evaluation, school improvement, attendance and behaviour, the curriculum and governance.

Inspection team

Anita Denman, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Paul Lowther

Ofsted Inspector

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