

Inspection of Northern House Academy

South Parade, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 7JN

Inspection dates: 25 and 26 June 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The headteacher of this school is Ricky Stevens. This school is part of The Gallery Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Kay Willet MBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Chris Scrivener. There is also a head of school, Rebecca Holmes, who is also responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Northern House Academy is described by parents as 'life changing' for their children. From the moment pupils start here, they are enveloped into a warm, inclusive culture and quickly develop a sense of belonging. They are truly understood and accepted into the life of the school. They are encouraged to be authentically themselves. One pupil's view was that staff 'really care about me, in their hearts'. As a result, pupils feel safe and happy, and they flourish.

The atmosphere around school is inescapably positive. The staff know pupils exceptionally well and set high expectations. Pupils rise to these, and proactively engage in their learning with high levels of concentration.

Pupils' social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs underpin the whole approach to learning. Through a carefully designed holistic curriculum, they are taught to reflect on their emotions and identify and develop personal strategies to self-regulate. Each day, pupils have multiple opportunities for 'emotional check-ins'. This gives them continuous opportunities to reflect on their behaviour and choices and have a fresh start as often as needed. This creates a remarkably calm and happy environment, where everyone can concentrate in class. Through these embedded approaches, pupils develop high levels of self-awareness and empathy.

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

On joining the trust, the school embarked on a journey of rapid improvement. New leadership worked effectively with the staff team to swiftly raise standards and implement a highly ambitious curriculum. Academic subjects are meticulously organised and so pupils make excellent progress. Lessons are expertly delivered, through engaging, purposeful, and often 'hands-on', activities. This is enriched with pupils' individualised SEMH targets, which are embedded into their learning, and these link to their education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes. Alongside staff, pupils review and set their own weekly targets. They carefully track progress towards these goals on their own 'pupil passports' throughout the week, earning reward points as they go. This precise balance between academic learning and personal development means that pupils gain the knowledge, skills and cultural capital that they need for their future success.

The school's values of happiness, high expectations, nurture, consistency, understanding and positivity are undeniably present in every aspect of school life. All decision-making is based on these. Pupils understand these, and they reflect on how they live them out through their lessons and assemblies.

Therapeutic activities and support are expertly entwined through the teaching of the school's ambitious curriculum to ensure pupils learn and can achieve highly. For example, as well as learning about different techniques and a diverse range of artists, pupils are encouraged to use their 'doodle books' to draw in or spend time on crafts as calming activities.

Pupils' education is thoughtfully enhanced with a diverse range of life-shaping experiences. This is achieved through the school's 'enrichment pledge'. Activities include a carefully planned sequence of residential trips, inspirational trips such as a visit to the Houses of Parliament, and community partnerships. Pupils are proud of the ox sculpture they have recently decorated, which will feature in a local exhibition. The school is outward-looking and plays a formidable role in ensuring its pupils are understood and valued by society. For example, the school has forged a strong mutual partnership with sixth-form students from a local school, who actively contribute to pupils' learning and act as positive role models.

Helping pupils develop a love of stories and books is a priority. The school has implemented a systematic approach to teach pupils to read. Pupils enjoy the skilfully adapted lessons that help them develop their reading confidence and fluency. Their resilience shines through when they read with adults and work hard to blend and segment using the methods they have been taught. These sessions significantly boost pupils' self-confidence and inspire them to explore new interests.

Staff are provided with high-quality professional development. This means they have high levels of expertise to meet the SEMH needs of the pupils. Staff use this to help pupils be the authors of their own specific support plans, detailing the regulation strategies that help each individual pupil to learn. When pupils have more complex needs or require high levels of support to manage their behaviour, well-trained staff follow the school's clearly understood approaches. Pupils are consistently empowered to reflect on and return to learning.

Trust leaders, those responsible for governance and school leaders work as a cohesive unit. Along with staff, they have a shared moral purpose to make a difference to the lives of the pupils. This results in a strong collaborative and supportive approach to driving improvements to the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	147784
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10322052
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Chris Scrivener
CEO of the trust	Kay Willet MBE
Headteacher	Ricky Stevens (Headteacher) Rebecca Holmes (Head of School)
Website	www.northernhouseacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Gallery Trust, which it joined in February 2020.
- The school caters for pupils between the ages of five and 11 years who have SEMH difficulties, and autistic spectrum disorder.
- All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the head of school, other senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector also spoke with the chair of trustees and members of the local academy board, including the chair.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and art and design. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum and looked at samples of pupils' work in some other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire, including the free-text comments. They also gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors reviewed and scrutinised a range of the school's documentation, including leaders' plans for improving the school, minutes of trustee and local governor board meetings and records of attendance and behaviour incidents.

Inspection team

Jo Petch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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