



Northern House School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number 123336
LEA Oxfordshire

Inspection number 275902
Inspection dates 12 July 2005
Reporting inspector Adrian Simm

Inspection deemed to have been carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 according to section 12(3) of the same act.

Type of School	Special	School address	South Parade
School category	Community Special		Oxford
Age range of pupils	5 – 13		OX2 7JN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01865 557004
Number on roll	77	Fax number	01865 511210
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Lady Julia Berkeley
Date of previous inspection	October 1998	Headteacher	Mrs A J Battersby

Age group	Published	Reference no.
5 – 13	July 2005	275902

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Introduction

The inspection was a pilot of the new arrangements for inspection announced by Ofsted in its consultation paper of February 2004. It was carried out with the support and co-operation of Northern House School.

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Also, a high number have learning difficulties. Seventy-two boys and five girls are on roll. Forty-six per cent have free school meals, which is high. Eighty-six per cent of pupils are from white, British backgrounds. A small number are from English speaking mixed race or black backgrounds. Five per cent are in public care. All pupils have a statement of their special educational needs (SEN). Attendance at previous schools has often been sporadic. The headteacher is due to leave at the end of term. Temporary leadership has been organised, pending the appointment of a permanent headteacher.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

The headteacher and governors were overly modest in judging the school to be good, because they know there is some room for improvement. The school is outstanding and offers exceptional value for money. It provides all pupils with a 'second chance' to succeed, which they accept enthusiastically. Residential experiences, links with mainstream schools and a wealth of out of school activities place the school at the heart of the community. The school is rightly proud that, after difficulties in previous schools, 'children learn to smile again'. This happens because staff know all pupils' individual needs extremely well. Pupils' self-esteem is boosted constantly. Break times and lunchtimes are planned very effectively. Success is constantly celebrated and the pupils' achievement and personal development are excellent as a result of very high quality teaching and learning.

Perceptive and rigorous self-evaluation has secured real improvement since the last inspection. Current self-evaluation systems offer a first-class framework for the future. The school has identified rightly that pupils' writing skills are not as strong as their reading skills. Staff have already started working on this. Parents and carers are asked for their views about the effectiveness of the school and how things can be improved. The school takes notice of their responses. Parents are delighted with what the school offers. All of this is possible because of outstanding leadership, management and governance.

Grade: 1

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' writing skills further to match the very good progress made in reading.

Achievement and standards

Data provided by the school points to pupils making very rapid progress. Overall, pupils' starting points are generally well below national expectations. For many, attainment has been affected detrimentally by erratic school attendance and disrupted learning at previous schools. However, once settled, pupils do very well. Year 6 pupils in 2004 progressed so well that their improvement was exceptional. Results this year for Year 6 look to have built upon this success. Pupils attain results that are very good in comparison with similar schools. By Year 8, the small number of pupils who continue in the school achieve equally as well. Whilst, overall, pupils achieve very highly in English, inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that more needs to be

done to improve pupils' writing skills. Pupils achieve extremely well in mathematics, science, religious education and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils' achievement in relation to individual targets in their work and behaviour shows an excellent response to the challenges set for them. The very small number of girls, pupils looked after by the local authority, those with additional learning or more extreme behaviour difficulties and pupils who do not have a white, British background do equally as well. The school checks on this rigorously as part of its self-evaluation.

Grade: 1**Personal development and well-being**

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Year 5 and 6 pupils wrote that the school was '...a warm hand surrounding you, a good friend always there for you. It makes you feel warm inside'. The high ratio and quality of staff support throughout the day ensures pupils interact with each other socially and thrive independently in a safe and healthy environment. Pupils enjoy the range of fresh fruit provided. They have ready access to fresh drinking water. Pupils' success in developing basic learning skills, teamwork skills and self-confidence prepares them very well for the future.

Pupils' attendance is excellent. This is a good measure of their enjoyment of school and of parents' support. In the context of the school, behaviour is good. Instances of poor behaviour happen from time-to-time, but routines in place almost always deal with these without resorting to exclusion. During the inspection, pupils showed great respect and consideration for others.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Staff celebrate pupils' achievement in work and behaviour throughout the day. The high quality of pupils' artwork on display reflects the vibrancy and exceptional ethos for learning. Pupils contribute effectively to the planning of a broad range of charity appeals. Target setting and success sessions mean that pupils know how well they are doing with their behaviour and personal development. This is very good practice.

Grade: 1

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Overall, teaching and learning are outstanding. Detailed assessment allows staff to know what the next thing is that each pupil needs to learn. This is much improved since the last inspection. Staff are also clear how pupils are likely to respond to situations thus pre-empting difficulties. Inspection evidence agrees with the headteacher's view that teachers have very good subject knowledge. They ensure consistently that pupils are clear about what they are going to learn and how they should behave. In a delightful and challenging literacy lesson, a very sensible and mature discussion about the book 'Black Beauty' led pupils to build a vivid mental picture of 'an old worn-out chestnut, with an ill-kept coat and bones that showed plainly through it'. Very effective questioning and use of an interactive whiteboard by the teacher added to pupils' enthusiasm. High staffing ratios, and very good teamwork between teachers and support staff, ensure that pupils' individual needs are put first. This was obvious in an outstanding ICT lesson, where the teacher and support assistant worked separately with pupils who needed specific help in designing their own posters for sports day. Staff report that pupils respond very well to the homework that is set regularly. This is another indicator of the pupils' enthusiasm for school and their desire to 'take that second chance' after previous failure.

Grade: 1

Curriculum and other activities

The curriculum is very well matched to the behavioural and learning needs of all pupils. Work is enriched by access to a very good array of ICT equipment which, together with staff training, have resulted in significant improvement since the last inspection. All pupils benefit from a vast array of educational visits and visitors to school, who contribute significantly to pupils' learning, for example in art and music. A significant number benefit from very well managed integration links with mainstream schools. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 benefit from using the specialist science facilities in a local secondary school. All pupils are encouraged to develop a healthy and safe lifestyle, with courses on citizenship, sex and relationships, and drugs awareness, supported by the community nurse and other outside organisations. Improvements to the school building have provided the pupils with updated facilities. In return, pupils respect what is provided for them.

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support

The school takes very good care of all pupils, who trust staff and know who to turn to if they need help. There is very good support for them when they are upset or troubled. Monitoring of pupils' progress and behaviour is an excellent feature of the school's work. Pupils' behaviour is tracked so closely that 'hiccups' in relationships between pupils and others are spotted and supported quickly. The pupils say that they feel safe in school because instances of bullying and racism are dealt with effectively. Those with additional learning difficulties, for example in reading, receive very well targeted support, as do pupils with more extreme emotional and social needs. The individual needs of minority groups are assessed and supported very effectively. Child protection and health and safety procedures are in place and known by staff.

Grade: 1

Leadership and management

Leadership, management and governance are outstanding. The headteacher's vision and determination to improve the school, and the support from key staff and governors, have resulted in outstanding provision for the pupils. There is an atmosphere of enthusiasm and celebration, with the pupils' needs first and foremost. National achievement and inclusion awards gained by the school are merited. The headteacher, senior managers and governors have first-hand knowledge of the effectiveness of lessons. Co-ordinators help track pupils' progress and their strengths and weaknesses in learning and behaviour. Together, this system works very effectively and is greatly improved since the last inspection. It supports the staff extremely well in knowing what else needs to be done to improve provision further. It is the foundation of the school's first-rate approach to self-evaluation. The school makes effective use of the resources available to improve its accommodation and grounds, thus impacting very positively on pupils' achievement and behaviour. The school council has contributed effectively with ideas for improvements. The school has improved very well since the last inspection, particularly in ICT where equipment, relevant staff training and pupils' progress have developed greatly. Although the headteacher leaves shortly, the staff and governors have the determination and skills to maintain the school's very strong provision.

Grade: 1

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INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

ACHIEVEMENT AND STANDARDS

How well do learners achieve?	1
The <i>standards</i> reached by learners	4*
How well learners' make <i>progress</i> , taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND WELL-BEING

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community.	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

*** Standards reached by learners are below the national average but learners achieve extremely well given their capabilities and starting points.**

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily.	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise.	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse.	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health.	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe.	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements.	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place.	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism.	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them.	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships.	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them.	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills.	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams.	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in Key Stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form.	N/A
Education for all learners aged 14-19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy.	N/A

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Northern House School
South Parade
Summertown
Oxford
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14 July 2005

Dear Pupils,

As you know, two inspectors visited you recently to find out how well your teachers are helping you with your learning and behaviour.

Thank you for being friendly and willing to talk to us. It was very useful to know what you think about how you are getting on. The poems that some of you have written about your school will stick in our minds for a long time.

You attend a wonderful school. What really impressed us was:

- The enthusiasm from you and your teachers in wanting to do well.
- How hard you try to get on well with everyone and do as you are asked.
- The very good progress you are making in your work. (Those of you who were designing sports day posters, we hope they turned out as well as you wanted. We're sure they did!)
- How well your headteacher and teachers know you, so that they can plan exciting activities and lessons that will challenge you to improve even more.

We have asked your teachers to help you to improve your writing skills, so that you can set down your ideas more clearly and are better prepared for the next time you move to another school.

We hope you carry on enjoying what you are doing and continue to help your teachers all you can.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Simm
Lead Inspector

Alastair Younger
Team inspector