



The North School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118832
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280405
Inspection dates 7 June 2006 to 8 June 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline White HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Essella Road
School category	Community		Ashford
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Kent TN24 8AL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01233 614600
Number on roll	800	Fax number	01233 612906
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs A Monk
Date of previous inspection	6 March 2000	Headteacher	Mr Simon Murphy

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The North School is smaller than average with a significantly higher number of boys than girls making up the school population.

The school has a very high proportion of students, close to half, with learning difficulties and disabilities. Of these students, a very high proportion, three times the national average, have a statement of special educational needs. The school has a designated Dyslexia Unit and a Learning Support Unit.

The number of students from minority ethnic groups is well below average as is the proportion of students for whom English is an additional language. The number of students eligible for free school meals is also below average.

The school has specialist status in sport with information communication technology (ICT) and a rural dimension.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The North School is a good school that successfully balances high academic aspirations with a deep commitment to the care of every individual student. This view is consistent with the school's own judgement of the quality of education it provides. An enthusiasm for learning is central to the school's ethos. The majority of students enjoy their time at school and take advantage of the many opportunities available to them to help them achieve and develop as well rounded young people. Parents are supportive of the school.

Students make good progress in relation to their starting points on entry to the school. Teaching is good. The excellent relationships between staff and students are a significant factor in the progress made by students. Most students work hard and achieve well. Teaching is not always responsive to the range of students' learning styles. Not all teachers make good use of assessment information to plan for learning or give students clear guidance on how they can improve their work. The curriculum has been successfully developed providing students with appropriate choices that hold their interest.

The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide strong and highly effective leadership. They are well supported by the senior leadership team. Together, they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development and have identified appropriate priorities for improvement.

The school is in the midst of an extensive building programme which could have affected students' learning experiences adversely. However, excellent management of the impact of major construction and the priorities of the school has kept disruption to a minimum.

Specialist school status in sport with ICT and a rural dimension has helped to develop students' confidence and raise standards. It has also given impetus to the development of some valuable partnerships with other local schools.

Improvements since the last inspection such as the design of the curriculum and an effective emphasis on students' personal development demonstrate good capacity for further improvement. The school makes efficient use of the resources available and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

Ensure that assessment information is used effectively by all subject teams to raise standards, particularly in English and science Develop students' potential further by sharing good teaching practice that is responsive to the range of students' learning styles Establish a consistent approach to marking that gives students guidance about what they must do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with standards well below average. The majority of students, from all backgrounds, make good progress and achieve well during their time at the school. The very high proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve as well as others.

Boys do not perform as well as girls in achieving higher GCSE grades. The gap between boys and girls performance at this level exceeds the national trend in some subjects. The majority of students achieve better in mathematics than in English or science. The school recognises that improving literacy skills, particularly those of boys, is a priority and is implementing a range of appropriate strategies to raise achievement in this area.

The number of students achieving higher GCSE grades in 2005 is below the national average. Results from standard tests at the end of Year 9 are also below average. However, the school is ambitious for its students and sets challenging targets in relationship to starting points. The school exceeded its target for higher GCSE grades by a significant margin. Similarly, targets for the proportion of students achieving higher levels in standard tests were either met or exceeded.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development is good. The vast majority value learning and the opportunities presented to develop into rounded, balanced members of society. Most students have a strong sense of morality. They show respect for each other and the adults in the community. A minority who think they can disregard the school's expectations are managed and supported effectively. Behaviour overall is good. Movement around the site is difficult because of the building programme. A few students, boys in particular, exploit this to extend their break time activities to the detriment of teaching and learning. Attendance rates are currently average, an improvement on the below average rates of the last year. The school is addressing some inefficiency in the management of attendance data.

The daily 'Learning to Learn' course helps students to see that learning is integral to personal development. The 'Learning Communities' (the pastoral systems which cross the year groups) deepen cultural awareness and widen horizons through their emphasis on different parts of the world. Opportunities for spiritual development have improved since the last inspection.

Students are aware of the importance of adopting healthy and safe lifestyles. Most students have two hours of physical exercise each week and plans are in place to ensure this is the case for all students. The skills needed for employment and future economic well-being are developed effectively through curriculum provision, work placements and well established links with local business. There is a good programme to cover sex, drugs and relationships education. The school parliaments and council involve

students in decision making and, together with the Learning Communities, create a strong sense of belonging.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. However, practice is inconsistent indicating that although the school has very thorough monitoring arrangements there is further scope to share good practice.

The most effective lessons are well planned, challenging and provide a wide range of activities which maintain students' interest. For example, in a mathematics lesson Year 7 students were challenged to calculate as many percentages as possible in a set time. They keenly rose to the task; their concentration was excellent and they made rapid progress. This was followed by class work and individual work which effectively consolidated their learning.

Not all teachers give sufficient consideration to students' different learning styles when planning lesson activities. The most successful teaching is founded on excellent relationships and maintains a balance between support for the individual and guidance for the whole class.

Teachers provide good verbal feedback to students but the quality of marking is inconsistent and sometimes fails to give students guidance about what they must do to improve. At best it helps students to think about their work analytically and sets targets for improvement. Consequently, students have a clear understanding of how well they are doing. Not all subject teams make good use of assessment information to plan for learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. It is kept under review and is responsive to students' interests and aptitudes. Students are offered a wide range of examination options including vocational subjects, some in partnership with local colleges. The curriculum is effective in engaging students and preparing them for the next stage of their lives. While citizenship themes are well covered, citizenship is not reported to parents of students in Years 10 and 11 as assessment procedures are not yet sufficiently developed.

Specialist school status in sport, ICT and a rural dimension has increased the scope and relevance of the curriculum. It has helped to develop students' confidence and raise standards.

The school farm provides a very worthwhile dimension; it enables students to apply their skills in an unfamiliar context as well as to learn about looking after animals. The

curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities such as field trips and visits.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a very high quality of care for its students. Key to this is the strength of the relationships which students share with their teachers and with their peers. Students know there is always someone to turn to if they have problems.

Students' needs are understood and attended to from the moment they join the school. Arrangements for a smooth transition from primary schools work very well. Effective guidance helps students to choose courses that match their capabilities and strengths. Good careers advice is readily available and students are well prepared for further stages in their education and their future careers.

Strong links with outside agencies contribute to the good support for students with disabilities. The school's provision for vulnerable children and those with learning difficulties is effective and ensures they achieve well. Procedures for child protection are secure. Risk assessment is similarly robust.

Reviews of students' progress lead to targets for improvement. In most cases these help students to know how well they are doing and how to improve, but practice is inconsistent. Parents are appreciative of the level of care given to students. Communication with parents on a regular basis through student planners is not always maintained.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's excellent leadership is strongly focused on continuous improvement not only within the school but also in the wider context of the local community. The deputy headteacher is effective in spearheading important work within the school. Their determined commitment to raising achievement is shared by other members of the senior leadership team. Together they are playing a very effective role in implementing rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They are passionate about enabling all students to realise their potential. In their quest to achieve this they have identified appropriate priorities and have good plans to bring about further improvement. The respect that leaders give to the entitlement of all contributors, students and adults alike, to develop as learners permeates the school.

There is a good whole school system in place for linking information about students' achievement to the planning and evaluation of learning. However, the quality of subject leadership is variable and there is some inconsistency in the implementation of systems.

Senior leaders are rightly focusing on raising standards through developing effective leadership at every level.

Governors are well informed and test the validity of their knowledge through their links with subject areas. They are dedicated to the school providing effective challenge and keen support for its future development.

The views of parents and students are sought regularly. The response to the pre-inspection questionnaire showed that the majority of parents support the school and appreciate the emphasis given to valuing individuals.

Progress made with the areas for improvement identified by the last inspection demonstrates that leaders have good capacity to raise standards further.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

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	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us so warmly. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views about your work and the school.

We believe that The North School is a good school. Your school is well led. The headteacher is helped and supported by an effective senior leadership team and a supportive group of governors. You contribute to the success of the school by being positive and taking part in school life with enthusiasm. We were pleased to see how well you are developing as responsible young people. You show respect for each other and for the adults in the community. The excellent relationships between you help you to focus on learning. You understand the importance of contributing to the improvement of your school and the wider community.

The senior leaders and governors of your school are ambitious for you. They want you to achieve the very highest standards and have clear plans for further improvement. We have asked them to make sure they include:

using information about how well you are doing to plan learning that meets your needs
incorporating a variety of activities in lessons that give you opportunities to learn in different ways
developing a system of marking that gives you clear guidance about what you need to do to improve. You and the staff have worked hard to establish your school as a caring and supportive place where everyone is equally valued. We are confident that, together, you will continue to improve on what has already been achieved.