



Northfield School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123346
LEA Oxfordshire LEA
Inspection number 282977
Inspection dates 18 October 2005 to 19 October 2005
Reporting inspector Bradley Simmons HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special	School address	Knights Road
School category	Community		Blackbird Leys
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Oxford OX4 6DQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01865771703
Number on roll	60	Fax number	01865773873
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Julie Slimm
Date of previous inspection	8 March 2004	Headteacher	Mr Mark Blencowe

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	18 October 2005 - 19 October 2005	282977

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Northfield School is a special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is situated in the Blackbird Leys area of Oxford, an area of acute social and economic deprivation. All 60 pupils currently on roll are boys, and each has a statement of special educational needs. These pupils are some of the most vulnerable children in Oxfordshire. Many have mental health difficulties and they are capable of presenting very challenging behaviour. There is one looked after pupil on roll, although informal fostering arrangements are experienced by several more. The school has residential provision for 12 boys. This was inspected in early October 2005 by the Commission for Social Care. When Northfield School was inspected in March 2004, it was judged to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school no longer requires special measures. This is now a satisfactory school which has some significant strengths. Pupils are now making at least satisfactory academic progress. Their behaviour has improved significantly since the school was last inspected because of the consistent implementation of a considered behaviour policy. The headteacher provides good leadership and is well supported by two able deputy headteachers and a strong team of teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils enjoy coming to school and receive outstanding care, guidance and support from the staff. The school has very clear self evaluation procedures and acts on its findings. It recognises that more able pupils should be challenged more consistently so that they make better progress. Pupils are given insufficient opportunities to develop and use their phonetic skills when they read and write. The use of assessment is not yet sharp enough to ensure that all pupils make the best possible progress during lessons. Despite the school's best efforts, attendance remains unsatisfactory, and pupils are insufficiently prepared for the world of work. The school's work since the last inspection demonstrates its good capacity to continue its improvement. It is now providing satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

* Ensure that higher ability pupils are consistently given tasks which match their capabilities.* Provide further opportunities for pupils to develop and use their phonetic knowledge when reading and writing.* Sharpen assessment and feedback so that all pupils make the best possible progress.* Continue efforts to raise levels of attendance.* Ensure pupils are prepared for the world of work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Many pupils placed at Northfield have experienced very disrupted and intermittent education, largely because their very challenging behaviour has led to fixed term and permanent exclusions from their previous schools. As a result, they start school with attainment that is very low compared to that expected nationally. At the time of the last inspection, pupils were not making the progress in English and science of which they were capable. Given their very low starting points, pupils' achievement in these and other subjects is now at least satisfactory and in some cases good, because teaching in these subjects has improved. This year's test results for 14- and 16- year-olds show that standards of attainment are beginning to rise across the school. The school is now setting increasingly challenging targets for pupils; these were exceeded in mathematics this year and pupils made better progress towards meeting their targets in English and science than was previously the case. The school is not complacent. It acknowledges that pupils could make better progress in reading and writing and that higher ability pupils should be consistently challenged to make better progress. Looked

after pupils, those experiencing informal fostering arrangements and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds are making progress in line with their peers at the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils receive very clear moral guidance and their behaviour has significantly improved since the time of the last inspection. All pupils are very motivated by the 'pennies for points' system which allows them to bank money for good behaviour. Money is deducted for lapses in behaviour or vandalism. The net result is that pupils generally behave in a safe manner, feel safe at school and there is very little vandalism. Pupils say that they enjoy their education, although some higher ability pupils become churlish when some teachers rightly present them with tasks that challenge them. Some pupils are initially abrasive when meeting visitors to the school. The school does all that may reasonably be expected to promote good attendance. The education social worker and police officer visit homes of local pupils to bring them to school when there is no satisfactory explanation given for absence. The school recognises that levels of attendance remain unsatisfactory, yet the picture is not all bleak. The rate of attendance improved during the last reporting year. In 2005, the highest recorded percentage of 14 year old pupils sat national tests rather than avoiding them by staying at home. Pupils eat and drink healthily at school. Pupils love the free breakfast club where staff and pupils chat and read newspapers. Filtered water is available throughout the day, and free fruit juice is provided at break times. At the behest of the school council, the sandwich choice at lunchtimes has improved, although some pupils noted that they would enjoy a hot meal at lunchtimes, which is currently not available.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

At the time of the last inspection, teaching and learning were unsatisfactory. The school believes that teaching is now strong, and this inspection verifies that view. Some teaching was outstanding. Overall, teaching is now having an increasingly positive effect on learning. However, pupils are not yet making consistently good progress because they are still coming to terms with the relatively new and increased demands made upon them. They sometimes react unfavourably when asked to attempt tasks which are well matched to their abilities but which they view as too demanding. The best lessons have some common features: teachers' strong subject knowledge; their use of targeted questions; and clear feedback to individual pupils. The use of curricular and behaviour targets led to pupils making at least satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Humour was often used effectively to keep pupils on track. Where teaching was less strong, this was because the most able pupils were not challenged sufficiently. The school acknowledges that the consistent use of assessment to ensure that pupils undertake work in line with their capabilities could be sharper. During some lessons, too little attention was paid to ensuring that pupils practise their phonetic skills when

reading and writing. Marking has improved. The best is now outstanding, telling pupils clearly how they may improve their work. Pupils appreciate both this guidance and the opportunities they are given to assess their academic work and behaviour.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, the school has endeavoured to develop a curriculum which is more closely geared to the needs of the pupils. Strategic planning is now coherent, ensuring that the curriculum is broad, balanced and enables pupils to make at least satisfactory progress. There is valuable provision for pupils to be taught skills from which they will derive considerable benefit throughout their lives. Pupils are taught to cook nutritious meals and to understand the importance of a healthy diet. Construction lessons give pupils opportunities to develop skills that are useful at home and may assist them in finding work. The school has developed alternative provision for its most challenging fifteen- and sixteen-year-olds. They spend the first two hours of each day on English and mathematics, and then a range of motivating activities keep them engaged. These activities include swimming, individual gym sessions, which underline the importance of a lifestyle to promote physical health, and construction and driving. The effect of this provision has been to improve attendance by these pupils. The school finds that employers are reluctant to offer work experience and placements to these potentially challenging pupils. Where pupils have had opportunities for work experience, they have enjoyed it. On the whole, though, provision in this important area is unsatisfactory. In addition, there is, at present, insufficient careers advice and guidance for pupils. The school recognises these weaknesses and has convincing plans to address both issues.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school prides itself on the quality of its care and personal guidance for pupils, and it is right to do so. Pupils feel strongly that the staff care about them. During the inspection, pupils named individual staff to whom they would speak if they were worried or unhappy. Staff provide excellent role models; they are cheerful, calm and give time to pupils out of lessons. Child protection procedures are comprehensive and clearly understood by the staff. Outside speakers enhance the quality of guidance for pupils. For example, Year 10 and 11 pupils receive a talk provided by 'Energy and Vision', an Oxford charity, where they learn about the effects of hard drugs from a reformed addict. The work of the school's community psychiatric nurse in mapping provision from external agencies for each pupil is very valuable because it has the effect of streamlining and clarifying the work of those agencies. Thus individual pupils are not overwhelmed with support, but they, and the school, generally have clear points of contact when the need arises. The school based police officer has developed excellent working relationships with pupils and has reduced their longstanding mistrust of the police.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Northfield School is effectively led and managed. The headteacher is a good leader. He is supported by strong deputies and a committed staff team. The effect of their work since the last inspection has been to ensure that the school is now at the stage where pupils are beginning to achieve in line with their capabilities. In so doing, they have created an inclusive school which provides an anchor in the lives of pupils who attend. The school evaluates its work very effectively. It collects relevant data, analyses this rigorously and then devises pertinent strategies for improving the performance of staff and the achievement of pupils. Curriculum leadership by heads of departments is now effective. They undertake regular scrutinies of pupils' work and provide helpful written feedback so that staff are clear about areas for improvement. These areas are then pursued by the senior management team who undertake regular formal observations of teaching and learning. The governing body is now not only supporting the school, but also holding the school to account for its work. Governors write visit notes so that, corporately, the governing body is aware of the work of its members. Governors have clearly defined roles linked to the school's improvement priorities. The school now has good capacity to build on its achievements. The first draft of the new school improvement plan is focused, costed and has transparent arrangements for monitoring and evaluation. The targets for improvement are appropriate, but should be couched in terms of expected annual gains in pupils' achievements and standards of attainment. This will enable the governors to hold the school fully to account for raising achievement, the most important area of its work.

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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?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	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?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	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?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	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	3	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	No
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your welcome when I inspected your school this week, and for talking to me and helping me to reach decisions about the quality of your school. I expect you know that when your school was inspected in March 2004, it was placed in special measures. Teachers often call this 'failing an inspection'. There were many reasons why this happened. The very good news is that I have decided that your school is no longer failing. This is why:

* You are now making at least satisfactory academic progress.* Your behaviour is significantly better than it was 18 months ago.* Mr Blencowe is a good headteacher and the staff team is strong. They have good plans to ensure the school continues to improve.* You told me you enjoy school. You think the care and guidance you receive is outstanding. I agree with you.

Within my report I've asked the school to work on some issues. You can play a part in these. Firstly, the rate of attendance at the school is still not high enough, even though the school is working very hard to make sure you attend. You need to make sure you are at school every day unless you are ill. I have asked the school to make sure some of you get more demanding work because you need to be stretched more. Some of you also need more practice in breaking down words when you read and you need to use these skills to help you spell more accurately. Some of you told me that you had really enjoyed work experience, but not enough of you are doing this. Mr. Blencowe has plans to try to make sure this happens in the future.I wish you and your school every success in the future.