

Northwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102445
Local Authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	286379
Inspection dates	14–15 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Brian Evans

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1020
6th form	217
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Anne Edmonds
Headteacher	Mrs Carol Ketley
Date of previous school inspection	14 January 2002
School address	Potter Street Northwood HA6 1QG
Telephone number	01923 836363
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Students from a wide range of backgrounds start at the school with levels of attainment that are generally just below average. Many students travel some distance to school. Well over two-thirds of students are White British and there is a broad mix of other ethnic minority backgrounds. An increasing number of students have English as an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and with statement of educational needs is above average. Staff turnover has been high and recruitment difficult in some subjects. The school roll is falling and a higher than usual numbers of students join or leave the school other than at the usual times. The school became a business and enterprise specialist college in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The school accurately identifies its effectiveness as inadequate though there has been significant improvement since the beginning of the school year. Standards are below average and all groups of students underachieve especially in English, mathematics and science by the end of Years 9 and 11. However, there are also pockets of high achievement and standards are improving. For example, in 2006 more than three quarters of the pupils entered for art and design, textiles, geography and history attained higher grades at GCSE level. Northwood provides a satisfactory standard of education overall and is capable of making further improvement. Difficulties in recruiting staff in 2005–06 have largely been resolved. New senior staff, including two deputy headteachers, are having a positive impact on standards. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory because there is still much leeway to make up on past underachievement. One parent had a number of concerns but stated that there had been improvement because 'senior staff are now more approachable and respected by students'.

Personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Relationships support learning satisfactorily. Attendance is unacceptably low in spite of determined efforts by the school and is one of the reasons that some students underperform. Care, support and guidance are satisfactory and students generally feel safe and have reasonably healthy lifestyles. School assessment data on students' progress is analysed well but not always used effectively to raise their performance. Teaching and learning vary from outstanding to inadequate but typically are satisfactory. Overall, most students enjoy school even though they sometimes find a number of otherwise satisfactory lessons to be boring. One student stated that 'we work well for some teachers but not for others.' Parents and students confirm inspectors' evidence that in some lessons the off-task chatter of a few disrupts the learning of others. The curriculum is satisfactory. Vocational courses and work-related opportunities help students to gain adequate skills for their future training and employment. The school's business and enterprise specialism is having a good impact on helping students to enjoy learning about the world of work.

The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory and improving. Good strategies for communicating the school's vision to staff and students have been introduced. For example, student councillors are currently constructively contributing to next year's school development plan. Good policies are in place to improve students' progress but these are not yet being implemented consistently by all staff and there is still a legacy of underachievement.

In accordance with 13(3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in attendance and in relation to achievement in English, mathematics and science, especially in Years 7 to 9.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory. Standards in the sixth form are average and achievement is satisfactory overall. In 2006 almost all students gained a pass and over a half gained A or B grades in art and design, drama, mathematics and politics. All students passed their vocational qualifications. Over 50 students passed psychology in 2006 - the most popular subject. Teaching and learning in areas such as theatre studies and art and design are good but in many other

subjects students lack skills as independent learners. Care and guidance are good. Students feel well supported by their tutors and are appreciative of the guidance they receive when applying for university. Students make a good contribution to the life of the school by acting as mentors to younger students, as junior sports leaders and as organisers of activities which raise money for charities. Curriculum enrichment activities are satisfactory and include, for example, monthly visits to the theatre. The head of sixth manages the sixth form well and has set up effective systems for evaluating and monitoring the progress of individual students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in English, mathematics and science, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- Improve attendance.
- Improve teaching and learning so that a greater proportion of lessons are good or better.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are below average and students' achievement is inadequate. Standards in Year 9 English, mathematics and science tests have been below average for three years, especially in English in 2006. Students significantly underachieved in all these subjects and the school did not meet its targets in 2006. In 2005, students with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those of Indian heritage, made slightly better progress than their peers. GCSE results improved in 2006 and one third of students attained five higher grades including English and mathematics. Nevertheless, a higher percentage attained this measure in 2004. Students underachieved in these subjects, especially boys in English. In many other subjects GCSE results are much better. With several new members of staff in the English, mathematics, science and ICT departments, standards are improving. Students are making progress closer to that predicted by their attainment on entry but there is much ground to make up. Underachievement in recent years has been due mainly to weaknesses in teaching which are now being resolved. Students of average and below average ability have weak writing skills which affects their performance in tests and examinations.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Relationships with adults are satisfactory and students respect teachers who, they said, 'treat us like adults'. Although there are some concerns about behaviour, most students show satisfactory attitudes to learning and the number of students excluded from school has fallen significantly. Students feel safe in school and assert that the infrequent incidents of bullying are dealt with promptly and relationships between students from different backgrounds and cultures are good. One student stated that 'the school community is excellent and everyone is really friendly'. Despite the improved procedures to monitor and improve attendance, it is still very low and adversely affects achievement. Students know about the benefits of leading healthy lifestyles, though many do not choose to eat healthily in the canteen. Many students participate eagerly in sporting activities. The school council provides a good forum for students to air their views.

Students make a solid contribution to the school community, to various charities and to local events.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. A range of teaching from outstanding to inadequate was observed during the inspection. Teachers use new technology in the classroom satisfactorily. Overall, good use is made of teaching and other assistants to support students with learning difficulties and disabilities. In an outstanding Year 11 science revision students with differing needs were given challenging work. They remained on task, were fully involved and were confident in their ability to improve. Typically, in satisfactory lessons teachers set work for some students that is either too easy or too hard. Some work is marked well and students know exactly what they must do to improve, but in others, there are too few marks or comments to be helpful. In inadequate lessons a few students disrupt the learning of others in the class. The introduction of more rigorous monitoring and support for teachers is slowly reducing the number of inadequate lessons. Nevertheless, the proportion of good or better teaching is still too low to overcome the legacy of underachievement.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

In Year 7, students are taught in form groups which give them good stability throughout their first year in secondary school and supports their transition from primary school well. However, the curriculum for the lower school is not fully meeting the needs of all groups of students because there is underachievement, especially in literacy and numeracy. Work experience, citizenship, enterprise activities and the careers programmes prepare students well for their future education and training, though their command of basic literacy and numeracy skills is sometimes limited. The curriculum satisfactorily reflects the increasingly multi-cultural school population. Many students benefit from a good range of out-of-hours clubs, especially in sport and drama. The school's business and enterprise specialist status has had a good impact on broadening option choices. There is a good programme of careers guidance and work-related learning. The school has fostered good links with feeder primary schools and the local community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support of students are satisfactory. Students state that they feel safe. The school provides good support for those more vulnerable students who have additional needs. The school's commitment to the inclusion of these students and the good links with a range of external agencies helps them to achieve satisfactorily. The needs of students for whom English is an additional language are identified and supported satisfactorily. Students' academic progress is adequately monitored, most students know their targets and these are regularly

discussed during academic review days each term. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged through the personal, social and health education programme and in particular the guidance about future career opportunities is good. All Year 11 students receive a well structured individual interview with a senior member of staff to provide advice on possible employment or education and training post-16.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

In the previous academic year, two long-term absences and a resignation significantly reduced the effectiveness of the senior leadership team. Although a review of all departments was carried out, underachievement and weak teaching were not highlighted early enough. Teacher absences in several subjects also contributed to the drop in standards in the Year 9 tests. The school's self-evaluation is realistic and the headteacher has made the right appointments to steer improvements. Two deputy headteachers took up post in September 2006 and two middle managers were appointed to join the senior leadership team. The school has the capacity to improve because leadership and management are now satisfactory and are bringing about improvements. Senior leaders are monitoring subject leaders' work more sharply. Standards are improving. The school is now providing value for money. The quality of subject leadership in the past was variable, ranging from good to poor. Training, focused on subject leaders monitoring and taking responsibility for standards, has improved the situation as has the appointment of several good teachers and effective subject leaders for mathematics, science and ICT. The governors' confidence in the headteacher has not wavered. When the school had little useful value-added data governors were not in a position to interrogate standards in detail. They now have this information and are beginning to use it effectively to monitor achievement. They are fully aware of the factors that contributed to the school's difficulties in the last academic year and can point to significant improvements in achievement since the start of the academic year.

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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?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	4	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Northwood School, Potter Street, Northwood, HA6 1QG

Thank you for the help you gave us with the recent inspection of your school and for the friendly way you received us. Our overall finding is that your school provides a satisfactory standard of education but we also believe that, with your help, the school could do very much better and that standards should be higher, especially in English, mathematics and science. The quality of education provided in the sixth form is satisfactory. Most of you told us that you enjoy coming to school and feel safe.

Things we particularly like about your school are:

- the care and support you are given to help you succeed in school and in later life
- the extensive choice of subjects and courses that are available to older students
- the mature way in which the school council discusses a wide range of school issues as, for example, in its thoughtful comments to the headteacher on the 2007-08 draft school development plan.

We have asked your school, with your help, to make urgent improvements and these are:

- to ensure that all students, especially those of you in Years 7, 8 and 9, improve their performance in English, mathematics and science
- to improve attendance
- to ensure that the best teaching methods are shared more widely across the school.

We feel the staff and governors have the skills to make your school even better in the future and we hope you will play your part in this. Thank you again for all your help in the inspection and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Brian Evans

Lead Inspector