



Northampton School for Girls

Inspection Report - Amended

Unique Reference Number 122083
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292313
Inspection date 20 September 2006
Reporting inspector Dilip Kadodwala HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Spinney Hill Road
School category	Community		Devon Way
Age range of pupils	11–18		Northampton NN3 6DG
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	01604 679540
Number on roll (school)	1401	Fax number	01604 679552
Number on roll (6th form)	311		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Joan Martin
		Headteacher	Penny Westwood
Date of previous school inspection	10 February 2003		

Age group 11–18	Inspection date 20 September 2006	Inspection number 292313
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Amended Report Addendum

Report updated to resolve formatting inconsistency

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is larger than the average sized secondary school. It has a specialist college status for music, the first in the country when it was granted it in September 2004. At the same time, the school expanded to take students from the age of 11 instead of 13, as a result of schools' reorganisation in the local authority. Currently the school is located on two sites but it is anticipated that all students will be located in new premises by September 2008. Around 80% of the students are from White British backgrounds. The rest are from a wide range of minority ethnic groups including those from Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black Caribbean heritages. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school of which students, parents, staff and governors are rightly proud. The attention paid to students' individual needs is impressive and it helps promote outstanding achievement in both their academic and personal development. A student's comment sums up the views of many: 'This school allows you to be yourself and it helps you to achieve excellence'.

The school is hugely popular. This is shown by the very large return of questionnaire responses from parents as part of this inspection, which was overwhelmingly in support of the school's work. There are many reasons for the school's success. The headteacher provides inspiring leadership. A governor observed, 'she has her eyes on the stars and feet right on the ground'. This means that the school's values are realised in practice. The headteacher is also ably supported by a very effective senior leadership team. Every student is known well and encouraged to reach her potential. Staff fully subscribe to the senior leaders' expectation that every student has a right to education, care and success. Staff, therefore, play an effective part in providing an outstandingly rich curriculum and stimulating lessons and keeping a meticulous eye on students' progress through frequent mentoring sessions. This mentoring is critical because it helps identify underachievement, keeps students who are at risk engaged and motivated and ensures that students are kept on track to attain the challenging targets set for them. The result is that the great majority of students achieve their targets. In explaining the mentoring system's effectiveness a student was adamant that 'the school would not be the same without it!'

Students are happy and enjoy their time in school. Their commitment is reflected in their willingness to attend and to participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school's 'yellow bus' provision is effective because it enables students to fully access the range of activities and facilities available out of school hours. The school's specialist status for music allows over 600 students to learn to play a musical instrument, with many learning to play more than one. The impact of the status is also very evident in other areas of the curriculum and benefits the wider community as well. For example, students assist in leading music workshops in primary schools, and the school's orchestra performs at local and national events.

The school ensures that students are safe and secure. For some years the school has encouraged students to adopt healthy lifestyles, having dispensed with selling fizzy drinks and crisps, and the great majority of students now appreciate this action and willingly take part in eating sensibly and taking regular exercise.

The school has made very good progress in addressing the issues identified in the last inspection, including improving the provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Arrangements for checking the consistent use staff make of these students' individual education plans are not yet as robust as other aspects of the provision. The school's self-evaluation is accurate. It has rightly identified the need to raise standards further in art and science and to raise the level of challenge for students in the sixth form. The school's capacity to improve is excellent. Achievement

and standards are outstanding. Students make excellent progress from the time they start school to the end of Key Stage 4. Students in the sixth form attain average standards and make good progress.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The school operates a policy of open access to the sixth form for students of all backgrounds and attainment, including those who transfer from other schools. The impact of the open access is that attainment on entry into the sixth form is lower than the school's GCSE results would indicate. Standards are broadly average and students make good progress by the time they leave. This reflects the good quality of teaching and the effective improvements made since the last inspection. A major improvement has been in the guidance and support students receive which enables them and staff to track progress. However, demands on students are not consistently high which means that there is some undue variation in results in different subjects. For example, there is high performance in mathematics and good attainment in English and sociology. But in health and social care, government and politics, and some vocational level 2 courses, performance is not as good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the level of challenge in sixth form work to raise standards of the weaker subjects to the level of the best subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Standards are high and students make exceptional progress. Students enter the school with broadly average attainment. By the end of Year 9, standards have exceeded national figures over recent years. By the end of Year 11, standards are very high and students make outstanding progress to achieve challenging targets. Seventy-eight per cent of students attained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2005. This is well above the national average. Although the 2006 GCSE results for five good passes are slightly lower at 72%, the school's improvement trend over recent years exceeds the national rate. For the last four years 100% of students have attained at least one GCSE pass. The school is in the top 10% nationally judged on progress from the levels attained at the end of primary education. No groups underachieve. Staff are particularly effective at identifying students who are at risk of underachieving and the support provided for them has a positive impact on their achievement. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds attain as well as their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are outstanding. They really enjoy attending school and learning. Many echo the sentiment that staff at all levels care for them and students value the school's open access to facilities and staff. Students' behaviour is exemplary in school and in lessons. They are also highly effective ambassadors when representing the school, for example during work experience, sports and performing arts events. Students speak enthusiastically about their participation in extra-curricular activities which include music, sports, the performing arts and clubs which support their academic studies. These activities make a significant contribution to students' success at the school. Students are keenly aware of the importance of spiritual and moral development and willingly take up opportunities presented by teachers to reflect on questions of meaning and purpose and the consequences of their actions on others. They act responsibly, eat healthily, and take the initiative in raising funds for a wide range of charities. Students acquire the necessary skills to be successful in the world of work although the development of their enterprise skills is not as strong.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

Central to the students' huge progress is the outstanding work of the staff at this school. The high quality of the teaching ensures that all students make extremely good progress. There is a shared sense of wanting the best for every student and staff are generous in giving their time and expertise. Students value this highly. Staff training is put into practice purposefully so that students experience a wide range of teaching and learning styles. Within this range some elements of teaching and learning are common. These are: shared learning objectives and periodic checks on how well these objectives are met; ensuring students know what to do to improve their work; providing tasks and activities which meet the varied needs of learners; and, increasingly, involving students in the assessment of their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school curriculum is very broad and designed to provide all students with increasingly flexible choices as they get older. As a girls' school, it is very effective in ensuring that a high number of students take up courses such as resistant materials,

sciences and mathematics with creditable examination results. The school makes very effective links with other providers, especially in relation to vocational courses. The school's commitment to equal access for all drives initiatives to extend what is offered to students with learning difficulties and disabilities and the most able. The curriculum, and especially the comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities, makes a significant impact on students' personal and academic achievements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and contribute strongly to students' progress, enjoyment and well-being. Careful attention is paid to health and safety issues and child protection arrangements. Pastoral support for students is exceptional. In discussions with inspectors, students were very keen to point out that they had every confidence in asking and receiving help from staff whenever it was needed. Parents are kept well informed about their daughters' progress and attainment. The careful marking of students' work and the meticulous tracking of their progress, including the setting of challenging targets, has a direct bearing on students' outstanding progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school is led and managed outstandingly well. The headteacher provides exceptional direction and vision for the school and senior managers are very effective in their leadership. There is a strong focus on every individual student's right to education and opportunity to succeed. The school's strong commitment to ensuring that all students have equal access to opportunities is especially striking. The outstanding achievements of the great majority of students by the time they leave school are a result of the drive and determination provided by senior leaders and governors. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous, detailed and accurate and identifies clearly the areas for further development. Weaknesses identified at middle management level have been addressed effectively and action is already underway to improve standards further in art, science and in the sixth form. Governors are actively involved in the school and hold the senior team to account. The students benefit from highly committed staff.

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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?	1	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	2
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	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the results of the inspection. However, first, I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting some of you and appreciated your comments and opinions. We were very impressed by your maturity.

The inspection found that yours is an outstanding school. Leadership and management are excellent. You are set challenging targets and examination results are consistently high. You make excellent progress because you have very positive attitudes to learning. In our discussions with you it was clear that a major reason for your success is the regular checking of your progress with your tutors. This, along with the help you receive from staff both in lessons and at other times, ensures that you achieve so well. There is a huge range of extra-curricular activities which you enjoy, including learning to play musical instruments. We were also impressed by the level of care you show towards one another and the pride you take in representing your school, for example at musical and sports events.

There are some areas where the school recognises it needs to continue to develop. Teachers are very keen to raise standards further in art, science and in the sixth form. We left the school confident that it will continue to improve in these areas and keep up the achievement it enjoys. We wish you every success in the future.