

North Walsham High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121154
Local Authority	NORFOLK
Inspection number	302326
Inspection dates	21–22 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Robert Castle

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	850
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Russell Solly
Headteacher	Mrs Caroline Brooker
Date of previous school inspection	12 May 2003
School address	Spenser Avenue North Walsham NR28 9HZ
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

North Walsham High School is smaller than most secondary schools. It serves the market town of North Walsham and the surrounding area of north east Norfolk. For the older year groups, standards were a little below average when students entered the school. However, standards on entry have improved in the last two years and are now average. The socio-economic circumstances of the students that attend the school are below average. Fewer adults in the area have received higher education than is the case nationally. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. Very few students come from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average. The school became a specialist school for the performing arts in September 2005. It has the Artsmark silver award and the International Schools Award at intermediate level. The school has recently completed a major building programme.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

North Walsham High School is a satisfactory and improving school. The strong leadership and vision of the headteacher have been the key factors in recent improvements. She has developed a strong, effective and supportive senior leadership team. Performing arts specialist status has significantly contributed to raising expectations and enhancing self-esteem by involving students in new courses that are creative, interesting and exciting.

Students' achievement has improved and is now good. This has been brought about by careful guidance to individual students and by introducing new courses that suit students well and enable them to achieve. Care, guidance and support are good. Students are well cared for and appreciate the extra help that teachers willingly provide. Senior staff track students' progress carefully and provide effective additional support for those who are not doing as well, which boosts their achievement. The curriculum is also now good. It includes a wide range of vocational and academic programmes that are planned flexibly to provide a good match to individual needs. Students with learning difficulties are supported well. These strengths contribute successfully to enabling students to achieve well now.

Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are average. Students make good progress, especially in Years 7 to 9. Progress has been good in Years 7 to 9 over the last three years and more recently in Years 10 and 11. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities make good progress.

Students' personal development is satisfactory. They make a good contribution to the school and the local community. The out-of-hours activities are well supported and are strong features of school life. Students have a good understanding of safe practices and healthy lifestyles. However, attitudes and behaviour vary too much. Most students behave well but there is low level disruption in a minority of lessons. This is linked to the quality of teaching and is partly because the code of behaviour is not always enforced.

While standards have risen as a result of improvements to the curriculum and better guidance, the overall quality of teaching has not improved to the same extent. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Specialist status has helped to make some lessons more interesting through the use of new technology and teaching methods. Inspection evidence and the school's own monitoring show that in approximately half of lessons the teaching is good and provides students with engaging and challenging learning opportunities. However, a significant minority of lessons do not interest students enough or engage them sufficiently actively. At times teachers do not expect enough of students.

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The new headteacher has successfully moved the school forward over the last two years. The senior leadership team and governors have a sharp focus on raising standards based on their good evaluations of the school. Staff morale has improved and there is a consistent motivation to continue the improvements. Middle managers are increasingly involved in evaluating the quality of their provision and planning improvements. However, this aspect of their work is at an early stage of development and not yet consistently good. The results of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by these managers are not used sufficiently to share the good practice that exists in the school. The school provides satisfactory value for money. The achievements of the senior leadership team show that it has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning through regular monitoring and sharing of good practice.
- Improve students' attitudes to learning by ensuring that all teachers adopt consistently effective approaches to behaviour management in lessons.
- Develop the skills of middle managers in evaluating the quality of their work and planning for improvement.

A small proportion of schools judged to be satisfactory but with areas of underperformance will be monitored in accordance with the protocol published in November 2006.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good and improving. Standards are broadly average in years 9 and 11 and this represents good progress when students' below average starting points and backgrounds are taken into account. Students with learning difficulties make good progress. The school sets itself challenging targets for students' overall performance and for the specialist subjects of art, drama and media studies. Last year it met its targets for Years 7 to 9 but not for Years 10 and 11.

Progress in Years 7 to 9 has been consistently good for the past three years, more so in English and science than in mathematics, with boys and girls making equally good progress.

Progress has not been so consistent in Years 10 and 11. Although the proportion of students who gained at least five GCSE passes at grade C was average in 2006, their grades were below average overall. Nevertheless, the progress that this group of students made through the school was good, and significantly better than in previous years. This improvement was due to close guidance and broadening of the curriculum. Overall, girls made less progress than boys but there were no groups of students who significantly underachieved. Students' good progress has been maintained in the current school year and in the current Year 11, standards are broadly average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral and social development are satisfactory. Their cultural development is good because it is well supported by the curriculum. The performing arts specialism also strengthens students' social and cultural development. They develop self-confidence through their involvement in performances and making presentations. Students are developing an understanding of their moral obligations through the school council and prefect systems. Opportunities for spiritual consideration are not as strong, although assemblies include time for reflection. Students enjoy school and appreciate the many trips, activities and events provided for them. Around the school, students are sensible and polite, enjoying good relationships with their peers and teachers.

Behaviour is satisfactory. When lessons are well taught, students behave well, but in a minority of lessons there is inattention and minor disruption. Parents and some students are rightly concerned about this. New procedures have recently been introduced to improve behaviour, although not all students understand them fully. As a result of close monitoring, previously below average attendance is now satisfactory.

Students feel safe in school and understand well how to adopt safe and healthy lifestyles. Many are involved in the sporting activities on offer. Students report that there is little bullying and that any incidents are dealt with quickly and robustly. Students contribute well to the community, particularly through the school council and the 'peer mentoring' system. They feel that their views are listened to. Students develop skills that will aid their future economic well-being through good access to information and communication technology (ICT) and effective support for those who need extra help in literacy and numeracy. These combine with the good features in their personal development to prepare them well for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it well in preparing their lessons and in giving clear explanations and demonstrations that enhance students' learning. Relationships between students and teachers are positive. Students with learning difficulties are successfully helped by learning support assistants. However, not all marking, particularly of homework, helps students improve their work. Interactive whiteboards and practical equipment are sometimes used imaginatively to engage and interest students, and this contributes to good learning. In some other lessons, however, resources are underused. Students are not always punctual when arriving to lessons. About half of the lessons are good or better, but a significant minority of lessons lack challenge, pace and excitement. Students' attitudes to learning are generally positive, but in lessons where they are less engaged or interested, learning is slowed down by chatting, calling out or other low-level disruptive behaviour. This is not always dealt with consistently or effectively. There are not enough opportunities for teachers to share good practice through observation and discussion. Recent improvements in achievement are mainly due to curriculum changes and better programmes to support students who fall behind.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It has some notable strengths and is contributing well to students' improving achievement. In Years 7 to 9, all students take drama and have two hours of physical education a week which encourages healthy lifestyles. In Years 10 and 11, there are three 'learning pathways' that meet students' needs and interests. This means they can follow a variety of GCSE, BTEC and vocational courses, which are being developed further. A number of students follow a Prince's Trust course and have a one-day-a-week work placement. Some higher attaining students take national tests in mathematics a year early in Year 8 and start GCSE courses in science in Year 9. A very good programme of additional activities, including artistic and sporting opportunities, enhances learning. Visits abroad and revision sessions outside school hours add more. The school has also introduced an international aspect to its work, which broadens students' horizons. Initiatives like Black History Month and Refugee Week contribute further to this good provision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good care, guidance and support. Arrangements for child protection are fully in place. Well trained and experienced staff ensure that students receive the support they need. Staff, particularly those in the inclusion unit, work closely with external agencies to provide additional specialist support for those students who require it. Good quality information about individual students' needs is shared with staff to ensure a good level of care. The arrangements for transfer from primary school are very good, with a clear programme designed to help both students and parents cope with change. External counsellors and the police liaison officer work effectively in supporting students. The safety of students using the internet is very well developed and is a strength. Systems to monitor and track students' academic progress are good and students who are in danger of underachieving receive additional mentoring and support. This has made a significant contribution to improving progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and some aspects are good. The headteacher is providing good, clear and decisive leadership for the school. Her strong leadership has quickly established the structures and systems to secure ongoing improvements. She has developed a good senior leadership team who are confident and have been empowered to drive forward improvement. The specialist performing arts status is being well led. This provides significant curriculum enrichment and enhances students' aspirations. The senior leadership team has established a clear focus on raising standards and achievement. The school's evaluation of its progress is accurate. Data is used well to set challenging targets for students.

The quality of middle management is improving but is not yet consistently good. School and department improvement plans have identified areas for development. However, at faculty level, these plans do not always have a sufficiently robust focus on how the outcomes of initiatives will be evaluated. Senior managers recognise that the system for monitoring teaching and learning is as yet insufficiently rigorous to help teachers improve their performance.

The well led governing body provides good support as well as acting as a 'critical friend' to the headteacher and her staff. Good advice from the local authority has bolstered the school's progress since the last inspection.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
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?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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
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	2
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	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

23 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of North Walsham High School, North Walsham, NR28 9HZ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking to you and visiting your lessons and other activities.

Over the last year you and your teachers have worked in difficult conditions with the building work taking place. It is now completed and will improve your facilities. Many of you told us about other improvements like new courses, the performing arts status and the good support that you receive. We agree with you that the school has improved in these areas. It is a satisfactory and improving school.

Many of you behave well and help and support one another. You contribute well through the school council and take your responsibilities seriously. A large number of you take part in a big programme of out-of-school activities.

Overall, you make good progress and the standards you are reaching are average. This is partly due to good guidance about the new pathways and courses, allowing you to select courses which both suit and interest you. Most of you agree that target setting is helping you make good progress and reach higher standards.

Teaching is satisfactory. There are many good lessons which you enjoy. However, behaviour in lessons is not always good. We have asked the school to enforce the code of behaviour consistently and ask you to cooperate on this. Now that the building is complete there is no excuse for lateness to lessons. We are asking the school to increase the number of good lessons and for heads of faculties to check the quality of the work they do with you.

We are confident that your school will continue to improve because you have an able headteacher and senior staff, who together with the governors strive to do their best for you. We hope you will also work to improve your school further.

We wish you all the best for your future success.

Yours sincerely

Robert Castle

Lead Inspector