

Norton Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109301
Local Authority	Bath and North East Somerset
Inspection number	309953
Inspection date	7 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Brenda Cusdin HMI

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	1401
6th form	247
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Clayden
Headteacher	Peter Beaven
Date of previous school inspection	31 March 2003
School address	Charlton Road Midsomer Norton Radstock BA3 4AD
Telephone number	01761 412557
Fax number	01761 410622

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated three specific issues: • whether standards and achievement are good or outstanding • how effectively the sixth form provision is evaluated across the various providers and different courses • the improved strategies to help the very few disaffected students stay in education. Inspectors gathered evidence on the inspection day from discussions with staff. They scrutinised relevant documents, including the detailed analysis of students' standards and progress that the school has compiled. They observed first-hand some of the practice judged outstanding by the school and courses introduced to motivate students who prefer practical learning to bookwork. They studied the comments in 400 questionnaires returned by parents. Importantly, inspectors talked with students about the contributions they make and their experiences at school. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its Self-Evaluation Form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Norton Hill is much larger than other schools. Standards on entry in Year 7 are usually slightly above average. However, the current Year 11 had below average standards on entry.

The large sixth form collaborates with the other secondary schools in the town and the local college. A small but growing number of students join Norton Hill sixth form from other schools. Standards on entry to the sixth form cover a wide span, from students who achieved very highly in their GCSEs to those who meet the minimum requirements for entry to advanced courses.

Although the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, the proportion requiring particular specialist support is similar to the national figure. The local special school runs a resource base at Norton Hill for up to six students with Asperger's syndrome, who regularly join mainstream classes.

The area has relatively high employment but mainly in low-skilled, low-paid jobs. There are pockets of social and economic disadvantage in the town. Few students leave or join the school other than at the normal times. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds or who are learning English as an additional language.

Norton Hill became a specialist college in technology in 1999, added a second specialism in languages in 2006 and acquired specialist status in mathematics and information and communication technology this year. Norton Hill has achieved many 'kite marks' for quality. It is, for example, a Leading Edge School and Training School, and has an International Schools Award, a Healthy Schools Award, Sportsmark and Artsmark.

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Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Norton Hill is an outstanding school that thrives on inspirational leadership from its headteacher, joined-up thinking and active teamwork. The senior team know their school very well, celebrate its strengths joyfully and resolutely tackle any areas that appear to be dipping below their very high standards. They ensure that the students play a central part in the life of the school. The students are impressive ambassadors for their school. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about what the school is offering their children.

Standards are consistently high. Achievement at Year 9 has been outstanding and students achieve extremely well at Year 11 and in the sixth form. The excellent teaching and huge investment in support and intervention ensure that students with specific needs flourish.

The spotlight is continually on 'how well are we doing?' Everyone has targets and everyone reviews these. Students appreciate the regular opportunities for one-to-one discussions with tutors about their progress and their plans. In lessons, teachers have high expectations that everyone should be thinking things through. This, together with very positive relationships, leads to motivated and confident learners. There is an impressive take-up of extra-curricular activities by students and staff.

The curriculum is updated thoughtfully. The school's specialist status is promoting high standards. Teachers are sharing their subject expertise with primary partners, for example through providing master-classes. The more able students are stretched with accelerated courses and study three separate sciences for GCSE.

The courses introduced to combat potential disaffection are working well. Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is exemplary. Firm boundaries, and genuine interest and encouragement, help the very few students with behavioural difficulties to improve. Students make superb contributions to their school community; for example, they run 'Teen Support' and anti-bullying groups. Their views count.

The senior team are passionate that Norton Hill 'will not rest on its laurels'. They have succeeded. Norton Hill was an outstanding school at its last inspection and this is still true.

Rightly, senior leaders recognise that their biggest challenge is sustaining this very high quality, alongside managing wide-ranging new developments. Already they are confidently forging ahead with the sensible priorities in the current school improvement plan.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

A key to the success of the sixth form is superb leadership by the head of the sixth form. A second major factor is the high expectations that students will want to continue into higher education and professional careers.

Nearly all students take at least four AS courses in Year 12 and three A2 courses in Year 13, and very few drop out of these. Targets are carefully set for each sixth former. Their progress is tracked rigorously across the wide range of courses provided by the school and its partners. Students have monthly reports and easy access to advice from a professional tutor.

In 2007, 80 per cent of the students met their challenging A2 targets, and the school's tracking indicates that an even higher proportion of current sixth formers are on course to do so. The

school's A2 examination results produce an extremely high total points score, indicating excellent achievement.

Teachers in the sixth form make very skilful use of the information gained on students' progress when planning lessons, and give students opportunities to take an active part in lessons. This develops their self-confidence and capacity to work hard and independently. The school is actively working with others on ways to make religious education, which is a statutory requirement, really effective for this age group.

Students have excellent attitudes to learning and listen carefully to each other's opinions. They believe that the sixth form provides them with an excellent preparation for their future lives – and they are right.

What the school should do to improve further

- Pursue those new developments identified by the school with rigour and evaluate their impact on outcomes for pupils.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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

Dear Students

Inspection of Norton Hill School, Midsomer Norton, BA3 4AD

Many thanks for the warm welcome you gave us. We really enjoyed our day at your school. It was good to talk with you about your experiences and the contributions that you make to school life.

We found out a great deal during our visit and we were very impressed by what we found.

We think that Norton Hill is giving you an excellent education.

Your headteacher and staff want the very best for you. Your staff carefully check how well you are doing. They encourage you to do even better and they give extra help if required. In turn, you achieve extremely well and your school's test and examinations results are consistently high.

You appreciate the genuine interest that staff take in your progress. You also value the straight talking that you get from them if you need to improve your behaviour. We saw that you really enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning. Many of you take part in clubs and expeditions. You help others, for example through the Teen Support Group. Your voice is heard in important school decisions.

You play a very important part in ensuring Norton Hill is a great place to learn.

We hope that you continue to do so.

Very best wishes

Brenda Cusdin Her Majesty's Inspector