

The Norton Knatchbull School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118838
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	313113
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Janet Simms

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	740
6th form	307
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jill R Humphreys
Headteacher	John C Speller
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2002
School address	Hythe Road Ashford TN24 0QJ
Telephone number	01233 620045
Fax number	01233 633668

Age group	11-18
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2007
Inspection number	313113

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Boys are selected on entry at age 11 on the basis of academic ability. They come from a wide area of Kent around Ashford. The school has grown because of an increase from four-form to five-form entry and because of increased numbers in the sixth form, where both boys and girls from other schools are admitted. Few families claim free school meals. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The percentage using English as an additional language (EAL) is also low, although there has been a recent increase in numbers from Nepalese families. Specialist Language College status was awarded in 2004. It has Healthy School status, and Investors in People and Investors in Careers awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school which justly deserves its high reputation and standing in the community. Standards are very high and academic achievement good, particularly at Key Stage 3, although a key success of the school lies in students' additional achievements in all elements of personal and social skills. Students in the growing sixth form provide very good role models for younger ones and they too achieve well. These successes occur because of good management, firmly focused on promoting students' balanced academic and personal improvement, good teaching, engendering confidence and enjoyment, and a curriculum which provides a sensitively selected variety of activities to develop students as 'well-rounded' individuals.

New subject leadership and staffing have improved the identified slower progress in mathematics and modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4, with current students on track to achieve better standards. Literacy levels are relatively weak on entry and concerns about achievement in English, particularly in Years 10 and 11, are not yet resolved. The school recognises that provision for the very ablest students, particularly through planning in lessons, does not always stretch them to achieve the highest exam grades of which they are capable. Standards in science and other subjects such as humanities are high and the arts contribute very effectively to students' all-round development. Successful, increasingly extensive opportunities for early entry to GCSE exams, sometimes followed by AS level work in Key Stage 4, add significantly to the range and depth of students' achievements.

Outstanding progress in skills to equip students for future work and education forms part of their good overall personal development. They actively relish opportunities to learn enterprise skills and other subjects such as geography in several modern foreign languages. These aspects of the school's specialist status and the fulfilment of commitments to its partners are very good. In addition to good teaching and a good curriculum, pastoral care, often involving older students, is also strong so all feel safe and well cared for. Students enjoy the new healthy meal options and participate actively in sports to keep fit. Academic guidance provides frequent information about progress, but not all students or parents are clear about the meaning of some grades on their progress reports, for instance, for the new International Baccalaureate (IB). Leadership and management are good. Most areas requiring improvement from the last inspection have been tackled successfully and there is good capacity to improve further. Accurate, thoughtful self-evaluation results in effective planning for improvement, particularly in areas where there are concerns about achievement. Middle managers are increasingly accountable for subject performance, but there is too much variability between the effectiveness and impact of monitoring and evaluation, particularly when judging learning and achievement. Recent improvements to resources such as information and communication technology (ICT) and the new building have improved provision considerably. Excellent links with partners provide two-way support for and by the school in many areas.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The large, expanding sixth form is a well-integrated part of the school, making a highly positive contribution to the learning environment and ethos. Academic standards are high, with the great majority of students achieving well and moving into higher education. Most of Year 11 continue into the sixth form, joined by a significant proportion of external students, including girls. Standards on entry are higher than usual and the wide range of AS/A2 level courses and

the IB meet the needs of virtually all students, with additional courses available through an effective local consortium. Teachers are enthusiastic subject specialists so progress is good. Students value and enjoy their good relationships with teachers, appreciating all the support they receive and the ways they are encouraged towards increasingly independent learning. 'Teachers are always willing to give you time' was the consensus. Students readily take advantage of the many opportunities for enrichment and adopt positions of responsibility, for example, organising house teams and events, or providing pastoral support for younger students. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve achievement in Years 10 and 11, particularly of the potentially highest-attaining students and especially in English.
- Improve learning for the most able students by planning challenging work in regular lessons to ensure they reach their full potential.
- Sharpen monitoring and evaluation by middle managers to ensure that provision, especially teaching, is well focused on improving achievement and progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students enter with standards well above average, but there is a wider spread of prior attainment than in many grammar schools. Between Years 7 and 9, good teaching enables students to make good progress and achieve well. In national tests, standards at Year 9 are outstanding in English, mathematics and science. Standards remain exceptionally high at Key Stage 4, but students' progress has been slower here in the past two years. As a result of more consistently good teaching, current students are making good progress. Improvement is particularly noticeable in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Progress in English, however, is still below expectations, particularly for more-able students. In GCSE examinations virtually all students gain at least five A* to C grades including English and mathematics, although some miss the A*s they could achieve. There is otherwise no significant variation in achievement between different groups of students. The small proportion who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as others. Good progress and achievement continue through the sixth form and standards across the range of subjects and courses are high.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students are keen to learn, pleasant and courteous. Attendance is high, but punctuality to lessons can be delayed by movement between buildings. Students enjoy school and behaviour in lessons is often excellent, although it occasionally slips if teaching is not secure. The very few short-term exclusions have been effective in improving behaviour. Recent arrivals to England feel well served by the school but are still somewhat separated socially. Students are vigilant about safety, and healthy food options are increasingly popular. Preparation for adult roles develops well through good academic progress, house activities and charitable fundraising, for instance. Students value unusually highly their good personal, social, citizenship and health

education (PSCHE) programme. Many opportunities for travel, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme and other extra-curricular events contribute to students' maturity and well-developed self confidence. Students eagerly take on a wide range of responsibilities, as school and form council representatives, for example. Many older students adopt leadership roles and help to make younger ones feel at home when they arrive. Some offer a sympathetic, confidential ear to anyone experiencing difficulties; this is much appreciated, if rarely used. Students forge good links with form tutors, with whom they have several individual interviews each year about progress. Moral, social and cultural development is good. Students develop good attitudes towards others and a healthy recognition that their education is about more than just exam grades.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Good teaching and learning lead to students making good progress in the main school and in the sixth form. Progress was particularly good in the several outstanding lessons observed. Teachers know students well and make sure that most make good progress from their high starting points, although planning to stretch the very ablest students is not always good enough to ensure they do so. Good subject knowledge is transmitted well to interest and engage students so they enjoy their learning. Many, but not all, lessons include good opportunities for independent learning, for example, through using ICT effectively. Although students are sometimes very lively, behaviour management is good, creating calm atmospheres for learning. Assessment is accurate, with some exemplary guidance observed explaining examination marking criteria, which enables students to assess work for themselves. Assistants of all kinds are used well to help students learn better, for example, as extra native speakers in languages or as support for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The wide-ranging curriculum includes a number of features which contribute very positively to students' enjoyment; for instance, specialist status ensures that they can select from a wide range of languages, from French and Japanese to Latin. Key Stage 4 includes a good range of courses, including vocational pathways. Students say they would like more of the PSCHE programme because it is so useful. Basic skills such as ICT expertise are developed well in different subjects and students have good opportunities to develop linguistic skills. In Years 8, 9 and 10, selected groups learn geography in German and ICT in French. Enrichment opportunities such as the 'Maths Challenge' and various master classes stretch gifted and talented students well, but work in lessons is not always well matched to challenge them fully. Many educational visits and extra-curricular activities enhance students' social, cultural and personal development. A variety of enterprise and work-related activities prepares them very well for their future economic well-being. The wide-ranging programme of subjects and courses offered in the sixth form, including those through the local consortium, ensures that these students' study needs are met effectively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students and their parents value the caring ethos which the school embodies. Form tutors and heads of year make major contributions to their personal guidance. Systems to track students' progress provide realistic, understandable targets for each subject and students meet form tutors individually four times a year to review progress and determine how best to go forward. Tracking also allows staff to identify students experiencing difficulties. As a result, targeted students receive effective help but stronger interventions are needed to help gifted and talented students to achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. More accurate assessment of EAL needs is also required to help customize support for these students. The school uses external agencies well. Procedures for health and safety and for child protection are secure. Advice about careers and further education is good, especially towards the end of the main school and beyond.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher sustains the drive for continued improvement. He is well supported by senior leaders and governors, who have an accurate, shared view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Relative weaknesses in teaching, learning and the curriculum are challenged, and actions taken have led to improvements. Staff know they are accountable. They feel well supported and enjoy good opportunities to contribute to school development. Opportunities for middle managers' placement on the senior leadership team enhance their professional development.

Middle leaders generally have accurate views of the strengths and weaknesses of their subjects, although there is too much variation in their impact on improving students' progress. Procedures for monitoring progress are used systematically to identify underperformance. This information is not interrogated sufficiently well to determine whether all students progress as well as they could, given their starting points, especially the ablest ones. Priorities for improvement are sharply focused and underpinned by accurate self-evaluation. School development planning is well centred on raising standards and improving achievement. Collaborative partnerships are outstandingly effective and are used, for instance, to extend the curriculum and to provide support for other schools in languages and mathematics.

The majority of parents strongly support and appreciate the school's work, but a significant minority want to see improvements in communications. Governors are well informed and supportive and offer much expertise. Led by an able chair, they are increasingly challenging the school and developing their skills as critical friends to ensure more rapid progress. The school meets many of its specialist language college targets and recent improvements in the modern foreign languages department have significantly increased the potential to meet its very challenging standards targets in future years. The established culture of self-evaluation clearly demonstrates the school's good capacity for further improvement.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
---	----------------	-------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
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	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

29 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of The Norton Knatchbull School, Ashford, Kent TN24 0QJ

Thank you very much for your courteous welcome into your school in November. I am writing to tell you about our judgements.

Yours is a good school which enjoys a justifiably high reputation. Your standards are high when you enter and you make good progress so almost all of you achieve the high exam grades you need when you move on. In addition to those, we were impressed by your additional achievements in other areas, aspects of personal development, for instance, creating 'well-rounded' individuals who appreciate the school for all it provides, not simply exam results. In exams, though, we feel that those of you who do more subjects by entering some early, for example, are usefully adding to the range and depth of your skills and understanding. Opportunities for some to do AS level work in Key Stage 4 are also useful to prepare you for sixth form work. These strengths in your performance come about because of good leadership and management, good teaching and a well-balanced curriculum. You also contribute a good deal yourselves as good, keen learners. Your enthusiasm for complex learning such as enterprise activity or geography in a modern foreign language is an example of an outstanding response to unusually challenging provision and prepares you highly effectively for life beyond school.

Although progress has been slower in Years 10 and 11 in some subjects, we judge that this is speeding up in mathematics and modern foreign languages. This is not so in English yet and we have asked the school to ensure that students achieve as well as possible in both English exams at GCSE. This applies particularly to the highest achievers amongst you and there are other subjects in which this group don't do as well as they could. They therefore miss the A* grades of which they are capable, so we have asked the school to provide increased challenge, especially in regular lessons, to stretch these students more. When staff observe lessons as part of monitoring, we have suggested they evaluate this aspect in particular and ensure that lessons are planned well to facilitate the best levels of progress for all in the class.

Thank you again for your welcome.

Janet Simms Lead inspector