

North Ridge High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	132905
Local Authority	Manchester
Inspection number	316039
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Caroline Broomhead HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julia Duffy
Headteacher	Mrs Bernice Kostick
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Palmerstone Street Ancoats Manchester Lancashire M12 6PT
Telephone number	0161 2744667
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

North Ridge High School is a special school for students aged 11 to 19 years who have moderate, severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and/or complex additional medical or behavioural needs. The school opened in September 2006 as part of Manchester's re-organisation of special education across the local authority area and has a dual role as a specialist support centre for mainstream schools in the north of the city. It is located in the premises of one of the previous two special schools, catering for students with moderate learning difficulties, which closed in the re-organisation. A significant number of students and staff from these two schools transferred into the new North Ridge High School. The school has 110 places and there are currently 86 students on roll aged between 11 and 16 years. There are no students on roll in the 16 to 19 age range yet. Three quarters of the students are in receipt of free school meals and two students are looked after by the local authority. The majority of students are of White British heritage and there are 12 students whose first language is not English. The school is in temporary accommodation until it moves in February 2009 to new purpose built premises located on the same site as a secondary high school in another part of North Manchester.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Under the strong leadership of the headteacher, the school has quickly established itself as a good school which very successfully promotes equality of opportunity for each student and enjoys the support of parents. Class groups have been restructured with a clear focus on meeting the needs of individuals. The students are astute and loyal: they speak with accuracy and enthusiasm about the calm environment, the good teaching they receive, the wide range of activities provided for them and the good progress they are making. They enjoy school, feel safe and value the support they receive from all staff. They have many opportunities to express their views and to contribute to improvements and this boosts their self-confidence. The school prepares them very well for moving on into further education or training. The students generally behave well in lessons and around school. When they are given the opportunity to assess their own work they take this seriously and show a good understanding of what they are aiming to achieve. This is not consistent in all lessons and some students are not so aware of their individual targets or how well they are progressing. Attendance has improved significantly in the past year, but, despite the school's best efforts, it remains much lower than the national average.

The school has established strong partnerships with other schools, professionals and organisations to enrich the curriculum and provide specialist support for individual students. The school's work is regularly monitored by the headteacher and her senior leaders and they are well aware of its strengths and priorities for improvement. However, the targets set by the school for raising attainment are not sufficiently precise or challenging. Significant and sustainable improvements have been made across all aspects of the school's work in a short space of time and it has good capacity to manage the move to the new premises in February 2009 and continue to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Build on existing good practice to ensure that all students can assess the progress they are making towards achieving their individual targets.
- Ensure that whole school improvement targets to raise attainment are more precise and sufficiently challenging.
- Improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of the students in Key Stage 4 have moderate learning difficulties and many have additional emotional and social difficulties. Their attainment on entry to the school is below that expected for their age and many have had significant disruption in their previous schooling which has led to gaps in their learning. With good teaching, support and guidance they have matured, developed in confidence and achieved good results in their courses at school, in the local college and with training providers. In 2007, of 12 students entered, nine successfully completed courses in GCSE English at grades F or G. Four achieved grades F or G in science. Most were successful in achieving Entry Level Certificates in English, mathematics, science, physical education and information and communication technology (ICT). The school offers students the opportunity to be dually-entered for GCSE and Entry Level in English and this provides them with a good level of challenge whilst also offering a reassuring 'safety harness'.

Students take pride in the presentation of their coursework and the current Year 11 group is expected to achieve similar levels of success in a broad range of courses including performing arts, ICT and sport. Over three quarters of those who left in 2007 went on to further education or training and a similar picture exists for those who are about to leave. Students are pleased with what they have achieved and are looking forward to what they will be going on to. Various taster courses at college gave them a good insight into which vocational areas they might want to pursue further and helped inform their decisions. Successful work experience placements have boosted their knowledge of the world of work and their self-confidence: some students have been offered part-time employment as a result of their good attitudes and efforts whilst on placement.

There is a wider range of needs and abilities amongst the students at Key Stage 3, with more having severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex emotional needs than is the case at Key Stage 4. Their standards on entry to the school are well below those expected for their age; being mainly within the range P Level 1 up to National Curriculum Level 2. With good individual support and activities well matched to their needs, most students make small but good steps of progress in their learning. Some have made exceptionally good progress in their communication skills and this has boosted their self-confidence and reduced their levels of anxiety and frustration. Equally significant has been the improvement seen by staff in students' social skills and attitudes to learning. Students' creativity is seen in the colourful art displays around school and in their enthusiasm when participating in music sessions.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students enjoy coming to school and have a positive attitude to learning. Their behaviour is good, they know and understand what is expected of them in lessons and around school and usually respond appropriately. Students have a strong voice in the school and make good suggestions for what can be improved. They are very positive about school life and caring about each other. For example, members of the student council are keen to make sure that those students who are in wheelchairs are able to gain access to all parts of the building and grounds, although they recognise that this is not likely to happen until they get to their new school site. The student council believes that more could be done to improve the activities and equipment available at lunch-times. Students have a reasonable understanding of healthy living and the boys in particular enjoy sport. Students know they are valued and comment that, 'The staff never give up on us.' Through weekly assemblies and regular events in and out of school, students learn about different faiths and cultural traditions. The provision for students' social and moral development is particularly good and its impact is seen in the students' growing confidence, maturity and responsibility for the choices they make. A small number of students in Year 7 successfully join weekly science lessons at a local mainstream high school. Students are very well prepared for their economic well-being and for moving on as young adults.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good relationships are at the heart of the good teaching and learning which takes place. In most lessons students show respect for themselves and others. Teachers have a good understanding of their students' needs, interests and abilities and usually give careful thought

to which activities will best promote their learning. The good range of staff expertise and specialist resources within the school contribute significantly to students' good knowledge and understanding in subjects at both key stages. In the best lessons the students are encouraged to be independent learners, to work in pairs, to assess their own progress and to have high aspirations for what they can achieve. There is a good pace to lessons at the same time allowing students enough time to complete tasks and experience success. Teachers skilfully ask open-ended questions which elicit more thoughtful responses from students. They are also alert to when students' concentration is beginning to wane and a change of activity is needed. Teaching assistants provide good support for learning and behaviour. They know when and how best to offer advice and practical help. In the weaker lessons, teaching assistants were sometimes too ready to complete tasks for students thus creating a dependency on adults. Teachers' planning does not always make clear exactly what each student is expected to learn or how their learning is to be assessed. Where planning was least effective, a suitable range of activities had not been planned to ensure that students could work independently without having to wait for adult instruction and support.

Assessment is becoming more robust, particularly in the core subjects where a commercial scheme has been introduced that enables teachers to more accurately track students' small steps of progress over time. At Key Stage 4 assessment is linked to externally accredited courses and is firmly established.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Schemes of work have been suitably adapted to meet the students' needs, abilities and interests and to provide a good range of opportunities for them to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across all subjects. Subject areas are well resourced and include a good range of specialist facilities. There is a strong emphasis on developing students' literacy, communication, numeracy and independence skills, and on preparing them for adult life. Students at Key Stage 4 have the opportunity to choose from a range of courses which lead to external accreditation at a level appropriate to their ability and aspirations. There is a strong focus on work-related learning with many opportunities for students to undertake placements with employers and training providers in the local community as well as to attend courses at the college. Individual support is given to enable students to travel independently whenever possible. There are clear pathways for those moving on. For those students who find it difficult to learn in a school setting and who may be at risk of dropping out of education, a range of alternative off-site educational placements effectively keeps them on track. The curriculum is further enriched by a wide range of educational visits to places of interest, residential outdoor activity programmes and by visitors coming into the school.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Provision for students' care, guidance and support is good. The school has implemented all the latest guidance on safeguarding students. Policies are up to date and coordinators and responsible staff are trained and well informed. Procedures and links with other agencies are combined with responsive curricular arrangements which enable students' individual needs to be met. The school has established clear codes of conduct and students say that they feel safe. Staff deal calmly and consistently with any inappropriate behaviour and remain alert to possible tensions. Students are given good support on a day-to-day basis and arrangements for supporting

their transition, both when arriving from primary school and when they leave at 16, are particularly effective. Staff try to make sure any potential barriers are removed, for example, by providing direct support with completing forms.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and clear vision for the school. She sets high standards and has fully involved senior managers and other staff in influencing and monitoring the direction of the school. Good plans are in place to formalise arrangements for self-evaluation, involving all staff, students, governors and parents, from September. A particular strength has been the staff's commitment to seeking and acting on the views of the students. Governors support the school well and have a good understanding of students' needs. Resources to support teaching and learning have been enhanced, in particular those for ICT, although the physical layout of the building makes some of these difficult to access for non-ambulant students. The school provides good value for money.

Since opening in temporary premises, the school has experienced significant changes to the student population and to staffing, due mainly to the local authority's transition arrangements. These changes have been managed very effectively in a way that has instilled confidence in staff, students and parents. In particular, there has been a strong focus on identifying the needs of individual students and restructuring class groupings to better provide for those needs. Staffing, including leadership, has undergone restructuring to suit the aims of the school and the range of students' needs. Staff and leaders with specialist expertise have been appointed and this has made a strong contribution to the good provision across the school. Further appointments are being made from September, when the new structure will be complete. The school has appropriate plans in place to open its post-16 provision in September 2008. As would be expected at this early stage in the school's life, its role as a specialist support centre has yet to be fully developed.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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?	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	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	4
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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
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

Inspection of North Ridge High School, Manchester, M12 6PT

Thank you for welcoming myself and Christine Graham into your school this week. We enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views about the school. We appreciated the time you gave to speaking with us and were very impressed with your ideas and suggestions for improvement.

These are the findings of the inspection:

? We agree with you that North Ridge High School is a good school and it is very well led by the headteacher, Mrs Kostick. You and your parents have noticed the improvements that she has made since coming to the school.

? We know that you enjoy school, particularly the wide range of activities both in and out of school, and you make good progress in your lessons. You are rightly proud of your achievements.

- The teaching is good and assessment is getting better, although some of you are not sure what your targets are and how well you are doing in reaching these. We have asked the school to help you more with this. We have also asked the senior managers to make sure that the targets they have set for improving your achievement are clear and challenging.

? You appreciate the good support you receive in the small class groups and tell us that this helps you to concentrate better.

- Your behaviour in lessons and around school is good. The older students show considerable maturity and are a good example to the younger ones.
- Most of you attend school regularly and this is good, but attendance still needs to be improved.
- The governors support the school well and are keen to make sure that your move to the new site goes smoothly.

Once again, thank you for your warm welcome and may we offer you our very best wishes for the future.