

# Northwood School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	102445
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hillingdon
<b>Inspection number</b>	319393
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 May 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Barry Jones

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	857
6th form	172
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Anne Edmonds
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Carol Ketley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14 March 2007
<b>School address</b>	Potter Street Northwood HA6 1QG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01923 836 363
<b>Fax number</b>	01923 836 010

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<b>Age group</b>	11-18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and who speak English as an additional language are above average. A small proportion of pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The number of students who leave or join the school at unusual times is higher than usually found. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is average. These are mainly for specific or moderate learning difficulties or for behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. In addition, the school has a small Special Resource Provision for eight students with language and communication difficulties. The school has severe falling rolls in the main school. This decline has largely resulted from reorganisation of schools both within the borough and in a neighbouring authority. Entry numbers have fallen for those joining in Year 7 and Year 12. The school became a business and enterprise specialist college in September 2004. The school has achieved Investors in People status. It experiences difficulty in recruiting key staff.

As a result of the previous inspection, the school was given a Notice to Improve as significant improvement was required in attendance and in relation to achievement in English, mathematics and science, especially in Years 7 to 9. A further area for development was to increase the proportion of good teaching. A monitoring visit by HMI in November 2007 found that the school was making good progress on these issues.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

In accordance with Section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

The school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory. It has made good progress in the areas identified as weaknesses in the previous report. Improvements in attendance are outstanding while students' achievement has improved in all three key stages in line with better teaching. This has been accomplished by a strengthening of the senior management team. This effective work by senior managers is being undermined by the impact of the very sharp decline in the number of students joining the school. There is a recovery plan agreed with the local authority. However, it is predicated on entry numbers to the school that are not being met by a very considerable margin. There is still uncertainty over future numbers of students that are likely to join the school. This aspect is largely beyond the school's control. However, the school's financial planning and plans for developing a curriculum for forthcoming years, have not been modified sufficiently. Currently planning does not demonstrate that plans for expanding the main school curriculum are affordable. Although the school provides an acceptable standard of education and has a strong, capable management team, capacity for further improvement is therefore inadequate.

Standards are below average in most respects although the trend is upwards, particularly at Key Stage 3. There is still a legacy of underachievement in Key Stage 4 particularly, due to weaknesses in teaching in the past. Consequently, in 2007 many students did not make the progress they should have in the GCSE examinations. Students' progress in English and mathematics still lags behind that in other subjects. The tracking of students' progress has been improved and is now good. This shows that the picture is improving because students are making satisfactory progress in lessons across the school; in the sixth form students make good progress. Teachers plan well and make effective use of interactive whiteboards. They make more effective use of assessment data to plan lessons, though this varies across classes. The same work is too often provided to all the students in a class. The school has invested heavily into staffing the mixed-ability groups in Years 7 and 8. The school has retained five teaching groups for most subjects and six for physical education and technology even though the numbers are consistent with a three-form entry. Students in these small classes make average progress but not the rapid acceleration expected, given the high commitment of resources. This initiative has not provided satisfactory value for money and the school has acknowledged that it has to increase class sizes next year.

The school has adopted very rigorous procedures to improve attendance that have been pursued relentlessly. Consequently, attendance has improved to average levels from being well below previously. Procedures for improving behaviour are also good. However, agreed policies are not implemented consistently by all staff. Senior managers adopt a high profile around the school and consequently it is orderly. In classes a minority of boys do not always behave appropriately. These boys do not do as well as they should in their work. They also command too much of the teachers' attention and so detract from other students' progress. This is rightly raised as a concern by parents and other students. Until recently, because of difficulties in making a specialist needs appointment, the provision for students with moderate and specific learning difficulties has not been well organised. This is now rectified and these students make the same progress as their classmates. Students in the Specialist Resource Provision are usefully included in mainstream classes for the majority of their time. However, the teachers and the

Specialist Resource Provision staff do not collaborate strongly enough and some of the work given to the students is not suited to their needs. There is inadequate oversight by senior managers and these issues are not being tackled sufficiently rigorously. There are strengths to students' personal development. They have a good understanding of healthy issues. They also have a mature understanding of other cultures and beliefs.

The management of the school's specialist status as a business and enterprise college is good. Students do better in these subjects than in most of their other subjects. The specialist subjects have contributed significantly to improving teaching and learning by sharing good practice. It has been a driving force for the introduction of more vocational courses. The school makes a valuable contribution to developing these specialisms in other secondary schools through a local network. There are some innovative ideas for developing the curriculum further. These are sound aims as the intake to the school has changed markedly in the last few years. It now receives fewer higher attaining students than previously and relatively more who would benefit from a vocational type of course. However, the ambitious proposals imply an expansion in provision when the reality is that the school is faced with making some painful cuts. The school has not grasped the nettle in the recent past and so inspectors do not have confidence that these plans can be realised within the current constraints.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards in advanced level examinations are a little below average overall but are improving and students achieve well. An average proportion obtain a pass at A level but fewer than in most schools attain the highest grades. Standards improved in 2007 and were better than the average for the local authority. In the past, the school accepted onto advanced academic courses students who had lower prior attainment than in most other sixth forms. For some, the demands were too great and a significant proportion did not complete their two-year course. Most of the remaining students made good progress as a result of good teaching. The school has modified the curriculum for current students. It is now good and meets the needs of all students because of the increased number of vocational courses. Results in modular examinations this year and the school's own effective tracking shows that students are now achieving well. The improvements in the curriculum are demonstrated since there are few drop-outs from courses. The school is not complacent and further improvements are planned. However, the current financial constraints present too many uncertainties in relation to the affordability of the planned changes. Consequently, this limits the school's capacity to make further improvements.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Work with the local authority to urgently revise the recovery plan to ensure that the school can continue to provide an acceptable standard of education based on realistic projections for student numbers.
- Raise standards in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all students are enabled to make good progress.
- Ensure that all boys behave and achieve well.
- Ensure that there is effective oversight of the Special Resource Provision.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## Achievement and standards

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The great majority of students are now making satisfactory progress in lessons. This has been underpinned by a more rigorous analysis of data and tracking of students' progress. For instance, in science the new head of department identified that students had weak skills in investigative and practical aspects of the work. The curriculum was modified, teachers received extra training and this was monitored well. The school's own monitoring shows that standards have risen as a result. The school has received considerable support from the local authority for raising standards in English. Under the leadership of the new head of department this is beginning to pay dividends. However, more work remains to be done to ensure that students achieve well in English and mathematics. A minority of boys, mainly White British, do less well but other ethnic groups are achieving satisfactorily.

## Personal development and well-being

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Most students enjoy school and feel safe. However, there are a few students who do not always feel confident enough to report bullying and this concerns some parents. Behaviour is improving as shown by the reduced number of exclusions and frequency of incidents within the school. However, the behaviour of a few boys particularly remains a concern. As one student observed, 'they spoil it for the rest'. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. Generally, students engage well with both visitors and their peers. The school council takes its role seriously. Its ideas for polo neck shirts were adopted by the school. Enterprise days have been introduced into the curriculum to develop entrepreneurship. All departments carry out an audit of enterprise within their area. Year 7 students run an enterprise club and there is an active Young Enterprise for students in the sixth form. Visits from businesses give students the necessary skills to prepare them for the world of work. Students in the sixth form receive good guidance, including having a personal mentor, for continuing to higher education. Sixth formers contribute well to the school and to the local community. They are involved in mentoring younger students and in links with primary schools and a local special school.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The proportion of good teaching is increasing, but there remain inconsistencies in practice, for example, in the setting of appropriate and regular homework. Good use has been made of professional development and more rigorous monitoring of teaching to broaden the range of strategies used in lessons. Students welcome the increased use of group work and opportunities to use whiteboards interactively. Lesson objectives are shared with students and increasingly good use is being made of self and peer assessment. However, teachers make insufficient use of assessments to plan for the range of needs within classes. Whilst students indicate that they find marking helpful, much provides too little information on what they need to do to improve.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum is satisfactory in the main school and good in the sixth form. Improvements in recent years underpin the better progress made by students. There is a good range of enrichment activities and provision is enhanced through the school's specialism in business and enterprise. Students are offered a good range of subjects in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, with increasing provision for vocational pathways from 14 to 18 to meet the differing needs of groups of students. For example, a successful course is offered from Year 10 in hairdressing and a course in construction is being offered from September 2008. Planning for future development of the sixth form is good. Links are being developed with colleges and other schools to ensure the viability of options. Courses such as applied science are being introduced as they better match students' needs than some traditional A-levels. In contrast, planning for the reduced roll in the lower years is insufficiently developed. Smaller classes in Years 7 and 8 have not been used effectively to ensure good achievement and viable, coherent proposals for when these year groups reach Years 10 and 11 have not been developed. Provision for work-related learning is good. Students receive good advice on careers, option choices and planning for university and there is a good programme of work-related activities for all year groups.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Staff show a high level of commitment to supporting students, who in turn look after each other well. Students have a form tutor and a Year Learning Co-ordinator. The coordinators are effective first ports of call for the day-to-day issues that may arise to disturb learning. They also have an effective oversight of students' academic and personal development and this is helping to raise achievement. Learning mentors also work well with Year 11 students. However, not all students know their targets or how they might improve further. Students attending the Specialist Resource Provision benefit from caring staff who work hard to be there for the students at all times of the school day. When students are taught individually, work is often not appropriate for the age of the student and does not best meet the needs of the individuals. Whilst students with moderate and specific learning difficulties are identified appropriately, the co-ordination of support arrangements was ineffective for some period of time due to changes in staff. Senior leaders have recognised the urgent need to address this aspect of its work and appropriate steps are being taken to rectify this. Currently, the targets on individual education plans are not the practical, helpful tool that they are meant to be. Consequently, student's individual and particular needs are not always met fully and this prevents some students from making good progress.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 3

#### Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are satisfactory. There are some good procedures and practices. The school has received valued support from the local authority and other consultants. There is now a good system for tracking students' progress. The assessment data are shared effectively with other managers who use it well. Senior managers monitor the quality of teaching rigorously. These measures have contributed very significantly to the rising standards. The sixth form is thriving and this owes much to its good leadership and the way the school has responded positively to changing circumstances. Middle leaders are receiving appropriate training and their role is being extended. For example, they contribute usefully to the monitoring of teaching and learning although there is insufficient attention on the progress being made by students in their observations. The school recognises that there is more work to do. Some lower attaining boys do not achieve as well as others. The school is tackling this and initiatives are beginning to have an impact.

The school has clearly demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve if it could continue at its current level of resourcing. However, it has been living beyond its means and the school's good work is at risk of being undone. The triggers for the plummeting school roll were beyond the school's control. Abrupt changes in the school roll of this magnitude would be exceptionally difficult for any school to manage. The governors' initial strategy was to boost the marketing of the school but this has not been successful. The recovery plan, agreed with the local authority, is flawed because it is based on predictions for student numbers that are proving to be far too optimistic. The number on roll is currently falling by over 100 students a year and this trend seems set to continue in the medium term. Acceptances for students starting in Year 7 in September 2008 are running at less than a third of what they were only three years ago. The resulting high staffing level is very costly and the current curriculum provision is unlikely to be sustainable. However, there is no contingency plan, nor any revised plan for recovery, based on more realistic estimates of student numbers. This contributes to inadequate forward planning. For instance, plans for expansion of the curriculum take insufficient account of the serious budgetary position. The sixth form is better placed as there is a smaller drop in numbers and it is actively exploring links with other providers. However, given the lack of a realistic overall plan agreed by all responsible parties, it is not clear that the sixth form will be able to avoid cuts in provision too.



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## 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?	3	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?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	3

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	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	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	2

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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

04 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Northwood School, Northwood, HA6 1QG

Many thanks for your help and cooperation when we inspected your school recently. Unfortunately, we could not speak to as many of you as we would have wished. This was because the Year 11 and most of the sixth formers were preparing for external examinations. Year 10 students were also out of school doing work experience. We were able to meet with groups of students and to talk to others in classes or around the school. Some of your school council told us how they had been able to influence the choice of polo neck jumpers. You told us that you enjoy school and feel safe there.

Most of you will remember that you were inspected about a year ago. This is a follow up visit to check on how well the school is doing. We find that the school has made good progress on the issues raised in the last report. It now offers a satisfactory standard of education to you. The improvements in your attendance are outstanding – keep it up! You are doing better in your work throughout the school and this is very encouraging. The sixth form is thriving and its students do well academically and socially. Teachers have worked hard on your behalf and the school's leaders have brought in some good policies. On the whole these are working. Behaviour is much improved but there is still some work to do. Some of you and your parents are rightly concerned that sometimes lessons are disrupted by the misbehaviour of a few – usually boys, but not always. You will be aware that the opening of a new school nearby and other events has meant that the school now has fewer students. This means that it receives less money. The school will need to budget accordingly and some of its planning does not fully take this into account.

There are five ways in which we have asked the school to improve further.

- Agree with the local authority how the school will be able to provide you with a good education.
- Raise standards further in English and mathematics in Years 10 and 11.
- Make sure that all the teaching is good.
- Ensure that all boys behave and achieve well.
- Senior managers should check on how well the students in the Special Resource Provision are doing.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Barry Jones

Lead Inspector