

Newport Free Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115352
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326186
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Rhona Seviour HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1016
Sixth form	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Paul Grey
Headteacher	Mr Shaun O'Hagan
Date of previous school inspection	15 March 2006
School address	Bury Water Lane Newport Saffron Walden Essex CB11 3TR
Telephone number	01799 540237
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Newport Free Grammar School was granted specialist status in languages in 2003 and in science in 2008. The school is regularly oversubscribed and a number of students join the sixth form from other schools. Most of the students come from homes which are relatively socially and economically advantaged. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, from a minority ethnic background or who do not speak English as their first language are below the national averages. On entry to the school in Year 7, students' attainment is above the national average, with fewer less able students and more able students than average.

The school holds the International School and Sportsmark awards and was a founder member of Euroschoolnet 2000, a network of thirteen educational institutions across Europe. It is a member of a consortium of schools and a local college which collaborate in providing courses for the 14-19 age range. It works in partnership with the University of Cambridge to provide initial teacher training. The headteacher has been in post since 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Newport Free Grammar provides a satisfactory quality of education and some aspects of its work are good or outstanding. The school's specialist status in languages and, more recently, in science has had a beneficial impact and in both these areas there are examples of outstanding practice, high standards and good achievement. The school has a good curriculum with some highly distinctive features. The number of languages offered is impressive as, increasingly, is the provision in science. In addition to a varied array of activities, both in and out of school, that make learning more relevant and interesting, there is an impressively rich and diverse extra-curricular programme. This includes a vast range of international exchanges that makes an excellent contribution to the good level of students' personal, social and cultural development and contributes to the school's effectiveness in promoting community cohesion.

The school provides good care, support and guidance for its students. Staff and students get on well with each other and, consequently, the school's environment is happy and harmonious. Students are well motivated, confident and ambitious to succeed and often have a maturity beyond their years. They relish the chance to express their views and contribute to the work of the school and, quite rightly, would like the school to provide more such opportunities. Teachers know their subjects well, but the quality of teaching and learning, although satisfactory, varies considerably across the school. The best lessons take full account of students' individual abilities and, through a range of creative strategies, provide the challenge students need to achieve well. In weaker lessons, students have insufficient opportunity to question, collaborate, discuss or think for themselves and often spend lengthy periods listening passively. On occasions, this results in students' loss of attention and deterioration in their behaviour.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has guided the school to a recognition that standards, although above average, are below those of comparable schools and that achievement should be better than satisfactory. In response, the school has identified what it needs to do to improve but actions have yet to make a full impact. This is because they have not had time to do so and because of a lack of consistency and coherence in the implementation of some planned improvements. This is evident in the varying effectiveness with which middle leaders and managers monitor and evaluate teaching and learning and plan for improvements in students' achievement. In addition, the school has not sought the views of parents or students sufficiently or created enough opportunities for sharing its best practice across departments. The school is very well served by its strong governing body and well-informed chair of governors and has received very helpful advice and support for its improvement from the local authority. Governors, and the effective senior leadership team, are ambitious for the school and provide it with good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form has improved since the last inspection. It now has an outstanding curriculum and most other aspects, including its leadership and management, are good. As in the main school, teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students have the opportunity to select from a very wide range of advanced level courses, including applied or vocational subjects. The programme of courses is well organised and structured to allow as much flexibility as possible to meet students' individual needs and aspirations. It is produced with full awareness of other local provision and operates both on the school's site and elsewhere. As in the rest of the

school, the sixth form curriculum is enriched by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities including music, drama, field trips, language and cultural exchanges, sport and other leisure activities. The number of Year 11 students continuing their education or training is very high and very few leave the sixth form before completing their courses. As in the main school, standards are above average and, because of the close tracking of students' progress, individual mentoring and the excellent curriculum, achievement is good. Students enjoy their lessons and find the sixth form a happy and friendly place to be. Although they have reasonable concerns about the setting and use of targets, students are well supported by their teachers who, they feel, are prepared to 'go the extra mile' to help them.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching takes more account of students' individual needs and includes a wider range of strategies to engage and challenge students so that they all achieve their full potential.
- Improve the effectiveness with which middle leaders and managers monitor and evaluate teaching and learning and plan for improvements in students' achievement and standards.
- Ensure that actions designed to bring about improvement, such as sharing best practice in teaching, are implemented quickly, consistently and coherently across the school.
- Improve communications with parents and seek their views, and those of the students, more frequently.

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

Standards in Key Stages 3 and 4 are consistently above the national averages but, for some years, they have not been as high as those in similar schools. Between Years 7 and 11, the vast majority of students make at least satisfactory progress. Their progress in the areas for which the school has specialist status is particularly good and this is reflected in results in the GCSE examinations which are well above the national average. Whilst the proportion of students achieving the highest grades is below that found nationally, sixth form achievement has significantly improved since the last inspection and is now good.

The school is ambitious for its students and sets very challenging targets for their attainment at the end of Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations. Over the last three years it has met or exceeded the attainment targets linked with its specialist languages status but has not been successful in meeting those for attainment in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 or the percentage of students gaining 5 or more A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations. To raise achievement, senior leaders have taken steps to improve the quality of teaching and the effectiveness with which the school tracks students' progress and responds to instances of underachievement. Evidence from improving mid-year assessments indicates that, although still at an early stage, actions have the potential to raise standards to the level of other comparable schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school has a friendly environment in which students feel valued, supported and safe. They enjoy school and get on well with one another and with their teachers. Students are keen to learn and their attendance is good. In lessons, they willingly contribute their ideas and, when doing so, are impressively articulate and confident. They are also very mature and an indication of this is their wish to be consulted more about aspects of the school's work, particularly their learning in lessons. Students show a good awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural matters and are able to discuss difficult and controversial issues in a thoughtful and serious way. They are generally well behaved and this is reflected in the decline in exclusions since the last inspection. However, there are occasions when the seemingly established culture of friendly chatter spills into lessons and is an impediment to learning. Bullying is rare and students are confident that any incidents will be tackled effectively by staff. Students are well aware of the importance of healthy eating and exercise and participate enthusiastically in the extensive range of sporting activities. Their strong personal and social skills, academic abilities, information and communication technology (ICT) capability and confidence with foreign languages mean that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and their future careers.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teachers' strong subject knowledge is a strength of the teaching. However, teaching quality varies and there is not enough that is good or outstanding to ensure that all students achieve their full potential. In the best lessons, teaching is carefully planned to reflect students' different abilities and activities are varied to engage and challenge students. In these lessons students have the opportunity to use their initiative, work in groups and develop problem-solving skills. They know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to achieve their targets. Class and homework is marked regularly and National Curriculum or examination criteria are used effectively to guide students. Less successful lessons are dominated by teachers' talking and provide insufficient opportunity or encouragement for students to think for themselves or extend their good ability to ask questions. Planning for these lessons is often cursory. On occasions, behaviour deteriorates and the pace of learning slows because students talk, sometimes over the voice of the teacher, and distract one other.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum, some aspects of which are outstanding. Across all key stages, the curriculum is broad and flexible and is regularly adjusted in response to students' needs, the needs of the local area and national initiatives. Innovative plans for the future are well designed to provide even greater flexibility, particularly for accelerated learning. In addition to meeting all statutory requirements, the curriculum strongly reflects the school's specialist status in languages and science. There are excellent opportunities for students to study a number of foreign languages, including Latin, and the increasingly wide range of science courses now includes vocational options and astronomy. The school offers an impressive range of examination courses both at GCSE and advanced level and, since the last inspection, has expanded considerably the vocational and work-related options available to students. The

introduction of new diploma courses in 2009/10 will extend this further. There have also been improvements in the provision for ICT and personal, social and health education and citizenship, areas in which previous inspections identified weaknesses. The main school curriculum is enriched by an exceptionally wide range of visits, exchanges, clubs and sports and arts activities, as well as opportunities for students to contribute to work in other schools.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's systems and procedures ensure that the students receive good care, guidance and support. Child protection and safeguarding requirements and procedures are securely in place and meet all the statutory requirements. The senior leadership team, directors of learning, form tutors, mentors and teaching assistants provide an effective support network across the school. To supplement their work, the school liaises well with local authority and health services and with voluntary agencies. There are effective systems for identifying and supporting students who are vulnerable or at risk and, for these students, there is excellent pastoral care. In addition, students who find learning more difficult are well supported and their progress is regularly reviewed. Although teaching assistants are deployed well in response to students' individual needs, lesson planning does not always provide sufficient direction for their work. This results in their under-use in some lessons.

Over the last eighteen months the school has strengthened the systems for tracking students' progress and, consequently, staff at all levels are becoming better at identifying students who are not making sufficient progress towards their targets. The school has devised a range of strategies to support Year 11 students who are at risk of underachieving but makes limited use of similar interventions in other years. Through their responses to the inspection questionnaire, parents indicated their wish for more frequent feedback on students' progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Over the last two years, the headteacher, aided by an increasingly effective senior leadership team, has accurately identified what the school needs to do to improve and has led a number of necessary improvements. These include the introduction of systems for tracking students' progress, changes to the curriculum and the restructuring of senior leadership. These changes, while still fairly new, are beginning to make a positive impact on achievement. Nonetheless, the school has variable success in meeting its challenging attainment targets. Although senior leaders now monitor and evaluate the school's work more rigorously, the effectiveness with which middle leaders carry out similar responsibilities varies. Whereas some middle leaders evaluate teaching and plan for improvement very effectively, this is not the case in all areas. Inconsistencies and lack of coherence are also evident in some other aspects of the school's work, including its communication with parents. A quarter of the parents responding to the inspection questionnaire do not feel the school takes sufficient account of their views. In contrast, the school does much to develop and maintain productive national and international links and to work in collaboration with local schools, colleges and universities. In doing so, it is successfully promoting community cohesion. The governing body is effective and provides the critical challenge the school needs to improve. In particular, the very well informed chair of the governing body accurately analyses the school's effectiveness and contributes an expert

strategic steer to its improvement. Given students' current achievement, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

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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	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	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
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 learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

27 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Newport Free Grammar School, Newport, CB11 3TR

As you know, I recently visited your school for two days with three other inspectors. On behalf of the team, I should like to thank you for the help you gave us during the inspection. I am writing to you now to give you feedback on our findings and to highlight the school's good features as well as those that need to be improved.

We were impressed by many aspects of your school. There is an excellent range of opportunities to help you develop as responsible young people. These include all the clubs, foreign exchanges, outside visits, sporting and arts activities and the in-school events, some of which are designed to raise funds for charities. There is a good curriculum, with an outstanding range of courses in languages, science and the sixth form. You are well supported by the staff and you told us that you feel confident they will deal effectively with any difficulties you experience. Your teachers know their subjects well and, although teaching across the school is satisfactory, some of it is good and outstanding. You get on well with each other and with your teachers and generally behave well although, on occasions, you chatter too much in class. When this happens, we noticed that you all learn less. You are interested, inquisitive and keen to succeed. In our discussions with you, you spoke with great confidence and showed us how proud you are to be students at the school.

Newport provides a satisfactory quality of education. Although the majority of you reach standards which are above the national average, we know you are capable of making more progress. We have asked the school to make sure that the teaching and work of all subject departments is at the same high standard as the very best we saw. To achieve this, we want the school to improve the way it monitors and evaluates its work. Before we arrived, the school had already planned to take more account of your views and find ways for you to contribute more to decision-making. We want them to do so quickly. We are grateful to the parents of around 400 students who returned our questionnaire. We agree with your parents that, although the school does many things well, aspects of its work, including its communications with parents, need to improve. We know your school wants to improve and we are confident you will do your best to help it. We wish you all the very best for your future education.

Yours sincerely

Rhona Seviour

Her Majesty's Inspector