

Northampton Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134814
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	341532
Inspection dates	10–11 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Martin Cragg HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1348
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Tice
Headteacher	Mr Peter Hullah (Principle)
Date of previous school inspection	31 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 38 lessons, involving 38 teachers. They also conducted brief visits with a senior leader to 18 lessons, selected randomly, to review students' behaviour and attitudes. They held meetings with groups of students, staff, governors and some parents. They observed the school's work, and looked at the academy development plan, governors' policies and minutes, and current assessment, exclusion and attendance data. Inspectors considered 78 parental, 156 student and 70 staff questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the learning and progress of students in lessons and through the academy's assessment information
- the behaviour and attendance of students, especially those who may be vulnerable
- the consistency and effectiveness of teaching, lesson planning and assessment
- how effectively the curriculum caters for the needs of a range of students
- the effectiveness of leaders at all levels in monitoring performance, evaluating progress and bringing about improvement.

Information about the school

The academy is larger than average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. There are more students from minority ethnic groups than average but the proportion who speak English as an additional language is in line with that nationally. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average. These students most commonly have moderate learning difficulties, specific learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and social needs. The academy has specialisms in sport and business / enterprise. It holds the Healthy Schools and International School awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The academy provides a satisfactory but improving education for its students. Over the last three years, results for Year 11 students and for the sixth form have improved rapidly, successfully narrowing the gap with the national average. Students now make at least satisfactory progress and an increasing proportion make good progress. As a result, achievement is satisfactory and improving. This improvement arises from the clear vision and direction set by senior staff and governors. The academy's evaluation of its performance is accurate and staff have a sharp understanding of the areas where improvement is required. The academy has acted to improve teaching and revised policies and practice to raise achievement further. The best example of this is in the Academy 7 curriculum which gives Year 7 students more contact with their home tutor and fewer teachers overall. This initiative is popular with students and parents and already students are making accelerated progress. The academy has good capacity to improve further.

Teaching is satisfactory overall with examples of excellent practice, but there are also inconsistencies in approach. Where teaching is best, relationships in class are very strong and teachers' expectations are clear. Students respond positively and make very good progress. However, this good practice is not routinely shared across all staff. In other lessons, teachers do not always fully understand the range of students' needs. They do not match work sufficiently accurately to students' attainment nor give them opportunities to take responsibility for their learning. Although marking is satisfactory, it varies in quality, and it is not always clear what students need to do to improve their work. The curriculum is broad and provides effectively for the needs of a range of students. The academy specialisms in sport and business make a good contribution to achievement and broaden the range of experiences for students, especially in extra-curricular activities. Pastoral care is effective and students' progress is carefully monitored. The relatively large number of students with a wide range of specific needs receive valuable support through intervention classes and mentoring.

Students make effective contributions to the academy through a range of roles, for example as sports leaders or ambassadors. They generally understand the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. In questionnaires, a few students said that they did not feel safe in the academy and around one third of the parents who replied were not satisfied that behaviour was dealt with effectively. Inspectors looked carefully at these concerns in lessons, around the buildings and by random checks on a number of lessons. They found that most students behave well in lessons and around the academy, showing respect for each other and staff. However, in a few lessons, teaching did not sufficiently challenge students and behaviour declined as a result. Not all teachers use the agreed

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system for managing behaviour. Attendance has improved and is satisfactory. Academy staff work hard with the small number of students whose attendance or punctuality is not acceptable and this number is decreasing.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality and consistency of teaching by:
 - ensuring that work is carefully matched to the needs and ability of all students
 - developing students' confidence and skills to learn independently and take initiative in their work
 - providing clear guidance to all students through teachers' marking, comments and oral feedback on how they might improve their work.
- Raise outcomes for students by:
 - ensuring that all teachers use the academy's systems effectively to manage and improve behaviour
 - developing the skills of all teachers to respond effectively to the range of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - working with parents to improve further students' engagement, punctuality and attendance.
- Develop communication across the academy by:
 - ensuring that students' views and ideas are fully taken into account
 - providing prompt and flexible response to parents' queries and concerns
 - ensuring that effective practice is widely shared among all staff to improve outcomes for students.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students enter the academy with attainment which is well below the national average. The attainment of Year 11 students has improved significantly each year since 2007 and it was below average in 2009. The proportion achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C was 34% in 2007 and 59% in 2009. This figure, including English and mathematics, moved from 22% to 40%. The academy comfortably reached the National Challenge benchmark and exceeded its own challenging targets. Students made at least satisfactory progress in 2009, showing marked improvement in the last three years. The academy's assessment data for the current Year 11 indicates that they are on track to improve again on the 2009 results, bringing attainment close to the average and representing improved progress. Assessment data for other years shows a majority are on track to reach their targets which are set above the levels expected of students nationally. The progress made by students from minority ethnic groups and those who

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speak English as an additional language is at least satisfactory. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress and those with statements of special educational need make better progress than their peers because of highly effective support and the increasingly differentiated curriculum.

In the lessons observed, students made at least satisfactory and often good progress. Most concentrate well and settle to work promptly. Students of varying attainment respond positively to effective teaching, based on tasks which are engaging and matched to their needs. Students work well collaboratively and enjoy practical tasks and the opportunity to be creative. However, in a few lessons, where the challenge is not at the right level or students are not given sufficient opportunity to learn for themselves, their concentration waivers.

Most students behave well. Students feel that incidences of bullying are usually dealt with effectively. They understand the steps they should take to be healthy and safe. Many, including groups whose circumstances have made them vulnerable, participate in the wide range of sport and other extra-curricular activities. The academy council is active but some students feel that their concerns and suggestions are not always taken into account. Students have opportunities to consider different faiths and reflect on important issues. They understand the need to respect and tolerate each other and different groups of students relate well to each other. There are numerous links with schools and organisations in this and other countries which extend students' understanding of other cultures, as reflected in the International School Award. Attendance is broadly average and the academy is working hard to improve the punctuality of a few students. There are effective opportunities for students to learn about the world of work through formal work experience and aspects of the curriculum, supported by the academy's business specialism.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching varies but is satisfactory overall. Over half of the teaching observed was good. Here, teachers have good subject knowledge and plan activities to interest students, including effective use of technology. They form strong relationships in class which enable students to be confident and to work independently. They use questions well to develop learning and assess students' progress. However, in the less effective lessons, teachers often do not have sufficient skills to cater for a wide range of students' needs. These teachers tend to lead learning too much without giving students opportunities to apply what they have learnt. Academy policies, for example to manage behaviour or feed back to students, are not followed consistently. As a result, students' progress is satisfactory rather than good.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and has been amended effectively to meet the needs of students better. Students in Year 7 now benefit from a specially designed programme which supports their development as learners and builds their literacy and social skills. Year 9 students start GCSE and vocational courses early and there is an increasing range of specific provision for students who find the standard curriculum difficult. There is effective intervention to improve literacy and revision skills. The academy specialisms in sport and business are popular option choices and extend opportunities for students, along with the growing range of extra-curricular activities, events and trips.

Students are supported well to ensure that they make progress in their lessons. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities benefit from a range of strategies, including close liaison with external agencies. Focused support in the 'Progress Zone' or learning support unit enables them to make progress and develop confidence. This has already improved behaviour and increased attendance. Students are well supported as they transfer in to Year 7. The academy, in conjunction with the Connexions service, ensures that students make an appropriate choice of courses and prepares them well for moving on at 16 so that the percentage leaving the academy and not engaging in education, employment or training has dramatically reduced.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The principal, with senior staff and governors, sets a clear direction for the academy based on effective evaluation of its strengths and areas for development. The academy sets ambitious targets and high expectations. This has led to consistently improving results for Year 11 and the sixth form. There is a well-established and effective cycle of monitoring and evaluation, strongly based on analysis of students' performance, which helps to drive improvement. Senior and middle leaders use this evaluation to identify key priorities and detailed plans for action. The resulting improvements to outcomes and to the curriculum support the academy's good capacity to improve further.

There is a systematic approach to improving teaching which includes coaching and training for teachers. Middle leaders are increasingly accountable for performance in their area of responsibility and respond positively to this challenge. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the academy, derived from regular review of its performance and direct contact with subject leaders. Key governors closely supervise important areas of the academy's work such as safeguarding and behaviour.

The academy promotes equality and tackles discrimination well. The progress of key groups of students is monitored closely and analysed regularly. Their achievement is at least in line with and often better than the average for all students. The academy's promotion of community cohesion is good. It is a harmonious community where students from different backgrounds mix successfully. There are few racial incidents and these are dealt with firmly. Students understand different faiths and cultures and the strong focus on the global curriculum, reinforced by International School status, promotes awareness of issues in this country and abroad. There are strong links within the local community and a large number of adults use the academy facilities, including for family learning and support groups. Safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. Policies are regularly reviewed and staff receive relevant training. There are effective links with local agencies to support students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. A few parents in their questionnaire responses did not feel that the academy responded to their views and concerns. Inspectors found that there was a regular and effective system for communicating students' progress to parents and a newly-formed 'parents' voice' group. However, some parents clearly feel that communication on behaviour and educational matters is not always effective.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Outcomes in the sixth form are satisfactory and improving. Results are now close to average overall and strongest in applied and vocational courses. Students make at least satisfactory progress. Their performance is closely monitored and current assessment information indicates that most are on track to achieve their targets. Students have good personal skills and make an effective contribution across the academy, helping younger students with literacy coaching and preparation for work. Teaching is effective with good opportunities for students to develop independence and understand how they will be assessed. The curriculum is increasingly broad and is developing to build on the range of choices available to Key Stage 4 students. There is effective support for students arising from tutors' regular review of their progress with them, including preparation for higher education. Sixth form leaders work collaboratively and are well-informed. Increasingly, they liaise closely with subject leaders and teachers to ensure the quality of learning and to review any underperformance in subjects or by groups of students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Views of parents and carers

Relatively few questionnaires were received from parents and carers. The majority were positive and there were some strong statements of support for the work of the academy. However, around a quarter to a third of parents were not satisfied with behaviour, how their views are taken into account and how they are helped to support their child's learning. Inspectors focused on behaviour in lessons and around the building. They found that most students behaved well and that the atmosphere in the academy was positive. They agreed that, although students' progress is communicated regularly, there was an opportunity for the academy to improve its communication with parents over concerns that they raise. The group of parents who met with inspectors were very positive about the work of the academy and communication.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Northampton Academy to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 78 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1348 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	27	41	53	9	12	6	8
The school keeps my child safe	24	31	42	54	10	13	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	23	29	43	55	8	10	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	18	23	44	57	9	12	5	6
The teaching is good at this school	15	19	40	51	12	15	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	26	35	45	18	23	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	22	41	53	14	18	3	4
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	27	38	49	9	12	3	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	18	49	63	9	12	4	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	17	32	41	14	18	11	14
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	19	36	46	16	21	5	6
The school is led and managed effectively	17	22	39	50	12	15	4	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	26	38	49	9	12	6	8

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



12 May 2010

Dear students

Inspection of Northampton Academy, Northampton, NN3 8NH

Thank you for the welcome you gave when we visited the academy. We enjoyed talking to you in lessons, meetings and at breaks. Thanks also to those who filled in a questionnaire. This letter is to tell you what we found on our inspection.

The academy is satisfactory overall and improving every year. The results achieved by Year 11 students and the sixth form have risen significantly, particularly in English and mathematics. You are mostly on track to achieve your challenging targets. In lessons, most of you concentrate, behave and work well. You particularly enjoy practical tasks and working together. Your attendance and punctuality are also improving. You receive some good teaching but, overall, teaching is satisfactory. The best teachers are very good at building your confidence and getting you to apply what you learn. The curriculum is developing. Year 7 students benefit from the new 'Academy 7' programme which is already improving their progress. Those of you in Years 9 and 10 have a wider and more flexible range of courses to choose from, as do sixth formers. There is also an effective range of extra support for you through intervention and revision classes. Most of you know your targets and could tell us what you need to do to improve your work. You get on well together and show respect for each other and the very good facilities. You told us that any problems were usually dealt with by staff.

We asked the academy to improve in some areas. We recommended that:

- teachers set you work at the right level, give you the chance to try out what you have learnt, provide you with a clearer understanding of what you need to do to make your work better
- teachers use the behaviour policy consistently across all lessons, understand better how to help those of you who have particular needs, and work with your parents to improve your attendance further
- your views and ideas are taken into account more, and your parents' concerns are recognised and responded to.

I am sure that the academy will continue to improve. I wish you success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Cragg

Her Majesty's Inspector

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