

The Gateway School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	122162
Local authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	380408
Inspection dates	22–23 March 2012
Lead inspector	Charles Hackett

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bernard Ingram
Headteacher	David Lloyd (Principal)
Date of previous school inspection	8 May 2009
School address	St John's Road Tiffield Northampton NN12 8AA
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Introduction

Inspection team

Charles Hackett

Additional inspector

Lynda Walker

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors observed 11 lessons, taught by 11 different teachers, visited an assembly and listened to students read. Meetings were held with staff and two members of the governing body. Discussions were held with students about their work and views of the school, and inspectors joined students for lunch.

The inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at students' work and information on their progress. Safeguarding policies and other documents were evaluated. Questionnaires completed by five parents and carers, 20 staff and 23 pupils were scrutinised.

Information about the school

The Gateway school caters for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many have additional special needs that include moderate and specific learning difficulties, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). A small number of students with significant behavioural difficulties are educated part time on-site and at other times access alternative providers and college placements. An above average number of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. Almost all students are White British. The school is led by a Principal and a head of school. It has received a number of awards, the most recent being the Inclusion Mark and the Basic Skills Mark.

The school moved to its current purpose-built site four years ago and is now creating a new purpose-built vocational training facility on its site which is expected to open by the start of the next academic year.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- The Gateway is a good school. It successfully engages students in learning, many of whom were previously reluctant to access education. As a result students make good and, for some, outstanding progress. Most greatly improve their behaviour and attendance. The school is not outstanding because there are a few inconsistencies in the effectiveness of teaching, and vocational training opportunities are limited.
- Students' good progress reflects their increased enjoyment of learning. Many now pass GCSEs when earlier in their school careers this seemed unlikely. Those students who join the school with reading difficulties often make excellent improvement.
- Teaching is usually very effective because of the staff's high expectations of students to achieve. Teachers use their subject knowledge well to enthuse students to engage in activities, and teaching assistants play a valuable role in encouraging students to stay on task. Occasionally, teachers do not plan lessons sufficiently well to meet students' different ability levels. In a few lessons it is not always clear what students are expected to learn from the tasks set.
- Students respond well to the high expectations for their behaviour and many learn to take full responsibility for their actions. Students' very considerably improved levels of cooperation and social skills are evident in the highly positive manner they engage in weekly joint lessons with students with severe and complex learning difficulties from another special school.
- Under the determined leadership of the Principal and head of school, the quality of teaching has improved greatly. Performance is monitored robustly and positive interventions have brought about significant improvements where needed. However, there still remain a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. A strong curriculum addresses students' academic needs well.

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Students' progress is carefully tracked and excellent support is provided for literacy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- During the current academic year, improve the quality and impact of teaching so that all students make even better progress by:
 - ensuring that all teachers plan lessons that take account of students' prior achievements and focus precisely on each individual's needs
 - ensuring that all teachers follow the examples of excellent practice in the school in setting clear learning objectives for all lessons.

- During the next academic year, make full and effective use of the new vocational training facilities to extend students' achievement and their preparation for life after school.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Although only a few parents and carers responded to the inspection questionnaire, recent school surveys of their views fully agree with inspection findings. Typically in lessons, students respond well and are fully engaged in learning. In a drama lesson, for example, students created their own plot to a story and enthusiastically acted it out. Students' increased confidence allows them to take part in many of the specialised curricular courses, such as equine therapy, specific lessons at mainstream schools, work experience and taster courses at the local college.

Students develop in-depth understanding and skills in a number of subject areas. In English, for example, Year 9 students responded to images and samples of text on an interactive screen to explain the messages they convey. They discussed how the words 'narrow' and 'straw' help portray the living conditions of a character in Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men'. Students' literacy skills improve because of specific reading intervention programmes and the school's strong emphasis on reading in all subjects. Students on the intervention programmes who read to an inspector showed very good use of phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) to decipher words that were unfamiliar to them. They were rightly very proud of their progress in reading, which for some amounted to increasing their reading ages by several years in a short period of time.

Students often join the school with attainment levels well below the national average. The achievement of almost all students shows that they are increasingly narrowing the gap between their standards and nationally expected levels. The wealth of data on each student's progress shows that most achieve, and some exceed, expected rates of progress. There is no significant variation between any different groups of students, including the very few girls admitted to the school and

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those with ADHD. Those students on part-time placements who also attend external provision often make excellent progress from their very low starting points.

Quality of teaching

Teaching in all subjects of the curriculum is effective in addressing the needs of students. Where teaching is most effective teachers have very high expectations of students' behaviour and what they can achieve. In a design and technology lesson, for example, the teacher set very high standards and the good pace ensured that students were fully focused on making and painting their bird boxes. Similarly, in a food technology lesson, the very high expectations of the teacher fully engaged the students. The high quality of their finished dishes reflected the effectiveness of her teaching.

The curriculum has a positive impact on developing students' interest in a range of subjects, and students often enjoy learning because teachers are very creative in planning activities. Teaching in art is an example of this; the teacher uses a wide range of media and because she has an excellent understanding of students' previous achievements, she challenges the students very effectively to achieve well. This is not the case in all lessons. Occasionally teachers do not take sufficient account of students' abilities and prior achievements in planning tasks. This means, for example, that higher ability students are sometimes not fully challenged by the tasks set.

The focus on learning means that the pace of lessons is usually good which has a positive impact on the management of students' behaviour. The start of a Year 8 mathematics lesson was an effective example of this. As soon as pupils arrived the teacher quickly settled the class, set the scene for the tasks of the lesson and reminded students of their previous achievements. In this lesson, as in many others, the teaching assistant supported students well, noting quickly when any individual student needed specific support.

The strong focus on students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development broadens their horizons and helps develop their interests in a wide range of topics. This is usually well supported by teachers' planning for what students will learn. There are, though, a few occasions where it is not clear what students are expected to learn from undertaking the activities of the lesson. Parents and carers consider teaching to be very effective but the occasional weaknesses in the clarity of the learning objectives of lessons and matching work to students' different abilities are the key reasons why it is not judged to be outstanding.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students, parents and carers are all very confident that behaviour and safety are good and that many students make significant progress in both their behaviour and attendance. Inspection evidence supports this view. The school day runs smoothly because students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Students

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are welcoming to visitors, as demonstrated by their willingness to discuss their work and read to inspectors. This positive response means teachers can focus on learning in lessons rather than dealing with inappropriate behaviour. Students often co-operate and support each other well, such as in a physical education lesson where a more physically-able student spontaneously went to show another student how to hold his racket appropriately to enable him to hit the shuttlecock. In the weekly swimming and design and technology lessons held with students with severe and profound learning difficulties, students demonstrate strong traits of care and understanding. On the few occasions when behaviour is unacceptable, staff are very skilled at de-escalating situations and getting students back on task. This occurred in a Year 10 mathematics lesson. Students entered the classroom unsettled. The teacher amended her planned lesson and used her excellent relationships with the students to turn the situation around to one where, by the end of the lesson, students had achieved well.

Records confirm the improvements students make over time in their behaviour. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour, including different types of bullying, have occurred. Records show this is often when students first join the school and after a few terms these are reduced significantly. Bullying is taken very seriously and student-made anti-bullying posters show that they understand there are different forms of bullying and action is always needed to prevent them. Students say they feel that staff deal with incidents immediately and offer good support to perpetrators and victims. Students' response to enjoying school and feeling safe very often results in their attendance improving considerably. There remain a few persistent poor attendees but effective strategies, such as the school managing student transport themselves, are used to encourage them to attend more often.

Leadership and management

The Principal has shown good determination to move the school forward from previous 'satisfactory' judgements. The senior team has been re-structured to bring about greater rigour in the management and monitoring of student and staff performance. The Principal's determination for excellence, together with strong support from the governing body, has led to the present outstanding purpose-built accommodation and the soon-to-be completed vocational training unit. A good emphasis on improving the quality of teaching through continuous staff training opportunities has brought about consistency in the management of behaviour and in the use of teaching assistants to support learning. Weaknesses in the teaching of information and communication technology and science have been fully addressed, although there remain a few inconsistencies in the overall effectiveness of teaching. Issues identified by the previous inspection have also been successfully addressed. Through well-organised distributed leadership, staff are fully involved in monitoring performance and putting in positive interventions if needed. The governing body, through their committees and regular visits, monitor students' achievement carefully and challenge appropriately. All these factors show that there is a good capacity for the school to sustain its improvement.

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The school provides a wide curriculum that balances academic rigour with extending students' experiences. It meets students' individual needs well, especially in the strong focus on literacy, and offers some excellent enrichment activities, such as those linked to art projects, sports and residential trips. The curriculum greatly supports the strong emphasis on promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Good opportunities exist for work experience but other vocational training opportunities are limited. Equality of opportunity is promoted very carefully and this includes excellent support for the small number of girls. Positive links with a local school for girls provides them with numerous opportunities to engage with larger groups of girls both socially and academically. Senior staff and the governing body ensure that no form of discrimination is tolerated. They also place considerable emphasis on the safety of students. Safeguarding arrangements are very thorough and rigorous risk assessments are undertaken for the many activities offered to students.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



26 March 2012

Dear Students,

Inspection of The Gateway School, Northampton, NN12 8AA

Thank you for your kindness and hospitality when we visited your school recently. We very much enjoyed meeting so many of you and looking at your work. I especially enjoyed listening to two of you read to me and joining you for lunch. Because many of you feel your school is good you will not be surprised to know that we, too, have judged your school to be good.

We consider that your achievements and the quality of teaching are both good. Those of you who attend part time and access some other providers often make excellent progress in improving your engagement in learning. We judge that your behaviour and safety, and the way the school promotes your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are also good. We can see many of you make very good progress in managing your behaviour and attending school. A few of you, though, could help by improving your attendance even more.

The school has improved a lot since its last inspection. Much of this is due to the good leadership and management of the Principal and head of school and the hard-working team of staff. It is clear that all are determined to support you and enable you to achieve. To be even better, we have recommended two areas of improvement.

- Make sure that teachers are always clear what they expect you to learn in lessons and always plan work based on your differing abilities.
- Take full advantage of the new vocational facilities to enable you to achieve even more and be very well prepared for leaving school.

Once again, thank you for making our job so enjoyable when we came to visit.

Yours sincerely

Charles Hackett
Lead inspector

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