

Northgate High School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	121151
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	380178
Inspection dates	29–30 May 2012
Lead inspector	Alan Alder HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1206
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	216
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alan Jones
Headteacher	Glyn Hambling
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2006
School address	Cemetery Road Dereham NR19 2EU
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Age group	11–18
Inspection date(s)	29–30 May 2012
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Introduction

Inspection team

Alan Alder	Her Majesty's Inspector
June Cannie	Additional Inspector
Mehar Brar	Additional Inspector
Lisa Fraser	Additional Inspector
Nick Asker	Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The number of lessons observed was 42, and the number of teachers seen teaching was 41. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the headteacher and other members of staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online Parent View survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the 490 parental questionnaires received as well, as those completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average. Most students are White British. The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils supported by school action plus or with statements of special educational needs is in line with the national average. The school has exceeded the floor targets, the minimum standards expected by the government for the Year 11 students' examination results.

The sixth form is amalgamated with the sixth form of another school and they are taught together at a sixth form centre. The centre is staffed by teachers from both schools, as well as by some staff who are employed directly at the centre. The school has had several changes of headteacher in the last two years. The current headteacher was appointed with effect from September 2011. This is a permanent appointment.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a satisfactory school. It is not yet good because the quality of teaching is satisfactory and results in satisfactory learning in lessons. The school has introduced some good strategies for ensuring that lessons are well planned and take into account the different abilities within the class. As a result, it is improving. However, teacher-talk still predominates in too many lessons, even though students learn best when they are active participants in the lesson. Heads of department, while bringing about some good improvements in this area are not all focussing sufficiently on this aspect of their work. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Students' achievement is satisfactory. It has declined over the last three years, but the results of the external assessments already taken by the current Year 11 indicate that it has improved well this year. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs perform above the national average, though there is some inconsistency in the quality of support they receive in lessons.
- Students' behaviour is good. They have good attitudes to learning and are considerate to each other and to visitors. The school takes the necessary steps to ensure that they are safe and that they are aware of how to handle any potentially dangerous situations they may come across outside school.
- Leadership and management are strong. Their evaluation of the school's work is thorough and accurate. They provide a strong and effective drive for improvement in the school. The management of teaching and learning and of the performance of teachers is effective.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form is good and students' achievement is good. It prepares students well for the next stage in their education and the very large majority progress to higher education.

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

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' attainment further by ensuring that all teaching is good or better, by:
 - ensuring that students are actively engaged in learning, for example by reducing the amount of teacher talk in lessons where it is too dominant
 - making more use of searching questions in lessons to provide challenge and to assess students' understanding of the work they are doing, so that teaching can be adjusted if necessary.

- Ensure that subject leaders are all fully engaged in bringing about improved teaching in their departments by:
 - evaluating the characteristics of teaching in their departments, including the challenge offered by questions
 - using the information in their strategies to improve teaching.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' attainment when they join the school in Year 7 is below average. In the last three years, the progress they had made in their learning by the end of Year 11 slipped from above average to below average. This resulted in below average attainment. This decline has now been reversed for the current Year 11, their progress has improved and their attainment is satisfactory. This is being helped by extensive additional teaching and tailored support for a large number of students through a mentoring programme. In the 2011 examinations, those boys whose attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 had been low and the girls whose attainment had been average, both made inadequate progress and less than that made by other groups. The school's monitoring shows that this is no longer the case and inspectors' observations of learning confirm this. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are making satisfactory progress. In 2011, attainment in English was low. There is clear evidence that it is now much improved, including in reading, particularly in Year 11. The view of the vast majority of parents and carers is that their child is now making good progress. Learning is showing improvement and is now satisfactory in lessons across the school. Students are making better progress in lessons than in the past because they are fully engaged and eager to learn.

In the sixth form, the standards that students reach in their work are above average. They make good progress and develop good skills of independent learning.

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

Quality of teaching

Teaching is satisfactory, though the quality varies from outstanding to inadequate. In the sixth form centre it is good. Teachers know their subjects well and relationships between teachers and students are good. In most lessons, the pace of learning is good, though in some too much time is spent reviewing the learning from a previous lesson. Students are well informed about the quality of work that is expected of them. This helps them to focus their efforts. In general, students learn best when they are actively involved in their learning rather than listening passively to the teacher. Good examples of this were observed in English, drama, religious education, physical education and media studies. Learning was outstanding in an English lesson in which students were delivering presentations to the rest of the class. Their classmates were assessing them against national criteria and giving them feedback. In doing so, they developed a good understanding of the standards expected and this helped them to improve their own work. In addition, they demonstrated impressive sensitivity towards each other's feelings when asking questions about the presentation and providing feedback.

Students also learn well when teachers have high expectations of them, for example by asking demanding questions. This was evident in a mathematics lesson in which students were asked to comment on the appropriateness of the items used in a questionnaire. Some questions required careful thought on the part of students. When the teacher was given an answer that was not of the quality he wanted, he persisted and the student rose to the demand. In a science lesson, high expectations were revealed through the use of a challenging piece of text that students had to engage with. This was handled well by the teacher, who took students through it carefully, and in doing so helped to teach them how to handle such reading. Where students are behind with their reading, they are given extra help. This includes teaching them the use of phonics to decode words they do not recognise. This is bringing about improvements, but some older students are not yet using their knowledge of phonics as a matter of course when they have difficulty.

In lessons where expectations are too low, learning is only satisfactory or inadequate. For example, when too much time is spent repeating work when a swift reminder would suffice. In these lessons, there is often too long spent by students listening to the teacher and too little use of opportunities, such as small-group discussions, to consider a question the teacher has asked. In some lessons, the teachers' desire for a rapid pace leaves students with too little time to carry out the task they have been given. While teaching assistants generally provide good support, including for students who are disabled or who have special educational needs, in some lessons their deployment is not well enough directed. At times the use of questions, or the rapid monitoring of students' work by the teacher, are not used sufficiently to assess students' understanding in lessons so that teaching can be adjusted if students do not fully understand the work. Teaching encourages the development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students' behaviour is good. They conduct themselves sensibly in and around the school. They show respect to adults. A higher than usual proportion of parents expressed concerns about behaviour. As a result, inspectors carried out additional visits to lessons specifically to look at behaviour, as well as speaking with students and checking records. There is very detailed monitoring by the school's leaders of behaviour and effective policies are in place to support developments. Behaviour in lessons is settled. Invariably there is a good working atmosphere, although students occasionally do take a little longer than necessary to settle down after a change of activity in lessons. Nevertheless, they are interested in their work and have a good attitude to learning. Students' attendance is above average and improving, and punctuality is good. The school has taken some strong steps to ensure that parents send their children to school regularly. Students say they feel safe, though some complain about the behaviour of some of their peers. Students report that there is some bullying but this is generally tackled quickly and effectively. There are high levels of supervision by staff. Students are taught how to recognise potentially dangerous situations they may encounter out of school.

Leadership and management

The school is strongly led by the headteacher and the senior team. There is a very evident commitment to a rapid improvement of the school, which is tackled with energy, enthusiasm and an ambition that is pervasive. It is leading to rapid improvement in students' learning and attendance, for example. The same energy and commitment is applied in the sixth form centre. The working relationship between the leaders and the staff of the sixth form centre and those in the two high schools is very good. The governing body plays an important part in setting the direction for the school, and is well informed about the progress it is making, partly through regular visits. Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of the school's work is regular and detailed and allows the progress against the well-judged improvement plan to be thoroughly checked. Leaders are clear about their roles. They are supported well in their work by regular meetings to discuss progress with those who oversee their work. In this way they are also held well to account.

Those leaders with responsibility for subject departments now undertake thorough reviews of their department's work. In the English department, particularly good analyses have been carried out of the progress made against different parts of the English curriculum by different classes. This has enabled the teachers responsible for the faster progress to share their expertise with others. However, generally, the plans drawn up by subject leaders to develop their departments do not pay enough heed to the desirable teaching characteristics they wish to promote. Nor do the evaluations contain this sort of information. Nevertheless, much work is being done in the school to develop teaching quality. It is regularly monitored, a policy covering various aspects of teaching has been introduced and there is a good degree of compliance with it. Some judgements about the quality of teaching are generous though. A significant amount of time has been given to some staff to follow

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programmes to improve their teaching, and this has led to important improvements.

The curriculum ensures that students take a good range of subjects and it meets their differing interests and aspirations. For example, although there are the more conventional academic GCSE subjects, students can take applied courses. For some students who were underachieving and who were not benefitting from the more conventional curriculum, a special one-day-a-week course has been introduced. This has had clear success. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is catered for well. The curriculum includes visits to different places of worship and a thought for the day, as well as a good range of extra-curricular activities.

Leaders monitor the academic progress of students frequently and with impressive detail and take steps to ensure that no group of students fall behind. The monitoring of the uptake of extra-curricular activities is at an earlier stage in development. Nevertheless, there is a clear promotion of equality and a tackling of discrimination. The arrangements for the safeguarding of students comply with requirements and are effective. The school's good capacity for improvement is clearly demonstrated by leaders' strong commitment, ambition and drive to develop further.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	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 to 31 December 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.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
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.

31 May 2012

Dear Students



Inspection of Northgate High School, Dereham, NR19 2EU

Thank you for the help you gave us when we inspected your school. We spoke with a good number of you, either in meetings, in lessons or around the school. We found you to be polite and helpful.

We have judged your school to be satisfactory and the sixth form to be good. In the main school you are making satisfactory progress in your learning. This is a result of the satisfactory teaching you receive. The additional lessons and personal discussions with members of staff that students in Year 11 have are helping them to make more rapid progress.

We spent a lot of time checking on behaviour. Some of you, and a number of your parents, have some concerns about behaviour. We looked into this carefully along with how safe you are in school. We concluded that your behaviour and safety are good, though there are some times when you take a little too long to settle down when you change activities in class. We noted that your attendance is good too.

In order for you to make good progress in school, we have asked that you are given more opportunities to learn actively in class rather than listening for too long. We also want more demanding questions to be asked of you, to make you think more and also to check on your understanding of the work. In addition, we have asked that heads of department study how each teacher teaches so that they can help to spread the particularly effective approaches that different teachers use.

Your headteacher and his team are doing a good job in improving the school. You can help by continuing to attend regularly and by settling down very quickly in lessons.

Yours sincerely

Alan Alder
Her Majesty's Inspector

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