

Newport Free Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115352
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	379067
Inspection dates	30–31 May 2012
Lead inspector	Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
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	987
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Gray
Headteacher	Sean O'Hagan
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2009
School address	Bury Water Lane Newport Saffron Walden CB11 3TR
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector

Claire Austin Macrae

Additional Inspector

Genevieve Usher

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Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors spent 19 hours observing 39 lessons taught by 38 different teachers. Year 11 and sixth form students were on study leave during the inspection, although a Year 13 revision lesson was observed and inspectors met with the Head Boy and Head Girl. Meetings were also held with staff, the Chair of the Governing Body, and a senior officer of the local authority. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, together with the 156 parental and 84 staff responses that were made to the inspection questionnaires. Students' views were considered through written questionnaire responses and three student panels that met with inspectors. Documentation considered included data on achievement, attendance and exclusions, together with the school's records relating to students' behaviour and incidents of bullying. The single central record of safeguarding checks was also scrutinised.

Information about the school

Newport Free Grammar is an average-sized secondary maintained comprehensive school. The great majority of students are of White British heritage. A very small minority of students speak English as an additional language or are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is very small. The proportion of disabled students and those who are supported at 'school action plus' or have a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school meets the current floor standards, which are the minimum standards expected by the government for students' attainment and progress.

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	3
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Newport Free Grammar remains a satisfactory school. The sixth form is also satisfactory. It is not yet a good school because teaching is not consistently good enough to ensure that students, particularly the most able, achieve well as they should, and leadership is not sufficiently incisive or well communicated. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Despite some improvements since the last inspection and above-average attainment overall, students continue to make only satisfactory progress given their prior attainment at primary school. Overall standards at A level are broadly in line with national averages, although the proportion gaining A*–B grades and the numbers passing the AS-level exams are below average. Students perform well in mathematics and a high proportion study modern languages.
- Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have good subject expertise. Since the last inspection, a more consistent approach has been taken to structuring lessons. However, in too many instances teachers' approach to lesson planning is too rigid. Too much emphasis is given to generic activities and not enough account taken of students' generally above-average abilities. Consequently, in too many lessons only satisfactory challenge and depth of subject content are provided.
- Behaviour and safety are satisfactory. Students are often mature and sensible; compliant and willing to learn. However, a significant minority of staff, and parents and carers, suggest that this is not always the case. Students are generally very sensible when they move around the school although the main road crossing between the two school sites is a hazard.
- Satisfactory leadership of teaching and management of performance have led to improved mechanisms for monitoring teaching and more students gaining five GCSE A*–C passes since the last inspection. However, the school's self-evaluation is overgenerous and not all members of the school community fully

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support its leadership because of limitations in communication at all levels.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement so that it is good in relation to students' starting points by:
 - ensuring that the proportions of students gaining A*–C and A*–A grades are consistently above the national averages, overall and in the great majority of GCSE subjects taken
 - ensuring that the overall proportions of students gaining A–E grades at AS level and A*–B grades at A level are above the national averages.
- Improve lesson planning and delivery so that there is an overriding, rigorous, focus on high expectations for the development of students' subject knowledge and understanding, as well as on generic teaching structures and strategies.
- Assure the continued careful supervision of students when travelling between the school sites while pursuing with the local authority, as a matter of urgency, improvements to the public highway crossing.
- Improve the quality of communication between senior management and staff, and between the school and parents and carers, particularly in regard to individual concerns, so that there is full understanding of and support for actions taken by the school's leadership.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Most parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire believed that their child was making good progress, but inspectors disagree. It is true that, compared with other schools nationally, the overall proportions gaining five GCSE passes at grades A*–C are well above average and have increased since the last inspection. However, students join the school already having achieved significantly above-average standards in their primary schools. Furthermore, across the curriculum there is inconsistency in attainment. In 2011, standards in mathematics were significantly above national averages in every respect. However, the numbers of grades over and above grade C in other subjects vary. For example, in 2011, only six out of 25 subjects were significantly above average in the proportions gaining grade C or above and only seven subjects were significantly above for A* or A grades. The school is anticipating a greater number of higher passes this year, but even so teachers do not always challenge students rigorously enough in lessons to aim for the highest standards. This was seen clearly during the inspection, and typically led to students making satisfactory progress in the lessons observed. The quality of learning for disabled students and those who have special educational

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needs is satisfactory. All other groups of students, including boys and girls, also make satisfactory progress.

Examination results suggest a picture of positive achievement at A level, and overall standards in the sixth form remain broadly in line with national averages. However, the proportion of A*–B grades has remained below average for three years, as was the proportion of passes at AS level in 2011. A small minority of students, including those of the highest ability, choose to study at other sixth form institutions, either because of the different courses on offer or because they seek new challenges or experiences. This explains why overall standards in the sixth form are lower than they are in the main school but rates of progress are in line with those of sixth form students nationally. However, retention rates between the start and the end of sixth form for those students who choose to stay at Newport Free Grammar School are good.

Quality of teaching

Just over half the teaching seen by inspectors was satisfactory; a slightly smaller number of lessons were good, and a few outstanding. The teaching of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is also satisfactory. In almost all cases, teachers use a common framework for lesson planning. It is clear that a great deal of work has been done since the last inspection in training teachers about strategies for lesson planning, and in using assessment strategies to monitor progress. However, it is also clear that teachers have yet to strike the right balance between employing these strategies and delivering lessons that provide high-quality subject-specific learning. This is despite the fact that teachers have good and sometimes outstanding subject expertise. For example, in one lesson observed, students spent much more time discussing the learning objectives and success criteria for a practical task than they spent on the task itself. Not surprisingly, when they were asked to assess how well they had achieved the aims at the end of the lesson, they reported that they had not had enough time to complete the task and therefore had made limited progress. In contrast, in an outstanding Year 10 Italian lesson there was an overriding, relentless focus on developing students' engagement with and understanding of the target language. The planning was dictated primarily by the subject-specific learning needs and issues, rather than by generic teaching strategies. A key recommendation for improvement is to refocus teachers' continuing professional development so that teaching strikes the right balance between generic and subject-specific strategies.

While some teaching observed was, on first impressions, engaging and entertaining, scrutiny of students' books during lessons showed that the teaching over time was less impressive. This was indicated through lack of marking, limited commitment through poorly presented work, and incomplete tasks. In contrast, good teaching seen in a well-paced English lesson was confirmed by scrutiny of students' books that were well presented, marked regularly and in detail, and full of completed activities.

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Behaviour and safety of pupils

In recent years attendance has been broadly average, but it has improved significantly of late. Behaviour in class is generally compliant and this enables satisfactory learning to take place. However, the school's records of exclusion confirm reports made to inspectors by around a third of the students, parents and carers and staff who replied to the inspection questionnaire, who said that some lessons are disrupted by inappropriate behaviour. Inspectors judged that behaviour is satisfactory, rather than good as the school proposed in self-evaluation. The isolated incidents of inappropriate behaviour observed in lessons during the inspection were caused by weak teaching and lack of engagement, rather than wilful disobedience.

While the overwhelming majority of parents, carers and students told inspectors that they felt safe at school, individual and specific concerns were expressed about bullying. Inspectors looked carefully at the school's strategies for dealing with bullying incidents when they occur, and for promoting anti-bullying messages. They found that the school has satisfactory strategies to keep students safe, and that students have a satisfactory understanding of different types of bullying, including homophobia. However, inspectors also judged that the communications from the school leadership (including governors) with parents, carers and students about these matters are not sufficiently rapid or clear.

The two parts of the school site are divided by a minor road. A zebra crossing is provided, and speed restrictions are marked clearly. There is adequate staff supervision at peak movement times, and students are generally sensible when crossing the road. However, this does not negate the risk posed, not least because there are bends in the road approaching the crossing and the public highway is the responsibility of the local authority rather than the school. The school has made representations to the local authority to improve this situation; inspectors recommend that this matter is pursued as a matter of urgency.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and his senior team set clear expectations and ambitions for the school. Some improvements have been effected in attainment and attendance since the last inspection, and teachers and subject leaders are now held to account more methodically through the 'Spotlight' monitoring programme. The new Head of English is providing good leadership to a historically underperforming department and there is also good leadership in mathematics. The school provides a good curriculum that is appropriate to students' abilities and aspirations. A particular strength is that a high proportion of students study one or more modern languages and there is an extensive international programme. This makes a significant contribution to students' cultural development, as does the good programme of musical, sporting and dramatic activities. One area of weakness is information and communication technology. This key subject area has undergone significant turbulence in leadership and changes of curriculum in recent years; provision here is only just satisfactory.

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Inspectors judge that leadership and management are satisfactory overall because they have led to satisfactory provision and outcomes, with some improvements. The school has satisfactory arrangements to promote equality and tackle discrimination. Policies and procedures for keeping students safe meet current requirements. It is, however, clear from the responses to the staff and parents' questionnaires that there is not unanimous support for the way that the school is led and managed, particularly by the headteacher. This, together with the overgenerous self-evaluation, shows that capacity to improve beyond the school's current performance is no better than satisfactory.

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.



1 June 2012

Dear Students

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

I am writing to inform you that, when we visited just before half term, we judged your school to be satisfactory. We recognise that your GCSE results are of a higher standard than in most other schools. However, overall, your abilities when you join in Year 7 are also above average. For you to be making better than satisfactory progress, we would expect more of you to achieve the higher A* and A grades, rather than simply passing at grade C or above. Similarly, the proportion of A*–B grades at A level has also been below average and this is another area for improvement. We recognise that your teachers have good subject expertise. However, in too many lessons, too much time is spent on assessment tasks and organisation. In these lessons, you do not spend enough time getting down to developing the subject knowledge and understanding that you need to gain the highest grades in your examinations. We have asked the school's leaders to ensure that lessons have a much more rigorous emphasis on these subject skills.

We saw some good behaviour during our visit, but it was disappointing to hear from your parents and carers, and the school staff, that this is not always the case. There is one particular matter that I need to draw to your attention. While you show sensible behaviour when walking on the zebra crossing that links the school sites, the road remains a potential hazard. I have asked the school to liaise with the local authority to improve this crossing, as a matter of urgency. In the meantime, could I urge you to remain vigilant for yourselves and for other people, to ensure that safety is maintained?

Finally, our thanks to those of you who completed the inspection questionnaire. We noted the concerns that a number of parents and carers raised about the school's leadership. While we found leadership at the school to be satisfactory, we have asked Mr O'Hagan and his team to improve the quality of their communication with staff and parents and carers, so that everyone is working effectively together with the aim of making Newport Free Grammar a good rather than satisfactory school.

Yours sincerely

Mark Phillips
Her Majesty's Inspector

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