

Advanced Education - Northampton School

67a Queens Park Parade, Kingsthorpe, Northampton, NN2 6LR

Inspection dates 25–27 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Adequate	3
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Adequate	3
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

This school is adequate because

- Students, all of whom experienced disrupted education before starting at the school, are making adequate progress, including in English and mathematics.
- Teaching and the implementation of the curriculum are adequate. Although improved since the last inspection, they do not yet provide students with the opportunity to make good progress. Information from the new systems for checking students' progress is not well enough used in planning students' work.
- While students' behaviour has improved since the last inspection, there is still room for improvement, particularly in some lessons and in relation to some students' attendance.
- The school's recently appointed leadership team has ensured that all the regulations for independent school are met and that the quality of the provision has improved overall. They have started to implement plans for further improvement but it is too early to see the full impact of these.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has a positive ethos where students feel safe and enjoy new opportunities to extend their learning and achievement.
- Policies and procedures are effectively used to ensure students' welfare, health and safety.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice. The inspector observed eight lessons taught by six teachers. Seven lessons took place at the school's main site and one at the school's off-site provision in a children's home operated by the school's proprietor. Four lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- The inspector looked at students' work, held meetings with the headteacher, a representative of the proprietor, staff members and students.
- The inspector looked at documentation including policy statements, schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' progress, and records of lesson observations and of staff training.
- Seven questionnaire responses from staff were taken into account. No students, local authority representative or parents and carers had responded to the online Ofsted questionnaires.

Inspection team

John Gush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Advanced Education - Northampton School is a secondary day school for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD). It is situated in a suburban location on the outskirts of Northampton.
- The school opened in 2000 as a co-educational school and is registered for 24 students between the ages of 11 and 16.
- There are currently nine male and female students on roll aged 14 to 16 years; only one has been at the school for more than a year.
- All except one of the students have statements of special educational needs related to BESD. All have experienced very disrupted education before coming to the school, which has had a marked adverse effect on their education and their achievements. Two are looked after by their local authorities and reside in children's homes operated by the school's proprietor.
- Ownership of the school was transferred to Advanced Education Ltd during 2012. This organisation operates 15 other schools nationally catering for children with similar learning and behaviour profiles to those at this school, in addition to a number of children's homes. A new headteacher took up his post at the beginning of the current school year.
- The school uses a range of alternative provision to ensure that students have opportunities to access education and to extend the curriculum offered. Two Year 11 students receive full-time education away from the school's main site. One works with the school's teachers but on premises attached to the children's home where he resides. The other is supported by the school on a full-time vocational training at Pearson TQ Technical College in Corby. A Year 10 student spends a day each week on a link course at Northampton College. A Year 9 student is in the process of reintegrating into mainstream provision and currently spends three days each week at Wollaston School in Northampton with support from this school. All students make use of local leisure and fitness centres for physical education each week.
- The last full inspection took place in 2010 and was followed by two progress monitoring inspections, which took place in July and October 2011. In October 2011, the school was found to meet all the regulations for independent schools.
- The school aims to 'inspire and engage our learners through a range of positive learning experiences' so that they can 'manage their own behaviour and difficulties' ready for life after school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that all students are effectively challenged in lessons so that they have every opportunity to behave appropriately in class and to make the progress they can
 - improve the planning of college link courses and work experience placements so that students can make the best use of these opportunities
 - making sure that learning support workers are actively deployed to enable students to improve their learning
 - ensuring that marking always makes clear to students what is good about their work and what would improve it further.
- Work closely with parents and carers, students and other agencies to improve students' attendance further.

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing further the arrangements for supporting teachers to improve their lessons so that all students are fully engaged and have the best possible opportunities to learn and to behave appropriately
 - making sure that checks on what students know and can do are better used to inform targets in their individual education plans.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students' achievements are adequate. This is because students' unsettled emotional lives and turbulent educational experiences continue to have an impact on their learning, and because of the quality of teaching and curriculum in the school, which are adequate rather than good. All students study English and mathematics and take an appropriate range of academic and vocational subjects. Consistent measurement of students' progress has only been in place during the current school year. This shows that some students have made expected progress and a few have exceeded this, while others have made slightly less than expected progress. This is reflected in the results of recent Functional Skills qualifications where some achieved passes at levels between Entry Level 3 and Level 1 in English and mathematics, while others failed to achieve a pass. Some students have been out of school for more than two years and have made up lost ground well. Others make steady progress in re-integrating into mainstream education.

Students are making adequate progress towards vocational qualifications in subjects including plumbing, construction and automotive body repair and finishing. These take place both in school and in the additional provision that the school makes in partnership with other learning providers. Students report that they are achieving better than they did at their previous schools. They benefit from regular work on communication, literacy and numeracy and these subjects help them to make progress in their vocational studies. For instance, this helps to make it possible for students on a plumbing course to keep up with the theory element of the course. One student commented that the individual support he is receiving with phonics (sounds that letters make) is making 'a big, big difference' to his ability to read and write.

Records of the achievements of previous students at the school are sketchy due to changes in the school's ownership and management. However, they indicate that students in the recent past have made at least adequate progress and some have achieved GCSEs in English, mathematics and physics with grades ranging from D to G. Students have also gained basic skills accreditation and vocational qualifications in construction at Level 1.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Students' behaviour and personal development are adequate. They are not good because, although in many respects students make strong improvements in their attitudes and self-esteem during their time at the school, behaviour in some lessons continues to have a negative impact on their learning and achievement. In addition, some students' attendance remains poor.

Attendance records show that during their time in the school most students' attendance steadily improves. Some students' attendance exceeds the national average while others are moving towards it. All students' attendance is substantially improved from their prior school experience. However, some pockets of poor attendance persist despite a suitable range of strategies the school uses to address this. These include home visits and regular contact with parents and carers. The school has also developed innovative approaches for some students with deep-seated difficulties related to attending school. These include the provision of suitable school facilities and a full timetable, which is delivered to students by the school's teachers, on premises away from the school site. These arrangements help students with long histories of school refusal and very poor attendance to take part in education and to begin to make progress.

Students benefit from clearly stated expectations about appropriate behaviour that are reinforced by staff in a good humoured manner. They set targets for their own behaviour, effort and attendance at all lessons and activities, as well as during non-lesson times. The points they achieve when they meet these targets allow them to earn rewards, which motivates them well to behave

appropriately. The school's analysis of behaviour points indicates an overall improvement during the current school year. On occasion, outbursts of frustration and anger occur. The school maintains suitable records of all these incidents and, overall, the number has decreased during the past year. This is because an appropriate range of strategies is used to help students understand the impact of their actions. This involves partnership working with the police community liaison team and other local agencies. However, some students struggle to behave appropriately in some lessons because they are not engaged by the lesson content and appear to be bored.

The school makes suitable provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Lessons in citizenship and in philosophy and ethics help the students to develop an improved awareness of right and wrong, and to be aware of the impact of their behaviour on themselves and on others. Projects and assemblies on world religions, together with visits from local religious leaders, help students gain an understanding of their own and other cultures represented in the local community. This promotes an attitude of respect and tolerance of cultural and religious difference. Supporting and fundraising for local charities enable students to make a positive contribution to their local communities. Regular use of shops, libraries and leisure centres helps students to acquire a suitable understanding of public services and institutions in the locality. The school has developed an effective policy to ensure that, where political issues are raised, balanced messages are promoted.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate, which results in students' achievement being adequate. Teachers assess students' progress in their various subjects using new procedures and software introduced at the start of the current school year. Teachers and school leaders collaborate to make sure that these assessments are reliable. In some lessons, this information is used very well to provide students with the best possible opportunities to extend their knowledge and skills. In one lesson, students made excellent progress with English writing skills. This is because the work set provided the right level of challenge for their current ability, and they knew just what they needed to do to extend it and to achieve the next level. In other lessons, however, information about what students know and can do is not used so effectively. Some students find the work set too easy while others find it too hard and sometimes not able to keep up. Because of this students do not always make the progress they could and they lose interest. All students have individual education plans, which identify their personal targets. Although these provide useful guidance for teachers, targets are not sufficiently detailed in relation to students' academic development or their cognitive abilities. Because of this, teachers do not always provide learning materials that address students' needs accurately enough.

Teachers make valuable use of their experience of working with students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Teachers listen carefully to students' views and help them to come to terms with the frustration they sometimes experience as a result of their previous difficulties with education. This helps them to make the progress they do. Learning support workers assist students in most lessons and in most of the provision away from the school's site. In some lessons they are effectively used and are given appropriate guidance by teachers as to how best to enable students to succeed. However, in other lessons support workers are not clear what is needed and their presence does not enhance students' progress. Teachers mark students' work regularly, offering praise and encouraging students' efforts. A new marking policy has recently been introduced. Where this is used effectively, teachers provide students with clear and helpful indications of what is needed to help them improve their work.

Quality of curriculum

Adequate

The quality of the curriculum is adequate. An increased range of subjects is now available and these provide opportunities for individualised timetables. However, the curriculum is not good because it is not implemented well enough to enable pupils to make good progress. In addition,

although valuable opportunities are provided for students to join college courses away from the school and to carry out work experience placements, these are not always planned in a way that enable them to be successful.

The curriculum is based on the requirements of the National Curriculum and makes suitable use of schemes of work, including those for personal and social development (PSD) and citizenship, religious education, philosophy and ethics. Through these students have adequate opportunities to develop their personal, social and health education, including in the areas of relationships, sexual health and drug awareness.

Students work with a Connexions adviser as well as their personal tutor to develop ideas about future careers and college placements. Some join link courses at local colleges and take part in work experience placements. While these provide valuable experiences for some students, a number have not been successful recently with students beginning, but not continuing, their college courses or their work experience placements.

Attention is paid to the requirements of pupils' statements of special educational needs and the way the curriculum is implemented ensures that statement requirements are fulfilled. The school makes suitable use of the proprietor's therapeutic care team to support the development of appropriate learning and behaviour strategies. This helps staff to understand the issues that get in the way of students' learning, and to devise strategies to enable them to begin to overcome these barriers.

Physical education takes place at a local leisure centre and a fitness site. It is supplemented by outdoor activities such as horticulture, land work and equestrian skills, all of which students enjoy. The provision has a good impact on improving individuals' health and fitness. Regular outings, such as to museums and local places of interest, extend the pupils' knowledge and interest in their locality and in the world at large.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is good. It is characterised by a high level of commitment to students' wellbeing and care, and students say that they enjoy being at school and feel safe while they are there. All the regulations for this standard are met.

The school's procedures to manage and support behaviour have been developed and enhanced during the current school year. They are understood well by staff and students, and are carried out with consistency and rigour. Even though students' behaviour is adequate overall, these changes are enabling valuable improvements to be made.

Students report that bullying is rare in the school and that they know what to do if they experience it. This is the result of a wide-ranging strategy to raise awareness of bullying. This has included learning about the dangers associated with the bullying that take place on social network sites and the inappropriate use of text messages.

Staff recruitment is carried out in a thorough manner and the required single central register is correctly maintained. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that suitable checks have been made on all adults working with students in school and at off-site locations. All the regulations relating to safeguarding students are met. Staff training in child protection and first aid is thorough, and is regularly updated within the recommended timescales. This includes suitable training, at the appropriate higher level, for the designated safeguarding officer. Students' safety is a high priority, with fire drills and health and safety checks rigorously implemented. Risk assessments, including those for visits outside school, are thorough. Arrangements for educational trips are well planned and clearly recorded. Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained.

Students are very well supported in adopting a healthy lifestyle. They exercise well, understand the importance of healthy eating and have responded well to the school's policy on smoking reduction.

Leadership and management

Adequate

The leadership and management of the school are adequate. They are not good because the students are making adequate rather than good progress. A number of developments in the school's provision are in the early stages of implementation and have not yet demonstrated sustained results. During the past year, the proprietor has invested substantially in the school's facilities and staff. The headteacher is effectively supported by a senior representative of the proprietor's group and benefits from contact with other headteachers in the group. Taken together, these have enabled the school to make improvements since the previous inspection and to ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met.

The senior leadership team know the school's strengths and areas for development well. They have produced an accurate evaluation of the quality of the provision, together with a valuable development plan. This has led to the implementation of new procedures to support attendance, to improve consistency of behaviour management, and to enhance the regularity and accuracy of checks on students' progress. The headteacher is aware of the need to continue these developments and, in particular, to support teachers to improve their practice so that students' achievement can increase. Arrangements for performance management of staff are in place, but do not provide sufficient emphasis on the ways that teachers can enhance the outcomes of lessons for students.

Arrangements for extending students' opportunities through partnerships with other providers and through the availability of off-site provision are a strength of the school. These are providing valuable experiences for some students and enable students who might not otherwise be able to do so to gain access to learning opportunities.

The proprietor has provided the school with suitable learning facilities including classrooms that are light and airy, and well resourced. Specialist facilities for science and information and communication technology, together with a well-equipped workshop for design and technology, all provide appropriate opportunities for students to develop their skills. The premises and accommodation are maintained to a good standard. Inspiring photographs and examples of students' work contribute to providing an attractive and stimulating learning environment.

All the required information for parents, carers and others is provided, or made available, on the proprietors' web site and in the information pack available at the school. The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements and is effectively implemented. All of the regulations for independent schools are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	131802
Inspection number	422735
DfE registration number	928/6067

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent secondary school for pupils with behavioural, social and emotional difficulties
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Advanced Education Ltd
Chair	Riz Hahn
Headteacher	Simon Berry
Date of previous school inspection	19–20 October 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£31,995
Telephone number	01604 719711
Email address	Simon.berry@advancededucation.co.uk

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