

Northfield School

Knights Road, Oxford, OX4 6DQ

Inspection dates 14–15 May 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The school's leaders have improved the quality of teaching and behaviour management since the previous inspection.
- Students benefit from good teaching and have positive experiences in school. Expectations of staff and students are clear to everyone.
- Students acquire the reading, writing and mathematical skills they need to prepare them for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Students also learn a range of skills in other areas because the school provides a good variety of learning opportunities. They have particularly good provision for art, music and physical education.
- All groups of students make good progress and achieve well. They receive effective support to help them overcome difficulties. Students acquire good attitudes to learning.
- Students' behaviour improves while they are in the school and is good. They know that the staff always have time for them and understand them.
- The school is a supportive learning community. The students feel safe and well looked after.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They learn to work together and understand other people's points of view.
- School governance has improved significantly. Governors are skilled, well informed and now carry out their role effectively.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers' marking is not of consistently high quality and they do not always make the best use of support staff.
- The school is not providing the full curriculum in design and technology and a modern foreign language in Key Stage 3.
- Although attendance has improved, it is still too low.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in all classes and carried out 14 lesson observations, including several joint observations with the deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors also looked at attendance information, safeguarding arrangements and other key documents.
- A random sample of students’ work was analysed and comparisons made between the achievements of different groups of students. Inspectors analysed the school’s performance data showing the attainment and progress of students.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior and subject leaders, a group of governors and a group of students.
- An inspector met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors took account of 12 responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View), and 18 questionnaires from school staff.

Inspection team

Barnard Payne, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Debby McCarthy

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Northfield is a school for up to 60 boys who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. It currently has students from Year 6 to Year 11. There is provision for students to stay on in the sixth form, but currently there are no sixth form students.
- From September 2014 the school is running a two-year pilot project where the age-range of the school has been temporarily extended to include Year 6. This is to meet increased local demand.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is above the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- In common with other schools with primary-aged children, the school also receives the primary physical education and sport premium, designed to help primary schools improve the quality of the physical education and sport activities they offer their pupils. Because there is only one primary-aged year group in the school this is a small amount of additional funding.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average and all students speak English as a first language.
- There is a high level of mobility, with students often joining the school at different points during the school year.
- The school no longer has an off-site unit or residential provision. It uses no alternative provision, apart from work experience and college placements for Key Stage 4 students.
- Since the school was previously inspected it has received support from a National Leader of Education from Frank Wise School, Banbury.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide a full curriculum in design and technology and a modern foreign language in Key Stage 3.
- Improve attendance to bring it at least in line with other special schools.
- Ensure that teaching is of consistently high quality by:
 - improving the consistency of marking and feedback in students' books
 - always making the most effective use of support staff so that all students benefit.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The school's leaders have appropriately high expectations of staff and students and communicate these well. They have secured a good quality of teaching and keep this under regular review in order to address any shortcomings. The school has the capacity to continue improving.
- Some of the aspects requiring improvement at the time of the previous inspection concerned the off-site and residential provision. This provision has now closed down and the students have been successfully integrated into the main school.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and takes account of a good range of evidence. This includes rigorous tracking of students' progress through an effective system for collecting and analysing performance data.
- Teachers' appraisal targets are suitably challenging and are focused on enabling them to develop their practice. The school provides good support for its subject leaders in their professional development. The subject leaders monitor and evaluate teaching and learning in their areas thoroughly and attend appropriate training to develop their leadership and management capabilities.
- The school's curriculum provides a good variety of opportunities for students. It promotes enjoyment and personal success. There is particularly strong provision for art, music and physical education. Emphasis on English, mathematics and computing provides students with the key skills to prepare them for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Due to difficulties in recruitment, the school is not currently covering the full design and technology or modern foreign language curriculum in Key Stage 3.
- The school's leaders ensure that good relationships are established between students and between students and staff. Students are involved in activities that promote collaboration, listening to one another, understanding the importance of rules and seeing things from other people's points of view. They learn about different faiths and beliefs. The school promotes tolerance and mutual respect. Students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Students receive effective careers guidance. An external provider trains staff and students and provides good careers advice. This provision enables students to analyse their strengths and to make more informed choices about their next steps. A group of Year 9 students currently goes off site once a week to study for a BTEC in land-based studies. Students in Year 10 have work experience and by the end of Year 11 students are clear about their destinations, often their local college but with the option to stay on into the sixth form at school.
- The school ensures equality of opportunity. It provides students with new opportunities and experiences, such as going abroad for the first time to ski. It uses its pupil premium funding effectively to provide students with individualised support. There are no gaps in attainment when comparing the achievement of students receiving the pupil premium and other students.
- The school has also made effective use of its additional physical education and sport premium to help develop further a particularly strong part of the curriculum.
- The school provides a secure environment in which students feel safe. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.
- Parents are positive about the school and its leadership. Most parents responding through Parent View agree that the school is well led and managed and would recommend the school to another parent.
- The school has worked successfully with the local authority to carry out improvements since the school was previously inspected. The senior leadership team has taken decisive action following the advice and support provided by the National Leader in Education; the governing body has been transformed following an external review of governance.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance has improved significantly since the school was previously inspected. The school now has a skilled, well-informed board of governors that holds the leadership team to account and provides effective challenge and much stronger strategic leadership. Governors now have a good understanding of performance data. Individual governors have specific responsibilities, including regularly reviewing students' progress and achievement with senior leaders. Governors regularly visit the school and are well informed about the quality of teaching. They raise questions about performance in relation to pay and hold leaders to account for tackling underperformance. The governing body ensures that the school's financial resources are used effectively. They track how the pupil premium funding is spent, know exactly what provision each student receives and evaluate the outcomes.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. Taking into account the difficulties students have in controlling their own behaviour, there are relatively few disruptions in lessons. Staff are fully aware of the difficulties new students may have when joining the school and give them the additional support they need to settle in.
- Students acquire good attitudes to learning and are positive about the school. They say that they much prefer it to their previous experiences of education because staff have time for them and 'know what they are doing'.
- Case studies of students' behaviour over time show that recorded incidents of poor behaviour decrease once students have settled into the school. Over the past year, the rate of fixed-term exclusions has reduced significantly.
- Many students have a history of poor attendance at their previous schools. However, while attendance has continued to improve since the previous inspection, it is still too low, despite the school's best efforts.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Staff create a secure learning environment and students feel safe. They say that there is always an adult to go to if they need to.
- The school fully meets national requirements for safeguarding students.
- Students understand that there are different types of bullying, but say that it is very rare. Parents are positive about how the school deals with bullying.
- Students do sometimes use discriminatory language and this is recorded and followed up with appropriate rigour. In these cases, students use language without thinking, in the heat of the moment, and this does not reflect the day-to-day life in the school. Typically, students get on well together and form good relationships with staff.
- Students learn to deal with risk in new situations, such as off-site placements. A group of students taken skiing for the first time coped very well in an unfamiliar environment containing new risks and challenges. The school tracks the attendance of students going to college or other locations. It also carries out thorough risk assessments for students attending off-site provision to ensure they are kept safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching leads to good achievement over time across the curriculum, including in English and mathematics. Teachers and support staff have suitably high expectations of students and enable them to develop a broad range of skills, including reading, writing, mathematical, creative and physical skills.
- All staff strive to create a positive climate for learning. Even where behaviour is challenging, staff remain calm and constructive in their approach.
- Occasionally, the deployment of support staff to work with individual students away from the main class has a detrimental effect because it reduces the support available to the teacher and other students.
- Teachers nearly always set work that is interesting and engaging. Students say that the challenge of the work provided is usually just right, but sometimes could be harder.
- The teaching in Key Stage 3, which was a weaker aspect when the school was previously inspected, has improved and is now good. On rare occasions achievement in Key Stage 3 lessons requires improvement, but students' books show that over time progress is sustained and that teaching is effective.
- Assessment is regular and mostly used well to set work at the right level. Staff listen to students and provide good verbal feedback in lessons, but marking in books varies too much in quality. Some is very good, some lacks sufficient detail. However, students do understand the level they are working at and how well they are progressing. They find marking useful in helping them improve their work.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on entry to the school is often low, because of the difficulties they have had in previous schools. Many have had very poor attendance in the past, which has had an impact on their achievement. Due to effective teaching and support they make good progress and are able to overcome their difficulties. In particular, the school ensures that students acquire reading skills, which gives them confidence in other subjects.

- For example, students in Key Stage 3 who receive individual support for reading began with very low starting points on entry to the school. They have made rapid progress and now read independently, using their understanding of letters and sounds (phonics) to sound out unfamiliar words.
- Most students make good progress in English. There are good examples of extended pieces of writing. By the end of Year 9, the best writing is well structured and includes personal responses to books students have read; these include references to feelings and other people's viewpoints.
- In mathematics, students also make good progress and the school's performance data show that they often exceed predictions. There are some good opportunities for students to apply their mathematical knowledge in other subjects. In Key Stage 4 physical education, students have used data handling to record and analyse a survey of physical activity.
- The school tailors its Key Stage 4 curriculum to cater for students' aptitudes and interests. Students have access to a variety of national qualifications, including GCSE English and mathematics. Most students in 2014 achieved a GCSE grade in English and mathematics which, given their starting points, shows good achievement. A few, more able, students achieved a grade C. There are no early entries for GCSE.
- The school has revised its target-setting process to increase the expectations of what students can achieve. In the past, very low attainment on entry led to low predictions for the end of Key Stage 4. Now, the school takes account of the accelerated progress students make on joining the school, which results in more challenging targets.
- The achievement of the most able students is good and students are encouraged to set themselves suitably challenging targets. For example, in a Key Stage 3 English lesson the teacher set the most-able student an additional task in order to extend his thinking.
- Students with lower prior attainment also make good progress. In the same Key Stage 3 English lesson, a student worked with a teaching assistant, who asked pertinent questions to get the student thinking. He developed a piece of extended writing that really captured people's feelings and reactions to an event.
- The achievement of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is good, in line with other groups.
- There are no gaps in attainment when comparing students eligible for the pupil premium with other students.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123346
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	462381

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Whitlock
Headteacher	Mark Blencowe
Date of previous school inspection	15–16 May 2013
Telephone number	01865 771703
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