

Northfleet School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118788
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291256
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Modern (non-selective)
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	986
6th form	161
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Christie
Headteacher	Julie Wilson
Date of previous school inspection	29 January 2001
School address	Hall Road Northfleet Gravesend DA11 8AQ
Telephone number	0844 477 2525
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This slightly larger than average, oversubscribed school is non-selective in an authority which has selective schools. Since September 2005 the school has had business and enterprise specialist status. Now in its 70th year, major building works will soon transform the school's physical environment.

The school has many links, especially through the Gravesham Excellence Cluster, with other education providers in the area. These include many secondary and primary schools and North West Kent College. The school has a Healthy Schools award and Investors in People.

Almost one in four students has learning difficulties and disabilities, a well above average percentage. The proportion of students with statements of special educational needs is well below average. Approximately eight out of 10 students are White British and one in 10 is from an Indian background, with small numbers from other minority ethnic groups. An above average percentage of students do not speak English as their mother tongue.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Northfleet is a good school with several significant strengths. These include the excellent atmosphere of mutual support and respect between students and teachers and the particularly good quality care, guidance and support for girls, especially those with particular needs. Staff work hard to help students to mature and to be ready to face the world of work or further study.

Students enter the school with below average standards and achieve well, attaining an average percentage of five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. Few students attain high grades so the points score is below average but it is rising. In Years 7 to 11, achievement is good in English and mathematics. Progress in the different GCSE science courses is mixed. Higher attaining students study the separate sciences at GCSE and achieve well. Sharper assessment and monitoring of students' progress are helping to raise standards, which are broadly average overall.

Students respond well to the high quality education they receive about how to lead healthy lives. Most take enough physical exercise and rate the personal, social and cultural education programme highly. They enjoy being at school, behave well and feel safe. Students' personal development and well-being, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good.

As well as the good progress made in English and mathematics, the school's business and enterprise specialism helps students to acquire skills they need for their future economic well-being although not all of them are fully competent using information and communication technology (ICT). The good curriculum includes many worthwhile vocational courses in Years 10 to 13.

Teaching and learning are good with some inconsistency within and between departments. Brisk and inspiring lessons, which usually include a good mix of activities, contrast with those where the relevance of work to students' lives is not considered sufficiently, so learning is not focused. ICT is not used enough as a tool for teaching and learning in some lessons.

The new headteacher is very well supported by an enthusiastic leadership team. She has an astute understanding of how to improve the school. Leadership and management are good. The leadership team has wisdom and experience about what makes for effective learning but this has not yet had full impact on teaching. As well as focusing on the school's new buildings, the headteacher is determined to foster the school's key aim: 'Always Learning, Learning All Ways'.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form provides students with a satisfactory and improving education. The open door entry policy enables many students who might not otherwise benefit from a sixth form education to do so. Through links with other sixth form providers, students have a good choice of academic and vocational courses; they do well in the latter. It is good that over half the students proceed to university.

In 2006, several factors contributed to underachievement in A levels, when standards were further below average than usual. The school diagnosed the problems and most students now

make satisfactory progress. Students are very well cared for and appreciate the support and encouragement they receive from all the staff. They like the increased involvement in school life that the new mixed-age tutor groups bring. Leadership of the sixth form is good; the recently appointed head of sixth form is clear about, and tackling what needs to be done to raise standards and improve consistency in teaching and learning, which are satisfactory at present.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the percentage of high GCSE grades, especially in science, and improve achievement in the sixth form.
- Make teaching and learning more consistently effective by spreading the very good practice that exists and by ensuring that training about teaching has a measurable impact on students' progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are close to average. Students' achievement is good in Years 7 to 11. Students do well in English in Years 7 to 9, achieving average standards in the end of Year 9 national tests. A significant number of students enter the school with low reading ages but they catch up well. The school had its best ever GCSE results in 2006. Over 40% of students attained five GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics. Students make better progress in English and mathematics in Years 10 and 11 than they do in science. In several subjects, two-thirds of the grades attained were A* to C. The school is working hard to further improve its percentage of A*/A grades. When students' attendance falls below 90%, they do less well at GCSE.

Students who enter the school with relatively low attainment, who do not have English as their mother tongue or who have support for a learning difficulty or disability, achieve at least as well as other students. The school is fully aware that middle and some higher attaining girls could do better and it is beginning to raise their attainment. There is very little difference between the progress made by White British students and those from minority ethnic backgrounds.

In 2006, over half the sixth form students achieved their predicted A-level grades. However, they underachieved in several subjects and the number of students reaching the high grades was low. A combination of factors contributed to these results, including the impact of staff absences, too many students taking four AS levels, which many found too much and/or taking difficult subjects without strong enough GCSE grades in them. Present Year 13 students did reasonably well in their Year 12 AS examinations which gives them a secure base for their examinations in 2007. Students make very good progress in vocational courses.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Practically all students say that they enjoy coming to school, reflected in their average attendance and good punctuality. The good relationships between students have been strengthened by the new, mixed-age tutor groups. Students feel confident that bullying is rare

and that it is not tolerated. The atmosphere around the school is calm and orderly. Students from different ethnic and home backgrounds get on well. Behaviour in lessons is generally good. Chatter and lack of concentration occurs when teaching is not exciting or it lacks relevance and variety. The number of students excluded for a fixed period has been high because the school applies its behaviour policies strictly. The school has intensified its support for vulnerable students and the incidents of students being excluded more than once has declined.

Many students take advantage of the very good range of healthy food and drinks offered in the canteen. Students understand the importance of exercise and a large number take part in sports clubs after school. Students know full well the dangers of drugs, smoking and sexual relationships as the school tackles all such topics in a sensitive, yet open manner. The school encourages high moral and social standards well.

The school council takes up suggested issues but there are limited opportunities for all students to inform its discussions or for the council to manage its own affairs. A good step forward is that the headteacher has invited students, through the school's intranet, to share with her their thoughts about the new school buildings. Opportunities for students to take responsibilities are increasing and sixth formers are becoming more involved with helping younger students. Through its specialism, students' involvement in the community is growing, for example a Future Towns project. Sixth form students fund-raise for Opportunity Gambia.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

In the majority of lessons, teachers' insistence on good behaviour and concentration creates an atmosphere in which girls establish good working habits and attitudes to learning. When encouraged to do so, students keep their notebooks tidy and well organised, as seen in geography but not in mathematics. As assessment records are now well organised, an increasing number of teachers use them to plan work to match students' different standards.

In successful lessons teachers understand that students enjoy learning in different ways. Students learn well when they are actively involved and assess their own and each other's learning, such as in the performing arts. Students enjoy practical work, for example in science when they are excited by their first view of cells under a microscope.

It is clear that there has been training on ways to make lessons go well, but some teachers do not apply this knowledge with enough thought. Whilst it is sensible to ask groups of students to prepare presentations to give to the class, if they have too little time and limited guidance about how to do this then they do not learn enough.

Girls with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because of the high quality, effective support they receive from teachers and learning support assistants. Whilst teachers develop students' literacy and numeracy well, not all of them use ICT effectively in their lessons and students do not practise their skills regularly enough for them all to feel confident using ICT.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The recent review of the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 has improved the range of vocational courses and extended the combinations of courses that students can follow. This has increased students' choices and added to their enjoyment of learning. Students do not use ICT enough across the curriculum. There are many extra-curricular activities taken up by many students, sometimes by whole year groups, especially in music, drama and sports.

In the sixth form, the choice of vocational and academic courses benefits from the effective collaboration with several local institutions and satisfactorily meets students' needs. Gifted and talented students are given good opportunities to attend interesting courses which extend their horizons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Careful analysis of students' academic and social needs combined with rigorous support programmes provide strong foundations for improving their achievements. Guidance about careers is very good. Outstanding provision in the Link Centre supports vulnerable students and those with serious behaviour or emotional difficulties very well. They receive effective, detailed counselling, target setting and progress reviews.

Effective links with external agencies such as social services and the police, promote healthy living, welfare and safety. In all year groups, the team of personal, social and health education specialists prepares students very well to cope with life outside school. Senior staff respond promptly to reported incidents of bullying or racial abuse and track outcomes and repetitions. Procedures for child protection and safeguarding all students meet legal requirements.

Some students are concerned that the system for rewards and sanctions is not applied consistently and that students are sometimes unfairly punished for minor infringements. The headteacher is concerned about their perceptions and taking actions to address them.

The school fully involves partner primary schools in the good induction programme. Year 7 students settle in quickly. In Year 11, workplace visits, work experience and external agency advice provide very good guidance for further education and careers. Several of these elements have been strengthened by the business and enterprise links, as have the courses offered to the local community.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

By quickly evaluating the school's strengths and areas for development, the new headteacher has identified the right priorities to build on the good GCSE results in 2006 and to improve standards in the sixth form. She is very ably supported by an enthusiastic and energetic leadership team, which is fiercely proud of the school's achievements. Self-evaluation is detailed,

honest and leads to changes as necessary. For example, present sixth formers received more realistic guidance about which courses they should follow to best match their aptitudes and aspirations.

Reflecting one of its aims, 'Where people develop and show initiative', the school is particularly good at spotting talent amongst its staff and supporting them to develop into leaders. With several new appointments this academic year, the effectiveness of middle managers has improved; weak departments receive support to improve. An Innovations Group of enthusiastic teachers is successfully spearheading business and enterprise initiatives and promoting ICT in the curriculum.

Several senior leaders and the governors are deeply involved in plans to rebuild large parts of the school. The designs imaginatively incorporate students' welfare needs as well as consideration of how their learning will evolve in the future. Members of the governing body have a wealth of relevant expertise and are fully aware of what needs to be done to keep standards rising. Governors took heed of the previous inspection's recommendations and put them into place. The school's capacity to improve is good.

Governors are proud of the school's strong reputation in the community. They also keenly support the school's determination to nurture students, whatever their academic abilities, so that all can succeed and follow worthwhile careers. It is good that most of the school is accessible by wheelchair and that the school welcomes students with other physical disabilities. Parents rate the school highly, so it is not surprising that it is oversubscribed.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

8 June 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Northfleet School for Girls, Northfleet, DA11 8AQ

We much enjoyed visiting your school recently. Thank you for being so welcoming. We are sorry that we did not have time to talk to more of you as it was interesting hearing your views about school life, most of which were positive! We have described your school's effectiveness as good with several significant strengths. These include how well you get on with teachers and the very good care and support you get, especially through your personal, social and health education lessons and through the Link.

Last year's Year 11 did well by getting an average percentage of five or more GCSE grades A* to C, including English and mathematics. The challenge for you and your teachers in the future is to get more high grades, especially in the sixth form. Doing this is one of the two issues in the report which we have asked the school to tackle.

The other issue is to do with teaching and how you learn. We know there is much good teaching and that your headteacher and many other staff are knowledgeable about what makes lessons interesting. What is needed now are more really good lessons where teachers:

- break up lessons with a good mix of activities, especially practical ones
- use ICT to help you learn and encourage you to do the same
- help you to see the relevance of work to your lives.

You can help to improve your learning too, by continuing to work hard, by concentrating in all lessons and by keeping your notes well organised and clear.

Your headteacher is busy working on the major building works which will transform your school and she is keen to hear your views on them and all areas of school life. At the same time, she is determined to foster one your school's key aims, that: 'Everyone is proud of their achievements and friendships'.

For those of you taking examinations, I hope they go very well and that all of you have happy and successful futures.

Clare Gillies Lead inspector