



Northampton Academy

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 134814
Inspection number 300446
Inspection dates 31 January –1 February 2007
Reporting inspector Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Academy	School address	Wellingborough Rd
School category	Non-maintained		Northampton
Age range of pupils	11–18		NN3 8NH
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01604 402811
Number on roll (school)	1192	Fax number	01604 773830
Number on roll (6th form)	136		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Richard Tice
		Headteacher	Peter Hullah
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	31 January –1 February 2007	300446

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

The academy opened in September 2004 in the buildings of the predecessor school and in a neighbouring middle school that closed as part of the town-wide reorganisation to 11–18 education. The highly technological teaching environment provides superb information and communication technology (ICT) and sports facilities. The academy has a dual specialism in sport and in business and enterprise. The academy has faced significant staffing difficulties, including a high turnover in teachers and changes in senior leadership. The principal took up post in January 2006. The recruitment of suitably qualified and experienced teachers remains an ongoing challenge in some key subject areas.

The number of students on roll is rising. The academy is an increasingly popular school. The academy draws its students from Northampton's eastern estates. The catchment has high levels of social and educational disadvantage. Students come from a wide range of different backgrounds. Most are White British, although the proportion of students from other ethnic backgrounds is broadly average. The proportion entitled to free school meals is above the national figure. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average, although more students have a statement of special educational need than is found nationally.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The academy is an improving school. Its overall effectiveness is satisfactory.

There are notable and developing strengths in the academy's provision, particularly those developed through its specialism in sport. The curriculum is good because it meets the needs and aspirations of most students well and gives them good enrichment opportunities. The quality of teaching is satisfactory and the academy provides good care, guidance and support for its students. This sound provision has a positive impact on the students. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory and improving. Given their starting points, students make expected rates of progress. Although standards of attainment are below national average figures, they are rising year on year and are set to increase further. Achievement is satisfactory overall. However, weaknesses in students' literacy skills constrain their rates of progress across the curriculum.

The split site arrangement presented a considerable challenge during the first four terms until the academy moved into its excellent new accommodation in January 2006. Despite turbulence and staff upheaval since it first opened, the academy has established a settled climate and a positive ethos. The improving picture is the result of strong and effective leadership and a team of staff that is increasingly cohesive and confident. However, there remain a small but significant number of students, across Years 7 to 11, whose attendance, behaviour and attitudes continue to present a considerable challenge and take up a disproportionate amount of management time and energy. The most challenging students do not readily respond to the academy's support or rise to its expectations.

The academy's leadership and management have strengthened significantly and are good. Procedures for monitoring the academy's performance are rigorous and effective. There is good capacity to sustain and increase the academy's improvement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The embryonic sixth form is developing well. Its effectiveness and efficiency are satisfactory. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is good and its leadership is satisfactory. The curriculum is suitably tailored to meet the needs of the expanding sixth form, and is satisfactory. Many of the students choose to stay at the academy because they value the positive relationships and the strong support and guidance that staff provide. Sixth form students take advantage of the wide range of opportunities provided by the academy and also contribute positively to the academy and to the wider community.

They mature as confident young adults who are well prepared for the next stage in their education and for later life. Given their starting points, students make satisfactory and often good progress in lessons. Standards of attainment are broadly average and are rising. Achievement is good in several subjects and is satisfactory overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the developing strategies to strengthen provision have a stronger impact on the attendance, behaviour and achievement of the most challenging students.
- Raise standards by coordinating more effectively the actions to improve students' literacy skills across the curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement is satisfactory overall. The standard of students' work when they start in Year 7 is generally below the level expected for 11-year-olds. Writing is particularly weak. Nonetheless, students make satisfactory progress in lessons and over time. Moreover, standards are showing steady improvement. Results in the Key Stage 3 national tests and in the GCSE examinations increased in 2006, but remain below national average figures. The proportion of students who achieved at least five higher grade GCSEs rose from 34% to 40%. There are some significant individual successes, for example in sociology, textiles and Spanish, where students regularly attain levels well above the national average. However, the academy is still surprised by occasional dips, notably in English in 2006, where the results were lower than expected. Around 95% of all students achieved at least one GCSE qualification in 2006. Although promising, this still means that some students leave without any qualifications.

Although this picture is improving, low levels of literacy continue to limit the rates of progress that many students can make. Too few students achieve five good GCSEs that include English and mathematics, and strategies to address weaknesses in literacy are not coordinated systematically across the curriculum. Girls tend to outperform boys throughout the academy. The most significant underachievement is amongst middle ability boys. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds do slightly better than those from White British backgrounds.

Standards of attainment in the sixth form are broadly in line with national figures. Results at A and AS level improved significantly in 2006. Achievement is satisfactory.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The personal development of students, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, is satisfactory overall with many good features. Students talk enthusiastically about the many and varied opportunities that are on offer during and after school, including sport, music, creative writing, dance and drama. Participation rates are good. Students understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and many

do more than the usual two hours of sport per week. They feel safe and confident that issues, such as bullying, are suitably addressed.

Students make a positive contribution to the academy. The student council is active and effective. Representatives have, for example, met with canteen staff and helped to improve healthy eating. Students who contribute to the interactive magazine speak eloquently about their commitment and are clear about what they have learnt.

The academy is an orderly and welcoming community. The vast majority of students meet the academy's high expectations: they behave well, have positive attitudes to learning and often enjoy their lessons. However, the academy still faces a challenge from a small but significant number of recalcitrant students. These individuals do not readily accept the culture of respect and positive participation. Their challenging behaviour is, at times, a disruptive influence. The level of exclusions remains very high as the academy seeks to establish clear boundaries for what is unacceptable.

Attendance has improved steadily since the academy opened and is currently around 90%. The academy is tackling the issue robustly, but attendance remains stubbornly below the level achieved by most secondary schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with some outstanding provision and very little that is inadequate. The academy has worked hard to reach this position with the backdrop of a large turnover of staff. Sensibly, it has concentrated on ensuring that lessons are well planned, with appropriate objectives for learning and a clear structure. This has enabled new and less experienced teachers to establish themselves quickly and to ensure students make at least satisfactory progress in their learning.

In the majority of lessons, the atmosphere for learning is improved by the strong relationships that exist between the teachers and students. Assessment of the students' progress, by the teachers and the students themselves, is generally good. In some lessons this is enhanced further by frequent references to levels of attainment and what the students should do to improve. The teachers' subject knowledge is generally good.

Sometimes the behaviour of a very small minority of students is inadequate and the students' learning suffers; this was reflected by the concerns of some parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire. In a small number of lessons, the management of the students' behaviour is weak. Additionally, activities that fail to stimulate the students' interest result in poor behaviour of some and the passivity of others.

The quality of literacy support lessons for students in Years 7 and 8 is good. This is helping to address the weak skills of the students who struggle to cope with the

demands of reading and writing in many subjects. However, the support for literacy in lessons more generally is just satisfactory and sometimes does not provide a sufficient framework to help students make progress, especially in writing.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The academy has given good thought to how it best meets the needs of the students according to their academic aptitudes and interests. The curriculum is developing well and is good. The academy's specialisms make a strong contribution to the curriculum. The sport specialism in particular makes very good provision for the students and also has a wider community impact through the strong links with local groups. The academy has been instrumental, for example, in promoting much better provision for rugby in the eastern district of Northampton; the resulting two clubs are an example of best practice in setting up and sustaining such provision. Strategies for developing teaching and learning have also been pioneered by the specialist subject areas.

The sixth form offers a satisfactory choice of courses. As it grows, so the curriculum is reviewed and adapted to provide a broader range of academic and vocational options, as well as a good range of wider enrichment opportunities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Students feel that they are listened to and that the issues which concern them are understood and addressed. The faith room offers an effective respite to vulnerable students where they can receive support and time to reflect. Good use is made of data on students' prior achievement in target-setting. The termly reviews assess progress against targets, which students understand. Students' personal and academic progress is well supported, so that most know what they need to do to improve. Effective procedures are in place to identify and support those that are at risk. A proper record of the statutory checks is kept. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported. Learning mentors make an effective contribution to this provision.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good. The academy has effectively managed considerable change and standards are rising. There has been steady improvement in the outcomes for students, both in their achievement and personal development, and this has been accomplished during a period of considerable staff turbulence.

The principal provides strong and effective leadership. He guides the strategic development of the academy and manages skilfully the day-to-day challenges. His vision for a high achieving school and a caring and inclusive community is modelled by his own leadership. Senior managers share this vision and use their complementary skills to implement the developments which are properly and clearly articulated in the academy development plan.

There are notable strengths in middle management, which is satisfactory overall. Recent appointments have strengthened curriculum leadership, and the development of rigorous and regular self-evaluation procedures has ensured that managers are both supported and held accountable. Four 'satisfactory to outstanding' staff groups have been established and their responsibilities reflect each of the academy's development priorities. This promotes the academy's ambitious vision by distributing ideas, developing good practice and encouraging decision making at all levels. Self-evaluation is accurate and effective, and demonstrates that the academy has good capacity for further improvement.

Governors are well informed and have a good understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. They are keen to support the academy's development by, for example, judiciously promoting the specialism in business and enterprise.

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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?	3	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	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	3	
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

Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. Like other visitors, we were impressed by your superb facilities, but also by your friendly welcome. Your openness was helpful and constructive. We were particularly impressed by:

- Your superb facilities and the good use that so many of you make of them; lots of you told us how much you enjoy the sport, fitness, dance and drama opportunities provided during and after school.
- The good relationships between adults and students and the positive attitudes to learning and good behaviour that most of you showed in your lessons.
- The good care, guidance and support that the academy provides and the positive impact this has on you as you move up through the academy.
- The high quality of many of your lessons.

Northampton Academy is an improving school that, with your help, will go from strength to strength. The vast majority of you take advantage of much that your academy offers. However, some of you, and your parents, drew attention to the disruptions caused by changes in teachers and also by the misbehaviour of some of your peers. The academy takes a strong line on unacceptable behaviour, but it is clear that some of you do not show enough consideration or respect for others. This has a detrimental impact on everyone. For example, your learning is sometimes affected in lessons and at lunchtime some of the toilets need constant supervision.

The academy is well led and managed. The principal has a vision for it becoming an outstanding school, but this will only be achieved when everyone works together. In order to continue to improve results we have specifically asked the academy to:

- Work more systematically on improving literacy across all subjects.
- Address the issues caused by disaffected students, so that there is improvement in overall levels of attendance, behaviour and achievement.