

Northbrook Church of England School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100749
Local Authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	307470
Inspection dates	12–13 December 2007
Reporting inspector	David Hornbrook HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	499
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Harold Reid
Headteacher	Miss Esther Holland (Acting Head)
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
School address	Leahurst Road Hither Green London SE13 5JA
Telephone number	020 8852 3191
Fax number	020 8463 0201

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Northbrook is a small, inner-city school which admits 60% of its students from Christian backgrounds. Boys outnumber girls and about one third of students are entitled to free school meals. The school population is ethnically diverse with some three quarters from minority ethnic groups. The number of students with learning needs or disabilities is well above average. The school presently occupies the buildings of a former primary school about half a mile from its permanent site which is being redeveloped. Delays in completing the temporary accommodation and the sudden departure of the former headteacher led to a certain amount of disruption at the beginning of the autumn term.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Despite its recent difficulties, Northbrook is providing a satisfactory standard of education with some good features and is well placed to improve. The transfer to the Leahurst Road site was managed very effectively, after frustrating delays to the refurbishment of the buildings, and the school is now running smoothly in its temporary home. The former deputy headteacher has confidently taken up her new leadership role as acting headteacher and is giving the school a clear sense of direction and vision. The governors have played a crucial role in providing stability over a difficult period. The improvement plan highlights the school's priorities and spells out a clear and realistic programme of action and there are already some signs of change for the better.

While achievement and standards are satisfactory overall, the picture is not a consistent one. In 2006, low grades at GCSE and falling achievement in Years 7 to 9 triggered local authority intervention and a partnership board was established to co-ordinate support for the school and to monitor improvement. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics improved dramatically in 2007 to just below the national figure. In the same year, students overall made progress which was significantly above the national average. Figures show that most of this progress was made in Years 10 and 11; standards and achievement in Years 7 to 9 have been significantly below average for a number of years. Girls continue to make less progress than might be expected, an issue noted at the time of the last inspection.

The behaviour of students is satisfactory and students report few incidents of bullying and no racist behaviour. The catering facilities are not as good as on the previous site and students have to travel by bus to games and physical education. Despite this, they have a sound awareness of the need to keep healthy. There are many opportunities for quiet reflection and students take part in a number of arts activities. The school has successfully run a number of enterprise days, but realises that providing better opportunities for the development of students' economic well-being is a priority.

There is a rigorous programme of lesson observation and the school's judgements about the quality of teaching and learning are robust. Inspectors agree with the school that teaching is satisfactory overall but the school knows that it must do more to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning in lessons if standards are to improve. The curriculum is sound and the school is making efforts to broaden students' access to vocational qualifications. The care, guidance and support provided for students' academic and pastoral needs are sound. New systems for academic review are well-designed but in the early stages of implementation.

The acting headteacher has made some progress towards the establishment of a new culture of accountability in the school and performance data are much more widely disseminated than before. Nevertheless, the strengthening of the roles of subject leaders and student co-ordinators and their fuller engagement with the improvement plan is a key priority for the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Improve the achievement of girls.
- Develop the accountability of subject leaders and student co-ordinators.
- Ensure that teaching encourages students to learn independently.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school with below average levels of attainment. The progress made by students in Years 7 to 9 is below average; in 2006 achievement was exceptionally low. Students make very much better progress in Years 10 and 11. Their progress was particularly good in 2007, putting the school in the top 15% of schools nationally for students' overall performance and in the top 6% for English. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C remains below the national average, but in 2007 there was marked rise in the percentage attaining these grades including English and mathematics. No groups are significantly underachieving, but girls continue to do less well than boys. Raising the attainment of girls and of all students in mathematics and science have been identified as key priorities. The school sets challenging targets, all of which it reached or exceeded in 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is good. Assemblies and registration periods provide opportunities for debate and reflection and all students are involved in some kind of creative or cultural activity. There is a school choir and students taking part in the black pupils' achievement project recently staged a drama production in a local theatre. Attendance is similar to national figures, although the number of unauthorised absences is slightly higher than average. Students are attentive and responsive in lessons but some of the boys are not as considerate of others as they should be when moving through circulation areas. Students enjoy coming to school, feel safe there and praise the work done by staff to transform the building. One parent commented, 'The school is in temporary premises but my child is very happy in Year 7'. Despite the lack of exercise facilities on site, students take part in borough-wide sporting activities such as cross-country championships. Students make a positive contribution to the school community through an active school council and a system of Year 11 prefects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Lessons are well planned and teachers are beginning to use information about students' past performance to think about how they might meet the needs of all those in their classes. Clear learning objectives, which are shared with the students, are a strong feature of lessons. Teachers maintain an appropriate pace, deploy a range of different activities to stimulate interest and use praise well to reward and motivate. Some teachers use searching questions to challenge students to think for themselves but others are too reliant on relaying information. A few students are disinclined to work with others on tasks and the school recognises that there is a need to develop students' confidence in learning independently. In some subjects, marking is very thorough with informative comments to help students to see what they need to do. Interactive whiteboards are a feature of all classrooms but teachers are not yet exploiting their full potential.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum for all years is satisfactory and fulfils statutory requirements. In Years 10 and 11, in addition to the normal compulsory subjects, all students follow a course in information and communication technology. They also make a choice from an adequate range of additional subjects. The vocational options available at the school are limited but additional work-related courses in subjects such as catering are available at a local further education college. All Year 11 students take the on-line tests in adult literacy and numeracy which helps to meet the needs of employers. Gifted and talented students may take GCSE examinations early and some GCE AS level courses and extension lessons are provided for them. A wide range of additional activities, many subject related and award bearing, is available for all students. The school prides itself on the number of educational visits on offer, believing that trips to theatres and art galleries help to develop young people into well rounded adults.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is selected by many parents for its caring ethos and several commented positively on the support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A successful 'fresh start' programme looks after more vulnerable pupils, many of whom grow in confidence as a result of the close attention they are given. The school's participation in the black pupils' achievement project has been very effective, significantly improving the results of those involved. Funding has been found for a similar project aimed at improving the motivation of girls. The school is developing systems for tracking students' achievement and students and parents are increasingly aware of students' targets. Careers guidance is sound and there are strong partnerships with local colleges to support progression into post-16 education. Suitable child protection procedures are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher and the governors have been successful in providing stability during the changes and challenges of the past 12 months. The departure of a number of senior staff in the summer, including the former headteacher, depleted the senior leadership, but the governors have been successful in securing the support of a number of experienced external advisers to strengthen the team. The acting headteacher is vigorous and resourceful. Having successfully settled the school into its temporary home, she is working hard to re-energise it and establish a culture of accountability and high expectations. The school makes good use of performance data to monitor standards and inform decisions and for the first time this information is shared among teachers. Self-evaluation is good. Judgements are secure and action is taken to address weaknesses. Teachers are regularly observed in the classroom and underperforming departments are called to account for students' performance and must produce rigorous action plans for improvement. It is too early for many of these developments to have had measurable impact, and the extent to which subject leaders and student co-ordinators have understood and embraced the new culture of accountability varies considerably across the school. However, strategic planning is good, there is already some evidence of improving

standards and the active involvement of a strong and effective governing body means that the school has good capacity to improve.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

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

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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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
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

2 January 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Northbrook Church of England School, London, SE13 5JA

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to let you know the judgements we made about your school. We enjoyed meeting groups of you, talking to your teachers and visiting lessons. Your views are very important and helped us to understand your school. In the end we thought that Northbrook is providing you with a satisfactory education.

- We were pleased to see that your GCSE results improved in 2007.
- We thought that you are attentive and hard-working in lessons, although some of you are a bit boisterous on the stairs and landings.
- We were pleased to hear that you enjoy coming to school and appreciate all the work that has gone into the move from the old building.
- We thought your new headteacher and the governors have a strong vision for the school and that its overall management is in very good hands.
- We were pleased to see all the initiatives aimed at helping you do better.

To make it even more successful we think your school needs to make sure that:

- you do as well in Years 7 to 9 as you do in Years 10 and 11
- you are able to learn independently of the teachers
- girls do as well as boys
- student co-ordinators and subject leaders are fully involved in new developments.

Thank you for taking part in the inspection, by talking to us about your work and your life in school. We were very impressed by your mature and reflective views.

David Hornbrook

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools