

Northfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	123346
Local Authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	314567
Inspection dates	26–27 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	60
6th form	2
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Slimm
Headteacher	Mr Mark Blencowe
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2005
School address	Knights Road Blackbird Leys Oxford OX4 6DQ
Telephone number	01865 771703
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Northfield School is a special school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is situated in the Blackbird Leys area of Oxford, an area of acute social and economic deprivation. All the pupils currently on roll are boys. Many of these have mental health difficulties and are capable of presenting very challenging behaviour. Pupils often arrive at Northfield having experienced very disrupted and intermittent education, largely because their very challenging behaviour has led to fixed term and permanent exclusions from their previous schools. As a result, they join the school with attainment well below the national average. The school has close links with Thames Valley Police and jointly funds a police officer, who is based full time in the school. It has Investors in People status, has gained a Healthy Schools award, and a Football Association charter mark for football and basketball. Being designated as a school for 11 to 16 year olds, Northfield does not officially make provision for students at post-16. However, it has two students in Year 12 as part of a pilot that is taking place in Oxfordshire special schools, pending a decision by the local authority about the education of 16 to 19 year olds in the county.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that has made significant improvement since the last inspection and is well placed to improve further.

Most parents express positive views about the school's work. For example, one parent said, 'Northfield has provided a safe and secure environment for my child, who has excelled being at this school. They have given him hope for the future where others have failed him. I cannot thank the school enough for the time, understanding, compassion and education my son has received'.

The school is led and managed well and senior leaders are passionate about providing the best possible education for the pupils. In recent years, the leadership team has systematically monitored and evaluated the school's provision and has made good improvements as a result. Managers have been innovative and put in place an exemplary system for supporting pupils in transforming their behaviour and attitudes. This has led to improved examination results, an increase in the attendance rate and a significant decline in the number of exclusions. Pupils appreciate that the system serves their best interests and they respond with good behaviour so that the school is a calm and orderly place. Relationships between staff and pupils are outstanding, and pupils frequently work and play harmoniously together. Some pupils make outstanding progress in their personal development and most attend regularly. Personal development is good overall, however, because the school is still working to engage a small group of pupils who are reluctant to attend.

Standards are well below average but improving and more able pupils are working close to the levels expected for their age in some areas. In the school as a whole, pupils achieve well and make good progress in response to teaching that is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. The curriculum meets pupils' personal needs very well and it is matched effectively to the learning needs of most pupils, with an emphasis on practical activities and preparation for the world of work.

The school is already working closely with the parents of pupils who do not attend regularly to try to improve their attendance. It has also begun to seek alternative means of meeting the learning needs of these pupils to develop possible packages of support, such as work experience, part-time attendance at college or producing work for completion at home. It provides satisfactory support for pupils with difficulties in literacy. The diagnosis of learning difficulties is not as detailed as it should be, however, and the support is not intensive enough. This is especially the case for those who join the school with limited skills in reading and spelling. Whereas behaviour targets are very detailed, pupils with learning difficulties do not have learning targets to help teachers to check how well they are doing and to plan appropriate support.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school makes good provision for the small number of students who have opted to stay on into Year 12. Following discussions with the students and their parents, individual programmes have been devised that reflect the students' interests and aspirations well. Students at post-16 receive the same good quality teaching and care afforded pupils throughout the school and, through links with the local community, have an opportunity to develop work-related skills.

The school is in the process of converting part of the boarding provision into a small self-contained flat to support students at post-16 in developing skills of independent living.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 8

The school's residential provision was inspected in June 2007, when its effectiveness was found to be good. Pupils were helped to achieve well and enjoyed the activities on offer. Good provision was made for protecting pupils from harm and helping them to stay safe. The management of the boarding provision was found to be good, but some aspects of the accommodation were criticised. The National Minimum Standards were fully met but with a number of recommendations for possible improvements. The school has made satisfactory progress towards meeting these recommendations and, through a donation from a local business, is currently completely refurbishing the boarding provision. There were, therefore, no pupils in residence at the time of the inspection and it was not possible to inspect all aspects of the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Identify learning difficulties more precisely and use this information to devise individual targets to help the staff to put in place an appropriate programme of support, especially for pupils with literacy difficulties.
- Devise flexible alternative provision for pupils who are reluctant to attend school regularly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school gained its best National Curriculum test results so far at Key Stage 3 in 2007 and a greater range of GCSE grades than in previous years. Typically, pupils gained accreditation from a selection of English, mathematics, science and physical education (PE), and a number of pupils in Year 10 gained a GCSE in PE. The two students who have stayed on into Year 12 both achieved six GCSE passes. The targets set for the school were met, and in some cases exceeded, in 2007. Pupils make good progress in mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Many pupils produce a good amount of written work and make good progress in English, but those with literacy difficulties do not make as much progress as they should in reading and writing. In the school as a whole, all pupils make particularly good progress in practical subjects such as PE, construction and motor vehicle studies. All pupils gain a first aid qualification and in the last two years, a team from the school has won the regional finals and reached the national finals.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Most pupils have positive attitudes and enjoy school. One said, 'I like coming to this school', and another said, 'It's the best school ever'. Behaviour is good in class and around the school; in those lessons where pupils are particularly motivated, behaviour is sometimes outstanding. Since the last inspection, the number of exclusions has fallen and records show that there has

been a significant reduction in extreme behaviour. There has also been an improvement in the rate of attendance, which is now satisfactory. The attendance of most pupils is good but a small number of pupils do not attend regularly enough which pulls down the overall attendance rate. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils have a good awareness of healthy lifestyles, particularly through taking an active part in a range of sporting activities, and understand about keeping safe. The school council makes a meaningful contribution to school development and pupils are closely involved in decisions. They are well prepared for the world of work and gain a very good understanding of the value of money through the school's 'penny for points' system. The range of skills and qualities pupils develop prepares them well for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school has sustained and built on the good quality teaching found at the last inspection and there is now a fair amount of teaching that is outstanding. Lessons are focused and purposeful. Varied activities, with an emphasis on practical opportunities, capture pupils' interest. Teachers use interactive whiteboards well to demonstrate techniques and provide examples. Subject knowledge is usually good and teachers often manage behaviour very effectively by keeping pupils focused so closely on the subject that they have no time to come off task. This is seen at its best in outstanding teaching in PE, where expectations are exceptionally high. Teaching assistants are generally used well and in some instances their skills have been developed so that they take a lead in particular areas of learning. Pupils are assessed on entry to the school and undertake termly tests which give them valuable practice in examination techniques and ensure that teachers have up-to-date information about their progress and attainment. Marking is generally informative so that pupils know what to do to improve their work. Pupils' personal and behavioural needs are identified very precisely and the resulting information used to set comprehensive targets in individual education plans. However, learning difficulties are not assessed precisely enough and pupils do not have individual learning targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good overall, with strengths in practical and vocational areas. At Key Stage 4, pupils have opportunities to take an increasing number of accredited courses at different levels of difficulty, including a number of GCSEs. They have stimulating sessions that include driving and motor vehicle studies, the Duke of Edinburgh Award, construction, cooking and first aid. There are good opportunities to find out about the world of work, to gain valuable skills in preparation for applying for jobs or college courses, and work experience is provided for selected pupils. ICT is promoted well across the curriculum and supports pupils' learning effectively. However, the school does not provide sufficiently intensive support programmes for pupils with learning difficulties, especially in literacy. A range of varied enrichment activities is linked exceptionally well to the rewards system and does much to motivate pupils. Some pupils have been on day trips to Barcelona and Paris and the school chartered a helicopter for

the four pupils who had gained the most points for good behaviour over a particular period of time. There are additional trips and the school welcomes a significant number of visitors who broaden pupils' awareness, including visiting musicians.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school provides high quality care and personal guidance, and ensures that pupils are safeguarded and protected. The staff have a detailed knowledge of pupils' backgrounds and are very sensitive to their personal difficulties. The system for promoting good behaviour and very close monitoring of the allocation of rewards and sanctions ensures that the behaviour policy is implemented consistently. The way rewards translate into a hierarchy of privileges and the very tangible outcome of a bank account for each pupil, into which pennies are paid but also deducted for any misdemeanours, encourages pupils to become responsible. Pupils greatly value the way behaviour is managed and say, 'It is good that we can only have privileges if we behave', and, 'The points system has encouraged us to do more work'. In addition, joint work with the police officer who is based in the school has helped to transform the behaviour of many pupils. The decision to partially fund an educational social worker, who supports parents experiencing difficulties getting their children to school, has been an important contributory factor in the rise in attendance. The onsite link with a careers agency also ensures pupils receive good advice about their future career options. Tracking of pupils' personal development and behaviour is outstanding. Tracking of their academic progress through termly testing is good, but tracking of progress for pupils who have learning difficulties is undeveloped.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and the deputies work together very effectively and provide a range of complementary skills. Staff morale is high and the school has gained a certificate of excellence from the Oxfordshire well-being project for two years in a row. Senior managers are accurate in their judgement about school effectiveness and leadership of behaviour is outstanding. Managers observe teaching and check how well pupils are doing in their work, and their findings have been backed up recently by a local authority review commissioned by the school. The contribution of subject co-ordinators to school development is satisfactory and improving. Governance is good. Governors are closely involved in the life of the school and have satisfactory systems in place for challenging managers. Considerable development has been undertaken to improve the facilities and maximum use is made of the premises. Senior managers are outward looking and have visited a number of other schools to identify best practice that could be incorporated into Northfield.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	2	
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

5 December 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northfield School, Oxford, OX4 6DQ

Thank you for making me feel welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit and now I am writing to tell you what I found out about the school.

Northfield is a good school. You say that you enjoy school and most of your parents are happy with the education it provides. The staff understand you and are always ready to listen to your problems. I was very impressed with the way the school helps you to improve your behaviour, and I know that you really value the rewards system. Having a wide range of privileges so that you have to earn a lot of points to take part in the most exciting ones, like go-karting, is a very good idea. Another fantastic idea is the way you build up money in your bank accounts through getting pennies for points and can build up quite big sums of money by the time you leave. It is also good that you have to pay for any damage from your account as that is helping you to become responsible.

Most of you are making good progress with your work because teaching is good. The school provides good opportunities for you to study subjects that interest you and it teaches you skills that are likely to be useful when you leave. I could see that you particularly enjoy physical education, getting hands-on experience with cars and construction, and finding out how to cook.

The school is led and managed well and the headteacher, managers and teachers want to make the school as good as possible for you. I have asked them to do this by:

- doing more to help those of you who find learning difficult, especially reading and writing
- finding more ways to work with the pupils who do not attend school regularly.

You can help them by always coming to school and working hard. Keep enjoying the privileges and make sure you earn a lot of points so that there is a big amount of money in your bank account to help you when you leave school.

Best wishes

Margaret Goodchild

Lead inspector