

The Gateway School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122162
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	327642
Inspection date	8 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	56
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ian Chapman
Headteacher	David Lloyd
Date of previous school inspection	8 June 2006
School address	St John's Road Tiffield Nr Towcester NN12 8AA
Telephone number	01604 878977
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The Gateway School makes provision for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties that prevent them from succeeding in mainstream settings. Most have additional learning or mental health needs. Many, have been excluded from their previous schools and have spent time away from school, with consequent very poor records of attendance. The school experiences a turnover of nearly half its pupil numbers each school year. Almost all pupils come from White British backgrounds. Nearly all are boys. The school moved from inadequate buildings in Northampton town to a new site and purpose-built facilities on the outskirts of a small village in February 2008, changing its name from Raeburn. The school's work has been recognised with the award of the Basic Skills Quality Mark, the FA Charter Standard, Activemark and The Princess Diana Memorial Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Gateway is a good school that makes a significant difference to the life chances of its pupils. It fulfils its central aim of 'working to maximum success for each individual' very well by nurturing excellent relationships with hard to reach young people and transforming their attitudes to themselves, to others and to learning. They consequently make outstanding progress in their personal and social development and achieve good results in their studies. The majority of pupils leave with a range of qualifications and go on to further education or employment. These results are the product of good teaching, leadership and management by a skilled and dedicated team of professionals who provide exceptionally effective care, guidance and support for pupils.

It is clear from what they say that pupils really enjoy their time at school, and this is made evident by their often much improved attendance. The very high quality, attractive and imaginatively designed environment and facilities of the new buildings and grounds play a significant part in helping pupils to feel valued. They respond with excellent behaviour, respecting their surroundings and the people in them. For this reason, pupils feel secure and act very responsibly, both within the school and on the many occasions when they make good use of a wide range of activities out in the wider community. Parents express their obvious appreciation with such comments as, 'My son is happy to go to school for the first time ever. In the short time he has been there, his reading age has almost doubled.' This kind of dramatic improvement makes a real difference to pupils' ability to engage successfully in learning. It is the product of well focused support by teachers and their able learning support assistants, who work very well together in effective partnerships, sensitively adapting their approaches to take account of individual pupils' needs and demeanour. The school has experienced high staff turnover in the recent past through no fault of its own, but has managed the situation well, ensuring that new staff are carefully inducted and helped to understand and adapt to the school's firm but fair ethos. Teaching and learning have been maintained at a good overall quality throughout this difficult time. Practice is, however, not yet consistent in making best use of the latest assessment information to inform planning to meet individual needs.

The principal has worked tirelessly to lead his colleagues successfully through a long and challenging period of development and change. He and a supportive team of senior colleagues and governors have worked very well together to plan strategically, raise significant funding and develop a flexible school and service that has a very clear and deliverable vision for the next stage of its development. Detailed and strongly funded plans are in train to develop wide-ranging vocational facilities on site and a current application has been submitted to achieve specialist technology school status. These plans will build on the school's already good and increasingly imaginative curriculum. Every development has always had the best interests of pupils as a key focus because of the principal's child-centred philosophy. Managers are, however, not yet making the best possible use of information to determine the relative effectiveness of its many initiatives. The school has made very considerable improvements since the last inspection and is exceptionally well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment data on pupils' performance is used consistently well to inform planning for learning across the school.

- Make better use of the wealth of data collected to provide a clearer overall picture of all aspects of the school's effectiveness and thus further sharpen development planning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry is well below national expectations and academic standards remain low due to the nature of pupils' learning difficulties and, in many cases, because of their previous poor attendance and often fractured education. Pupils make good progress across the majority of subjects and courses and achieve impressive results in an increasing number of accredited courses at the end of their time in school. No particular groups underperform, and some pupils with particular needs make exceptional progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills, the lack of which has often held them back in the past. Good systems for regularly checking how pupils are doing informs the collaborative setting of personalised targets with pupils and progress is reported very regularly to parents. This means that pupils are clear about what they need to do to further their progress, and this in turn raises their self-esteem and confidence. Pupils' major successes are, therefore, not always in the most obvious and important acquisition of valuable academic knowledge and skills. They are often more to do with learning how to work productively with others and independently, and coming to realise that they can have a worthwhile, positive future.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils demonstrate exceptional improvements in every area of their personal and social development. The school's success in this respect is the result of the development of excellent relationships within which pupils are encouraged and supported to share their thoughts, cares and concerns. In this way, they become increasingly capable of engaging in a productive dialogue with staff and recognising the important interplay of rights and responsibilities. The rewards of this approach are tangible across the school. There is a calm and mutually respectful atmosphere, pupils' behaviour is excellent, when considering their backgrounds and difficulties, and their 'pupil voice' is valued and acted upon. For example, pupils made significant contributions to the planning and delivery of the new building and facilities, and the interview and selection processes for recent staff appointments. Pupils engage very successfully in community activities. They have built extremely productive relationships with pupils in other special schools through arts projects - and more tangibly by working with, supporting and entertaining younger pupils with complex needs. This latter activity was celebrated through the award of the Princess Diana Memorial Award to the young men involved. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure. They respond very well to the school's many approaches to help them lead healthy lives through a wide range of sporting and outdoor activities, very good health education and nutritious lunch menus. Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural sensitivities are exceptionally well developed through the school's curriculum and strong ethos. In this way, pupils are well prepared to meet the challenges of the next stage of their education and adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

There is a calm and pleasant atmosphere in classrooms. Teachers are skilled in organising and managing lessons to get the best out of sometimes reluctant or disturbed pupils. Staff know their pupils well and are flexible in their responses to challenge. Most teaching is at least good and some is outstanding. The best lessons are fast paced and incorporate an engaging variety of methods and materials. Teachers' planning usually incorporates knowledge from thorough and careful assessment to ensure that all pupils' varying needs are met, so that they experience success in their learning. However, this does not yet feature consistently in lessons across the school. Very effective use is made of the new computer technology available. Relaxed and supportive relationships encourage excellent behaviour and good humour, so that pupils feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts and ideas. Regular monitoring and feedback by senior staff and well structured continuing professional development for all staff are gradually spreading best practice across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The move to a new building with excellent specialist facilities has accelerated the development of wide-ranging learning opportunities across most subjects. The curriculum is being regularly reviewed and creatively adapted to meet the diverse needs and interests of all pupils, so that they are motivated to engage productively with what is on offer. Close account is being taken of the most recent national advice to incorporate key skills and dimensions of learning, so that pupils can relate to a whole range of activities that are relevant to their future success. The number of accredited courses, including at GCSE level, which pupils can study is regularly increasing. Pupils experience a good range of enrichment activities, including competitive sports, arts projects, residential trips and theatre in education. Plans are in train to offer an extended day to increase these opportunities. Vocational learning is currently being offered to older pupils in local colleges, but the school has well advanced plans to develop this resource on site. This will in turn enable pupils to stay on beyond the age of 16. Enterprise and careers guidance elements are underdeveloped, but there are clear plans to improve the situation.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school has an excellent pastoral support system that is highly valued by pupils and parents alike. All staff are highly skilled in identifying the personal needs of pupils and engaging them in a productive dialogue about how they can overcome their difficulties and best develop their capabilities. This approach is exceptionally successful in encouraging pupils to improve their attitudes and behaviour, recognise the value of education and grow in confidence and self-esteem. Rewards and sanctions are motivating and used very well to encourage group working and joint responsibility. Attendance is extremely well monitored and encouraged, so that many pupils improve their attendance significantly. There is, though, a small group of persistent absentees who are hard to shift, and who have a disproportionately negative influence on the school's overall attendance figures. Procedures to safeguard pupils are robust and effective. High quality liaison links the work of many agencies, such as social care, counsellors and the Life Chances team, to provide a very effective 'joined up' approach to keeping pupils

safe and meeting their wide-ranging needs. Pupils are given valued guidance to set and meet challenging but achievable targets, and how to make the right choices about the next stage of their lives.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Thoughtful leadership and strong, well focused management have successfully developed and delivered a clear vision for the school during the past three years. Recent careful restructuring of the senior leadership team has facilitated an important division of responsibilities, which has enabled the principal to concentrate on the strategic planning necessary to continue with the school's further development. His colleagues are thus able to focus more on the work necessary to promote continuing improvements in teaching and learning. The school has developed increasingly sophisticated data gathering systems to monitor behaviour, attendance, learning and social development. It analyses this information well to aid self-evaluation, but has yet to implement a robust framework that provides a way of fully inter-relating the findings and involving the whole school community in a collective process. The move from an urban setting to a new rural community has encouraged the school to revisit its approach to promoting community cohesion. It has cause to celebrate its continuing success in helping pupils to understand, appreciate and respect difference and diversity in its own community and reaching out into the wider educational community through its outreach group to engage isolated pupils and their families. In a relatively short space of time, school leaders have already had considerable success in developing an active and mutually beneficial relationship with the local community through a wide range of effective initiatives.

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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?	2
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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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 learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Gateway School, Tiffield, NN12 8AA

Thank you for being so welcoming when we visited your school. We very much enjoyed meeting you, joining you for lunch and seeing some of your lessons and work. We were particularly grateful for your honesty when talking about your earlier experiences of school and the difference that being at The Gateway has made in many of your lives.

Your school is a calm and happy place to be and we were impressed to see how well you are looking after your splendid new buildings. We agree with you and your parents that yours is a good school with many interesting and helpful things going on. Good teaching helps you to make good progress in your studies and achieve some impressive results by the time you leave. Some of you have made some exceptional gains in your learning, for example in your reading skills, as a result of the support and encouragement you have received from the kind and helpful staff. Perhaps most impressive are the often remarkable improvements that you have made in your attitudes to school, behaviour and personal and social skills. You take on the responsibilities you have been offered maturely and sensibly, and many of you have shown considerable sensitivity in helping each other and those less fortunate than you in other schools.

Your teachers have worked hard to develop a wide range of interesting activities to help you develop more skills and greater confidence. As a result, many of you are gaining important qualifications that will help you to move on successfully beyond school. Mr Lloyd and all his colleagues have done a very good job in getting the school to where it is at the moment. They still have lots of plans to develop even better provision, especially to help you gain useful vocational skills.

We have asked the school to make better use of all the information it gathers about your activities and achievements in planning your individual work and the further development of the school.

Do remember, though, that you can only benefit from all this help if you attend the school regularly. Most of you do, some for the first time in your school career, and this is to be celebrated. Good luck in all your futures.

Yours faithfully

Steven Parker Lead inspector