

Northern House School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123336
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	380637
Inspection dates	5–6 July 2012
Lead inspector	Bob Pugh

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

Type of school	Community Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	5–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Michael Benson
Headteacher	Ian Barker
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2008
School address	South Parade Summertown Oxford OX2 7JN
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Age group	5–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Bob Pugh

Additional Inspector

Debby McCarthy

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 15 lessons taught by 13 teachers amounting to over six hours of lesson observation time. Meetings were held with school leaders, teachers, members of the governing body and with pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection and looked at the school's own self-evaluation work, its development plan and pupils' workbooks and files. Teachers' planning, minutes of governors' meetings and minutes of the school council's meetings were scrutinised. One inspector attended a scheduled meeting of the school council. The views of the 40 parents and carers who completed and returned questionnaires were considered. Inspectors also reviewed the questionnaires completed by staff and pupils.

Information about the school

Northern House School is an expanding special school of average size. All of the pupils have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and each has a statement of special educational needs. A growing number of pupils have additional needs such as autistic spectrum disorders and over one third are known to have significant speech, language and communication difficulties. Pupils come from all over Oxfordshire and there are almost fourteen times as many boys as girls. The great majority are from White British backgrounds and all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than the national average. There are a very few pupils in the care of the local authority.

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher and deputy headteacher have been appointed. Classroom accommodation is shared between an older house and a brand new purpose-built classroom block, opened in April 2012. The school has the Arts Mark and is working towards the Arts Gold Award. The school has applied for conversion to Academy status.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school where there is a continuous drive for improvement underpinning all aspects of its work. Significant recent changes have been extremely well managed to ensure that very high standards of teaching, learning and behaviour have been maintained.
- Most pupils make excellent progress during their time at this school, often from very low starting points on admission. Pupils often overcome significant barriers to make real improvements in learning and to their behaviour.
- Teachers have the highest expectations of their pupils. They use their detailed knowledge of the needs of each individual to make sure that lessons are very well planned and that all pupils are motivated and stretched. Senior staff play a leading role in improving the quality of teaching further by modelling good practice when new colleagues join the team or a new strategy is introduced. There are some opportunities for teachers to visit mainstream settings to strengthen their teaching even further, though this facility is not as well developed as it might be.
- Because teaching is carefully planned and focuses so well on individual needs, pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and behave extremely well. In class and in the wider school environment, pupils learn quickly to manage their own behaviour and everyone is treated with respect. Pupils say that they feel very safe at school.
- All school leaders and managers know their school well as a result of their careful monitoring of all aspects of its work. This includes highly effective performance management programmes for each member of staff. The excellent curriculum includes many opportunities for the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and includes a daily reminder that people have diverse beliefs. There is a lunchtime prayer rota representing a different religion every day.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for teachers to gain experiences of effective mainstream school practice so that:
 - even better transitions can be arranged for pupils into mainstream schools where this is appropriate
 - teachers are well equipped to provide support to pupils in mainstream schools when a need has been identified
 - effective teaching methods used in other settings can be adapted to drive standards yet higher in the school.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils work very hard in lessons. For example, in a successful mathematics lesson, one pupil practised sorting hundreds and tens until he was confident about the value of numbers in different columns. Because they are keen to succeed, by the time they are ready to leave the school some pupils have made such rapid progress, often from very low starting points, that their attainment matches that of their peers in mainstream settings. These pupils are often able to return successfully to mainstream schools. While attainment remains low overall, the overwhelming majority of pupils make significant gains during their years at the school and they are closing the gap with their peers rapidly. They catch up well in reading; this was demonstrated when pupils read from library books and their own workbooks when meeting inspectors. They attend well because they enjoy their lessons. There are no differences between rates of progress of any groups at the school.

Most pupils thoroughly understand their learning targets and are very often able to talk confidently about what they need to learn to do better. Pupils routinely make good guesses; they experiment and learn from mistakes, and work out solutions for themselves. This was particularly evident in a very effective art lesson when pupils became absorbed in model making and were able to explain to the class how their model would work. In a very good information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, pupils showed how well they have learned, by moving confidently from a group activity to work stations, where they loaded the programs they needed efficiently and worked enthusiastically to create personalised documents with minimal support but effective supervision from adults. Parents and carers are unanimous in their view that their children are making good progress at school. One pointed to the rapid progress made by their son in less than a year at the 'fantastic school with amazing teachers'.

Pupils are particularly proud of their successes in sporting events and competitions with pupils from other mainstream and special schools. On such occasions they try hard and behave well.

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Quality of teaching

Teaching at this school is outstanding. Teachers have very high expectations of their pupils, their precise lesson plans emphasise what each individual must learn if they are to achieve well. They frequently check that pupils understand what is being taught through questioning and discussion. In a highly effective English lesson, the teacher encouraged one pupil to explain what the lesson was about to another who arrived late. In doing so, the pupil demonstrated a full understanding of the lesson content and helped his friend to settle quickly to work. Very effective techniques are used to improve reading and writing. Teachers use their understanding of everyone's needs to deploy staff sensitively to support those who require most help. There is a firm emphasis on promoting reading and writing in daily literacy lessons and across the whole curriculum, with every opportunity taken in class and at break and lunchtime to stretch pupils further and gain confidence.

Lessons are almost always very well paced; teachers are conspicuously successful at engaging all pupils, no time is ever wasted because lesson planning motivates pupils to do well. Pupils regularly rise to the challenge by making well-thought-out suggestions and by experimenting. Two pupils in an outstanding science lesson, for example, enjoyed a real 'eureka' moment when they enthusiastically explained to the class what had happened to the water level when marbles were added to the cup. Teachers demonstrate their belief in pupils' good sense by allowing them to organise parts of the lesson. A particularly good example of this occurred when pupils extended what they had learned in a mathematics lesson by organising a captivating observation and perception game.

Homework is set regularly and is used to judge how well a pupil has understood what has happened in lessons and to foster regular communication between home and school. Marking is of a consistently high standard; feedback to pupils in workbooks and files matches the first-rate verbal feedback which is given to them during lessons.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils show very positive attitudes to learning. They settle quickly to their lessons following an orderly arrival at school. Parents and carers believe that the school helps their children through behavioural difficulties most effectively: one parent commented, 'Before my child came to Northern House, his behaviour was stopping him from learning. He did not like school and his behaviour was appalling. Now he behaves well, loves coming to school and he is learning again!' There is plenty of evidence that the behaviour of the vast majority of pupils shows remarkable rates of improvement at school. Pupils are polite and helpful to visitors, and keen to talk about their achievements and successes. Comprehensive records demonstrate a reduction in the rates of intervention with individual pupils over time and exclusions are very rare. Bullying of any kind is virtually unheard of. Attendance is above the

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national average for special schools and pupils arrive punctually. The very few disruptions which occur in class are dealt with efficiently and learning proceeds calmly at all times. Because lessons and other activities are so well planned, pupils are enthusiastic about learning, and as a result of excellent teaching, they thrive in lessons and develop important skills such as good listening, turn taking and trying hard at all times.

Pupils say that they feel safe at school and they know who to turn to for help if they are confused or worried. This view is endorsed by their parents and carers. The school site is safe and entrances are controlled by staff and doors and gates are secure. This means that once they are on the school campus pupils can, when it is appropriate, be trusted to move around the site without high levels of supervision. This demonstrates the extremely good progress they have made at managing their own behaviour, as a result of the school's relentless focus on improvement in this area. Rewards and sanctions are well matched to pupils' levels of understanding and pupils understand what they need to do to gain those rewards.

Leadership and management

School leaders and managers demonstrate an uncompromising commitment to continually driving up standards for pupils. The headteacher and his senior colleagues have an ambitious vision for the school based on their thorough understanding of what it does well and what needs to improve. Their vision is well captured in the school's development plan and in the conversations which occur around the school about how to help pupils succeed. Consequently, this school has a very strong capacity to improve even further in the future.

School leaders employ a wide range of assessment tools which provide close analysis of how well each pupil is doing and where improvement is necessary. The information gained from assessments is used to put into place effective intervention programmes, involving personalised support for literacy or numeracy. School leaders recognise when pupils would benefit from transfer to a different type of school and on these occasions, they work sensitively with pupils and parents and carers to arrange effective transfers. However, there are too few opportunities for all teachers to visit mainstream schools routinely, to extend their already notably successful teaching further by observing best practice in different settings, to facilitate better transitions into mainstream schools and to be equipped to provide support to pupils in mainstream schools when necessary.

Governors are keenly aware of their responsibilities and carry them out rigorously. They visit regularly and make good use of their knowledge of the school to support and challenge senior staff.

The school's outstanding curriculum offers wide-ranging and memorable learning experiences which pupils enjoy tremendously and include many opportunities for the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. School leaders ensure that every individual has an equal opportunity to gain access to all resources

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and activities. There are many examples of innovative practice in the curriculum, such as 'The Big Writing Project' which has led to rising standards in handwriting, spelling and sentence construction in all classes. Vibrant morning assemblies are used to set the right mood for learning each day, as they encourage participation and fun, and provide a quiet time for reflection as well as the need to value those around them. The school offers many opportunities to learn about other cultures and has a strong link with a community in India. Teachers speak highly of their performance management experiences which lead to well-focused opportunities for professional development. The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet all statutory requirements.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



9 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Northern House School, Oxford OX2 7JN

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. A special thank you to those of you who met us, showed us your work and told us about the very good progress you are making. There are many reasons why Northern House is an outstanding school and here are some of them.

- Your headteacher and his team of committed staff and governors run your school extremely well. They listen to what you and your parents and carers tell them about the school and how it can best help you.
- The teaching you receive is excellent. It helps you to make outstanding progress with learning and with your behaviour.
- Northern House provides you with a great range of interesting and exciting lessons and activities, and staff encourage you to take part in rich and rewarding experiences in school and in the wider community, for example when you are on residential visits and trips.
- You are really well prepared for the next steps in your education.

To help your school get even better, we have asked your headteacher and the staff to learn more about other types of schools, so that they can help more pupils in those schools and at the same time, get fresh ideas for improving your school even more.

You told us that you enjoy school very much. Please keep working hard and carry on behaving very well.

Yours sincerely

Bob Pugh
Lead inspector

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