

Northstar New School

Gascoigne School Annex, The Shaftsburys, Barking IG11 7JA

Inspection dates

6–8 November 2018

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Requires improvement |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders and governors have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards. The school now provides pupils with a good standard of education.
- Leaders are ambitious for the school. Their high expectations are respected by staff and pupils. All staff share the headteacher's vision that all pupils deserve the very best.
- Staff work together as a cohesive and effective team. Pupils are at the heart of their work. Regular and well-planned team meetings help all staff to understand each pupil's learning and behaviour needs.
- Pupils achieve well. Overall, they make good progress from their individual starting points in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The school is held in high regard by parents and carers. They feel that this school has made a significant difference to their children's behaviour, well-being and happiness.
- Pupils say that the school helps them to be successful. Their good attendance demonstrates their enjoyment of school.
- Leaders have planned a curriculum that enables pupils to acquire knowledge and skills across a range of subjects. Teachers and support staff plan activities that enthuse pupils to learn.
- Staff promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils behave well. During their time at the school, they show increasingly positive attitudes to learning. Staff manage pupils' behaviour effectively.
- Teachers do not provide consistently good opportunities for pupils to apply their writing skills. Sometimes, teachers miss opportunities to adapt activities in lessons to meet pupils' needs, particularly when pupils are ready to move on to new or more challenging tasks.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation are inconsistent in key stage 3.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils. However, there are times when they insufficiently promote pupils' independence.
- While leaders and governors are clear about the school's priorities, their plans for improvement do not routinely provide measurable targets to improve pupils' outcomes even further.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that improvement plans are sharply focused and include measurable targets and success criteria in order to raise the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes further.
- Improve pupils' outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length and apply their writing skills to longer pieces of work
 - teachers' expectations of pupils' handwriting and presentation in key stage 3 are consistently high
 - teachers adapt activities during lessons when pupils are ready to move on to new or more challenging tasks
 - the work of teaching assistants is enhanced further by supporting pupils towards greater independence.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, who is also the proprietor, together with the deputy headteacher and governors, have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Leaders have worked diligently since the previous inspection to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. They have the full support of a strong and committed staff team. As a result of leaders' actions, pupils now receive a good standard of education.
- Most pupils join the school with significant gaps in their education. Some have been excluded from previous settings and others were at risk of permanent exclusion. Pupils have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and most have social, emotional and mental health needs. Leaders and staff are experienced and skilled at meeting their needs. All staff are determined to provide the very best opportunities for all pupils so that they can enjoy success and, when appropriate, return to a mainstream school.
- The staff work together as an effective team. Leaders provide strong and effective support to other staff. Leaders routinely work in classrooms with staff to model good practice. Staff share ideas and strategies regularly and use daily team meetings to keep up to date with pupils' individual needs and situations at home.
- Staff appreciate the good opportunities available for professional development. Since the previous inspection, leaders have improved systems to monitor the work of teachers and teaching assistants. Performance management procedures are now in place and staff welcome the opportunities to reflect on their practice.
- Leaders have recently strengthened the school's assessment procedures. Staff use a range of measures to check pupils' progress across different areas of learning, including their personal, social and emotional development. Leaders use assessment information effectively to provide additional support to pupils where necessary.
- The school is calm and purposeful. Staff create a happy and safe place for pupils to learn. The school is effective in its promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders have devised a programme of activities, through assemblies and lessons, which enables pupils to learn about the wider world. For example, pupils learn about different families and the importance of respecting others, and so gain an understanding of the different cultures that make up modern Britain.
- Staff have developed an interesting curriculum that enables pupils to acquire a range of skills across different subjects. Teachers provide a variety of opportunities for pupils to experience learning in real-life contexts, such as trips to the supermarket to purchase ingredients for cooking. The curriculum is enhanced by visits locally and into central London. Pupils spoke keenly about their trips to the zoo, to museums and to cookery classes in the park.
- Parents are extremely positive about the school's work. They are complimentary about the excellent communication with leaders and the progress their children make. All parents said that their children are happier and making better progress than before.

- Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has worked effectively to establish links with the local authorities and other schools. The school buys support from the local authority's inclusion team and other external consultants to support school improvements.
- Leaders have worked effectively to address the issues identified at the previous inspection. They are clearly ambitious for all pupils and have an accurate understanding of the school's priorities. However, their improvement plans sometimes lack the detail needed to be able to measure their successes. Action plans do not routinely provide measurable targets and are not sharply focused on all aspects of teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes.

Governance

- The headteacher has strengthened the governing body since the previous inspection. During this inspection, a new governor was appointed, bringing additional expertise in therapeutic approaches and leadership. Governors all share the headteacher's vision for the school and pupils. They are keen and determined to continually improve the school.
- Governors liaise with school leaders regularly. Governors meet to discuss all aspects of the school's work and ask questions of leaders to ensure that the school is improving. Governors undertake unannounced visits to check safeguarding procedures and the school's health and safety arrangements and risk assessments.
- Governance is not yet fully effective in its use of improvement plans to check the impact of leaders' work on the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that the school is a safe place to learn. Parents agree that staff keep pupils safe and give high priority to safeguarding.
- Leaders and staff are acutely aware of pupils' vulnerabilities. Pupils' safety and well-being are given high priority by all staff. Staff understand their roles in keeping pupils safe and use the well-organised systems to refer any concerns they may have about pupils' welfare.
- Staff discuss safeguarding matters regularly and are up to date with the latest legislation. For example, leaders ensure that all staff are trained to understand the dangers associated with knife crime, gangs and radicalisation.
- Staff know all pupils well. Teachers and other staff use personalised risk assessments to understand how to support each pupil's safety and welfare.
- The curriculum includes age-appropriate opportunities for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe. Lessons on cyber-bullying, for example, and visits from specialist drug misuse prevention teams, enhance pupils' understanding.
- Leaders take swift action in contacting external agencies and other professionals to get pupils the help they need. Referrals to the appropriate authorities are completed without delay and record keeping is thorough and well organised.
- The school's safeguarding policy and arrangements are appropriate and published on the school's website.

- Leaders and governors ensure that recruitment procedures are effective. The single central record of staff suitability meets requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Relationships between pupils and staff are positive and purposeful. All staff invest time and effort to get to know each pupil and their family. Well-planned settling-in procedures, including home visits, enable each pupil to get to know their new school and members of staff. Pupils, most of whom have previously found it very difficult to engage in learning, are supported sensitively and effectively by staff.
- Leaders work closely with teachers to monitor pupils' progress. They liaise closely with other professionals, such as educational psychologists, therapists and staff in previous settings, to plan for pupils' needs.
- Leaders and teachers have improved the way in which pupils' targets are set. Staff monitor pupils' English and mathematics targets closely, offering them additional support where necessary to reach their goals. The school has established a programme of professional development that focuses on teachers' use of a range of interventions to help pupils to catch up.
- Pupils benefit from large, bright and engaging classrooms. Staff use resources thoughtfully to enthuse pupils. Pupils' work is celebrated on displays around the school and their efforts are shared on 'working walls'. Staff use displays well to remind pupils of previous learning and to make connections between different activities.
- Teachers use secure subject knowledge well to address pupils' misconceptions. In key stage 3 reading sessions, teachers' understanding of how pupils learn to read and understand texts is a strength. Here, pupils think and respond to key texts and offer well-founded opinions about characters and themes. In key stage 2, the teaching of spelling and phonics is good. Pupils use phonics to read and write new words accurately.
- Pupils respond well to opportunities to work practically and investigate. Teachers incorporate a range of hands-on activities to build pupils' enthusiasm and to develop their problem-solving skills. In science, for example, pupils use the local area to search for insects and apply what they have learned in the classroom to real-life contexts. Key stage 3 pupils visited a local centre where they cooked meals and baked cakes. These experiences enrich pupils' skills and develop their self-esteem and confidence effectively.
- High levels of adult support and attention in lessons enable pupils to engage in learning activities. Teaching assistants support pupils well, particularly in helping them to calm down when they are angry or upset. Sometimes, however, teaching assistants miss opportunities to promote pupils' independent learning skills as pupils are over-reliant on their help.
- Although teachers plan activities that develop pupils' writing skills, pupils are not routinely expected to write at length and to use these skills independently. Additionally, teachers' expectations of pupils' presentation and handwriting in key stage 3 are inconsistent. As a result, pupils' work is not as neatly presented as leaders expect. Leaders plan to introduce a handwriting scheme that will build stamina in pupils' writing and help them to form letters correctly, particularly in key stage 3.

- Teachers know pupils well and respond positively to their needs. However, sometimes they do not adapt activities quickly enough in lessons when pupils are ready to move on to different or more challenging tasks during lessons.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff are kind and caring. They use strategies very effectively to enable pupils to manage their feelings and behaviour. Staff listen carefully and give pupils time to speak and share their thoughts. The strong focus on promoting pupils' confidence and self-esteem is seen throughout all aspects of the school's work.
- The school's nurture room is a strength of the school. Over time, leaders have developed this provision to give pupils time and space to reflect. Staff have received specific training to support pupils' emotional well-being. This work is having a positive effect on pupils' attendance, engagement for learning and their personal development.
- Leaders and other staff make sure that pupils have a chance to offer their views and contribute to the school. Pupils are involved in decision making within lessons and in planning other activities, such as educational visits. Pupils say that staff listen to their ideas and take their suggestions on board. For example, pupils were fully involved in deciding whether the new school premises were suitable.
- Bullying is rare. All incidents, including those that involve name-calling, are dealt with promptly by staff. Pupils know the rules and usually follow these well. Pupils know that derogatory language is not allowed in school. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons are used effectively to teach pupils about the different types of bullying.
- Pupils enjoy the opportunities to learn about the world around them. For example, during recent lessons on the local community, key stage 3 pupils met police officers and interviewed them about their roles and responsibilities. Leaders are continually looking for innovative ways to raise pupils' awareness of personal safety.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. During lessons and at social times, pupils behave well and demonstrate increasingly positive attitudes to learning.
- All staff use strategies effectively to deal with challenging behaviour. Pupils' individual behaviour plans are understood by all staff. These plans are reviewed regularly so that the support and intervention offered to pupils are effective. Staff are successful at supporting pupils to manage their own behaviour, particularly when pupils are angry or anxious.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. They greet staff positively each morning and value the new friendships that are formed with their peers. Their enjoyment of school is reflected in their good attendance. Pupils who have previously had very poor attendance in other settings are now attending more regularly. Leaders work hard to support parents and families in helping their children attend school each day.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- As a result of good teaching, pupils make good progress in their learning. They achieve well in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Pupils develop mathematical skills well. They use and apply calculation strategies effectively and understand how to use different written methods to solve problems. Pupils enjoy practical activities where they can apply their skills in different contexts.
- Pupils read well. Younger pupils use phonics accurately to read and spell unfamiliar words. Pupils in both key stages read with expression and interest. They answer questions about their texts well, and demonstrate a secure understanding of characters' feelings.
- Although pupils make good progress in writing overall, they do not have consistently good opportunities to apply these skills and write at length, and so are not making the progress of which they are capable.
- Pupils acquire knowledge and skills across the wider curriculum. For example, in humanities, pupils learn to ask questions about the environment by exploring the effects of litter and single-use plastic. In health education sessions, pupils learn how to lead healthy lifestyles and the importance of eating well.
- Pupils speak with confidence and articulate their thoughts and opinions well. Pupils make good progress because they learn to listen attentively. Staff promote pupils' social skills effectively. During their time at this school, pupils improve their self-esteem and confidence, as shown by the way they approach a range of tasks.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 142334 |
| DfE registration number | 311/6001 |
| Inspection number | 10055473 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 7 to 14 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 15 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Euan Macdonald |
| Chair | Andrew Williamson |
| Headteacher | Euan Macdonald |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £48,000 to £65,000 |
| Telephone number | 0208 724 8862 |
| Website | www.northstarnewschool.org |
| Email address | euan.macdonald@northstarnewschool.org |
| Date of previous inspection | 10–12 October 2017 |

Information about this school

- Northstar New School was previously called Youth Empowerment Education Programme. In September 2018, the school relocated to its current premises in Barking.
- The school caters for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have additional needs including autistic spectrum disorder. Pupils have an education, health and care plan or are undergoing statutory assessment. They are currently referred to the provision by three local authorities.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in October 2017, when it was judged to require improvement. At that time, all the independent school standards were met. A

material change inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) and took place in June 2018. The proprietor wanted to increase the number of pupils on roll and to change the address of the registered premises.

- The school does not use any alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed lessons taking place in both key stages. He visited classrooms and the school's nurture provision. Most of these visits to lessons were accompanied by the headteacher or the deputy headteacher.
- The inspector spoke with pupils informally throughout the inspection to seek their views. He also met with pupils from each key stage formally.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and governors. He met with two representatives from the local authority. The inspector spoke to staff informally throughout the inspection and also held two meetings with all staff formally to seek their views.
- The inspector met with parents and carers at different times throughout the inspection. There were too few responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, to be considered.
- The inspector considered nine responses to the staff survey.
- The inspector looked at pupils' workbooks and their work on display. He scrutinised a range of documents, including those related to safeguarding and pupils' outcomes. The inspector toured the premises and scrutinised relevant documentation to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- The inspector looked at case studies and sampled pupils' individual behaviour and support plans.

Inspection team

Gary Rawlings, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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