

Ferndown Upper School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113854
Local Authority	Dorset
Inspection number	357439
Inspection dates	24–25 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Pauline Robins

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1005
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	315
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Moss
Headteacher	Alexander Wills
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2008
School address	Cherry Grove Ferndown BH22 9EY
Telephone number	01202 871243
Fax number	01202 893383
Email address	office@fernup.dorset.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 1234 234

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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent looking at learning. Inspectors carried out two 'learning walks' with senior leaders when they visited a number of lessons briefly to focus on specific inspection trails. They visited 43 lessons taught by 41 teachers, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, policy documents, and students' work and spoke to the School Improvement Partner. They also scrutinised 151 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers and questionnaires completed by staff and a representative sample of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How effectively provision meets the needs of all students to ensure that outcomes are increasingly good.
- How effective the school has been in addressing the areas for development identified at the last inspection.
- The contribution of visual arts status to school improvement.
- The effectiveness and impact of the monitoring and evaluation carried out by senior and middle leaders.
- The effectiveness of the sixth form.

Information about the school

Ferndown Upper School is a smaller than average comprehensive school for students aged 13–19. The school has held specialist status for the visual arts since 2004. Most students are of White British heritage and speak English as their first language. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below that found nationally, as is the percentage who have a statement of special educational needs. The number of students in the sixth form has grown and includes recruitment from other local schools; this is despite falling rolls in the main school.

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: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Ferndown Upper is a good school that has improved appreciably since the last inspection and has the capacity to improve further. This was verified by questionnaires from students, staff and parents. In this caring and supportive environment, students feel extremely safe, enjoy their learning and achieve well. Students who have received additional support are overwhelmingly positive about their school experience. Comments such as, 'School is like heaven compared with my last school' and 'The school has helped me to change 100%' were common. The school's evaluation of its own performance is effective, strengths and weaknesses are acknowledged and strategies to move the school from good to outstanding are clearly articulated in development planning. Senior leaders have been selective in developing collaborative partnerships with other schools which have been highly effective in accelerating change.

There is a rising trend in students' attainment and the majority of students make good progress regardless of their background, starting points or special educational needs. Teaching is good and there is a strategic policy to ensure that regular and systematic assessment takes place in all subject areas. Outcomes are evaluated and analysis is increasingly accurate at a whole-school level. However, the system is overly complicated and not consistently understood by all staff so that it can be used to pinpoint the learning needs of every student, inform lesson planning and differentiate teaching strategies. Improvements to the support and intervention systems have resulted in significant improvements to behaviour which is now good. A greater awareness of, and commitment to, consistent intervention programmes for students at risk of underachievement have had a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning. Students are motivated and engaged, and a purposeful working atmosphere pervades the school. Students make an extensive contribution to the life of the school and the wider community thanks to the excellent opportunities arising from the specialist status. The high quality art work which is displayed throughout the school is treated with great respect and is testament to the trust and pride that the school has in its students.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good; there is a focus on continual improvement and high expectations, consequently outcomes are improving. Provision is good, strengths and weaknesses have been identified and appropriate strategies adopted. The reorganised management structure and the development of tutors to take greater responsibility for academic mentoring have contributed to this better picture.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop a single, central student progress monitoring and evaluation system so that all staff can consistently use assessment information to plan lessons and support learning for individual students. This should enable the school to:

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- develop a more diagnostic approach to planning and teaching
- further differentiate work to meet the needs of all students
- ensure interventions are consistently planned to support individuals and groups of students to meet expectations.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

In the majority of lessons observed, students made good progress and achieved well. Students enjoy their learning, especially in those lessons where they are encouraged to be active and ask questions, work collaboratively and engage in debate with their peers. These lessons were skilfully designed to interest and meet the needs of every student regardless of ability.

The school is beginning to see the positive effects of its work to raise student aspirations and to improve attainment. Progress is accelerating as a result of the systems for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning. The school meets the needs of differing groups of students well and all groups make good progress.

Overall examination results for 2010 show a continuing trend of improvement on previous years. Although the percentage of students attaining 5 A*-C passes has increased, the rate of increase is not keeping pace with that seen nationally and is below average. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of students attaining five A* to C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics. This figure has risen by 12 per cent since last year and is now above the national average. This clearly demonstrates the impact of the focus on these two subjects.

The school's latest analysis of performance for 2011 suggests that the vast majority of students are on track to achieve their challenging targets by the end of this academic year.

The visual arts specialism makes a good contribution to students' achievement, development and enjoyment of school life. Their pride in and respect for the high quality of their work displayed throughout the school is self-evident. The school engages students in learning and helps them to gain skills they need for future education, employment and training.

Students' behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. In the majority of lessons observed by inspectors, students were respectful and engaged positively with their learning. Students' relationships with staff are mostly excellent and an atmosphere of trust allows them to respond positively to challenging targets.

The school has worked hard to improve attendance and has put in place monitoring and support systems which have proved to be effective, particularly in reducing the number of students who are persistently absent. Students have a good understanding of what constitutes healthy living. They take part in a wide range of physical activities both in lessons and through after-school clubs and competitions. Through improved catering provision, students have access to good quality food and are encouraged to make healthy choices at break and lunchtime.

Students believe they have a positive role to play within the school and are able to talk in detail about their charity work and the contribution they have made to school improvement, for example the refurbishment of the canteen and the anti-bullying charter.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Common features of the good teaching seen by inspectors were good subject knowledge which builds students' confidence and stimulates their interest and excitement, and also challenging questioning to extend students' knowledge and check upon their understanding. In the best lessons, students were given detailed feedback on next steps through marking and in conversations with their teachers. This is not yet consistent across departments.

Teachers know their students well and have extensive data on their attainment and individual needs. However, in less effective lessons, planning for and teaching of different groups of students are not consistently well executed and therefore their specific needs are not consistently met.

Students have a good understanding of the levels they are working at and what they need to do to improve and meet challenging targets. The curriculum is developing with clear areas of success, especially in some of the specialist subject areas such as photography and textiles. It provides an appropriate level of flexibility to meet the needs of individual students where work placements such as mechanics and hairdressing are directly leading to career opportunities. In recent years, there has been a focus on cooperation with the feeder middle schools, inclusion and rationalisation.

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The range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities on offer is good. These activities are well attended by all groups of students and give effective support to aspects of their academic and personal development.

The quality of the school's care, guidance and support for students is good and underpins the drive for improvement. The house system and vertical tutor groups are valued by staff and students, and provide opportunities for sixth form students to act as mentors to those younger than themselves.

The school works closely with a range of external agencies and nearby organisations to enable potentially vulnerable students to overcome their difficulties and remain in education. Provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those with medical conditions, in terms of identification, analysis of need, progress tracking and communication with parents, is good. As one parent wrote, 'The school has been very supportive and understanding of my child with a serious medical condition. This has meant that she continues to thrive and achieve good, consistent grades.'

The quality of the support provided by additional adults in the classroom is good. However, this provision is currently targeted at specific individuals, but the school has in place a plan to review its practice so this valuable resource can be more effectively utilised.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and his leadership team have a clear vision for the school. They are committed to driving through a range of improvements to raise standards and develop students as 'confident, independent learners and responsible citizens'. Staff morale is high and 97 per cent of staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agreed with the statement, 'I am proud to be a member of staff at this school.'

The school is working to develop the quality and consistency of middle leaders in securing good outcomes for students. Heads of house work closely with heads of faculties and departments to monitor the pastoral and academic achievement of students. Tracking and target setting is thorough but has yet to achieve total consistency in practice.

The governing body is supportive and brings a wide range of expertise to its role as both 'critical friend' and in holding managers at all levels to account. There are systems in place to monitor the school's work and enable it to challenge the school on its performance. As a result of falling rolls in the main school, there is a deficit budget. Governors review this regularly and there is a realistic plan in place to redress the balance.

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Effective procedures are in place to ensure students' safety and all current safeguarding requirements are met. There is regular and systematic training for staff and the school is proactive in working with key agencies to reduce the risk of harm to students. The distributed leadership and management of this aspect through the 'Safeguarding Working Party' is a successful development.

The school promotes equality of opportunity strongly through policies and procedures that ensure positive experiences for all students. The school community is both cohesive and harmonious. There are established international links and good engagement with the local and wider community through its specialist status. The school is developing its strategy to improve students' engagement with other communities across Britain.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

There is a strong focus on improving outcomes for students in the sixth form, as they are currently satisfactory. This is because there is considerable variance between students' attainment between year groups and for various subjects. The school recognises that it needs to consistently raise examination performance at A2 to that of students at AS level.

Students enjoy their time in the sixth form and have very positive attitudes towards their learning. As a result, retention rates are increasing and almost all complete their course. They readily take on responsibility, contributing to school development and supporting students in other year groups, for example during tutor time. Teaching and assessment are good, as is the curriculum, which is regularly evaluated to ensure it meets the students' needs. However, the school is aware that a broader range of options for less academic students would enhance this further. Similarly, support and guidance for students who do not progress to university has been identified by the school as an area for development. Overall, good care and guidance ensure students make appropriate

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choices at various stages in the sixth form. They value highly the very positive relationships they have and the support they receive from the staff who teach them.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Of the parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire, a very large majority showed that they were highly satisfied with the quality of education and care the school provides and believe that their children enjoy coming to school. Those who wrote positive comments referred to improvement since the last inspection, the commitment of the staff and the quality of the support that students receive, especially for those who are experiencing difficulties or have medical conditions. A few parents raised concerns but no consistent theme emerged. A very small minority responded negatively to the question on behaviour. However, the inspection team judged that behaviour was good and the school has effective provision and procedures in place which have brought about an improvement in behaviour since the last inspection.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ferndown Upper School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 151 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 905 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	58	38	77	51	12	8	4	3
The school keeps my child safe	59	39	90	60	2	1	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	70	46	71	47	9	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	55	36	80	53	12	8	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	45	30	95	63	7	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	26	95	63	12	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	17	104	69	16	11	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	48	32	89	59	6	4	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	52	34	86	57	7	5	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	37	25	87	58	18	12	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	41	27	84	56	4	3	5	3
The school is led and managed effectively	56	37	84	56	5	3	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	68	45	76	50	6	4	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

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.



26 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Ferndown Upper School, Ferndown BH22 9EY

Thank you for your contribution to the recent inspection and especially to those who took the time to talk to inspectors. This letter is to outline the main findings from the inspection but I hope that many of you will find time to read the report in full. We judged your school to be good and improving since your last inspection. We have every confidence that it will continue to improve further as the school is well led and managed.

Exam results are improving because the progress you make in lessons is good. You told us that you enjoy coming to school, that the staff do everything they can to support you and that makes you feel exceptionally safe and well cared for. We found your behaviour to be good and you have positive attitudes towards your learning. You appreciate the benefits that visual arts status has brought to the school and we were extremely impressed by the high quality of the art work on display, which you treat with great respect.

You were clear about the levels at which you are working and the challenging targets you hope to reach and how to get there. We judged that teaching was good but, together with the senior management team, we have identified a way to improve both teaching and learning still further:

- Develop a single, central student progress monitoring and evaluation system so that all staff can consistently use assessment information to plan lessons and support learning for individual students. This should enable the school to:
 - develop a more analytical approach to planning and teaching
 - further differentiate work to meet the needs of all students
 - ensure interventions are consistently planned to support individuals and groups of students to meet expectations.

With very best wishes for your future success,

Yours sincerely

Pauline Robins

Her Majesty's Inspector

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