

Falconer School

Falconer Road, Bushey, WD23 3AT

Inspection dates

11–12 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Require improvement	3
Leadership and management		Require improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students make no better than the expected progress from their individual starting points.
- The way that students' behaviour is managed and rewarded has improved but has become overly complicated and is not consistently applied.
- Low-level disruption affects students' learning in some lessons.
- Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average but some students do not attend frequently enough.
- The use of individual targets and teachers' marking are not yet well-established.
- Homework to help students contribute to lessons and as preparation for post-16 studies is not well established.
- Literacy skills, particularly reading, are not developed systematically enough throughout the curriculum.
- Improvement plans have run their course. Having been effective in developing the school's performance, they are now out of date.
- Policies have not kept up with current good practice and there are too many of them.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has come a long way in a short time and the right things are in place to move forward with confidence.
- Staff at all levels and the governing body have stepped up with enthusiasm and determination to do what is required to improve the school's performance
- The ethos has changed over the past year, with the focus on improving teaching and students' attainment now firmly established in all areas.
- The headteacher, and previously the executive headteacher, has focused relentlessly on improving the quality of teaching.
- Leaders took swift action to address the issues in the November 2013 inspection of the boarding provision and this means that the residential manager is now an active member of the senior leadership team.
- Local authority support is good.
- Arrangements to keep students safe are good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 14 lessons, looked at students’ past work and the school’s monitoring of teaching and students’ learning.
- Documents scrutinised included those for tracking students’ achievement, governance, the arrangements for safeguarding students, and local authority support.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher and the senior leadership team, two members of the governing body, teaching and non-teaching staff, the school council and the school effectiveness adviser from the local authority.
- An inspector visited the off-site, alternative provision at Sanctuary Art of Music and Sound.
- Questionnaires were circulated to parents and staff to gain their views. Four were returned by parents and 10 from staff.

Inspection team

Heather Yaxley, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Sa’ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This is a school for boys who have behavioural, social and emotional difficulties. Each student has a statement of special educational needs.
- There is residential provision on site at School House with places for 10 students, with up to eight boys boarding at any one time. This was not inspected as part of this inspection.
- Most students are White British.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above the national average. This is additional funding from the government for those known to be eligible for free school meals, in local authority care or with a parent in the armed forces.
- The school does not receive Year 7 catch-up funding.
- The school uses the off-site, alternative provision at Sanctuary Art of Music and Sound.
- The school was placed in special measures in February 2013 and monitoring inspections took place in May and November 2013.
- The most recent inspection of the residential provision took place at the same time as the November 2013 monitoring inspection, when the overall effectiveness of the boarding provision was judged as adequate. Full details can be found in the monitoring inspection report on the Ofsted website.
- From April to December 2013, the school was led by an executive headteacher, the previous headteacher of Bushey Meads School. From September 2013 the leadership was shared with an associate headteacher, who was appointed as the permanent headteacher from January 2014.
- A new Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body were appointed soon after the first monitoring inspection in May 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that teaching and students' achievement are at least good by:
 - planning lessons that take into account students' individual targets for attainment and personal development
 - making homework an integral part of teaching and learning
 - assessing students' work thoroughly, including providing consistently good written feedback.
- Make sure that students' behaviour is at least good by:
 - tackling low-level disruption in lessons
 - implementing a robust and well-understood system of rewards and sanctions.
- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - implementing a new school improvement plan that takes into account the progress of different groups of students and the views of students, parents and staff
 - revising policies to reflect current practice and reviewing their effectiveness frequently
 - making literacy an important feature of the curriculum, including teaching reading and spelling systematically
 - making sure that each student reaches the national average rate of attendance.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- In Key Stage 3, students make expected progress in mathematics but there is some underachievement in English, particularly in reading and spelling.
- Reading time at the end of each day means that students read frequently and more widely than before, and staff have good information about students' reading levels, but the teaching of reading and spelling is not yet systematic.
- Staff have made good use of support from staff at Bushey Meads School to check that work is assessed accurately. As a result, leaders and teaching staff have the information that they need to track progress with confidence, but this has been the case only since September.
- As a result of better teaching, a wider range of subjects to study and aspirational targets, students now generally make expected progress from their individual starting points.
- Students in Year 11 are on track to achieve a range of GCSEs, some at grades A* to C, which has secured places already for half of the group to go on to Level 3 courses in September. This is a significant improvement from the qualifications gained by students in the past.
- Year 10 students, having the advantage of an even better curriculum, are on track to reach their target GCSE grades for the end of Year 11.
- So far, the emphasis has been appropriately on raising attainment for all students through better teaching. Apart from some weaker progress in mathematics, students generally achieve equally, including those for whom the school receives the pupil premium.
- It is only now that information from assessments is rich enough to evaluate the progress of different groups of students or to identify those who could benefit from additional support, particularly those who are supported by the pupil premium and others who have different experiences during the week, such as boarders and those attending alternative off-site provision.
- Students are keen to learn and respond well when there are high expectations for them to succeed. Conversely, they do not do their best work when not pushed to do so. The difference is obvious when looking at how well they present their work or behave in lessons.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teachers' use of marking and individual targets to show students how to improve their work has developed but some of this is in its infancy or is not consistently applied across different subjects.
- Neither students nor staff understand the purpose of homework as preparation for the next stage of education or as a means of contributing to lessons. Too much teaching is planned around simply the work that students will complete rather than around developing their knowledge and skills. Teachers' marking does not always give students good advice on how to improve their work.
- The overall quality of teaching has improved and is increasingly good. This is a result of high

expectations by senior staff, the support given to improve teaching where it is needed and, significantly, the determination of staff to change what they do.

- Staff acknowledge the difference that improved teaching has on students' achievement and aspiration. 'No way back' is the sentiment expressed by all staff who gave their views. Students know that teaching has improved and appreciate the greater focus on their academic education.
- Support staff make a good contribution to teaching in partnerships with teachers, making sure that all are well-prepared for what students are expected to learn in each lesson.
- The teacher leading the development of reading has done a good job in completing assessments and giving greater importance to reading and spelling throughout the timetable. There is not yet a clear picture of how much progress students make in their literacy skills or an agreed way to teach these skills systematically.

The behaviour and safety of pupils require improvement

- The behaviour of students requires improvement because of some low-level disruption in lessons. Rewards and sanctions are not applied consistently enough to give all students clear guidelines for their behaviour.
- The management of behaviour in class is not overly controlled, in contrast to 12 months ago, and this means that students now often work well collaboratively and are held to account for managing their own behaviour as well as they can.
- The deputy headteacher has successfully raised the expectations of staff and students when inappropriate behaviour means students are temporarily removed from class. The focus on supporting students to continue with their work in the study area and returning to class promptly is working well.
- Although the approach to managing students' behaviour has evolved substantially and appropriately, policies have not kept pace with the changes, and rewards and sanctions have not been reviewed to check their effectiveness, for example to indicate how students achieve the different levels for rewards and how consistently staff apply sanctions. Students perceive these as unfairly administered.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good because staff are well-informed and go the extra mile to promote students' well-being.
- Staff are good role models. Relationships between staff and students, and among students, are good.
- The home-liaison team and the boarding staff make significant contributions to students' well-being. Appropriately, the headteacher has made the leaders of these teams members of the senior leadership team.
- Exclusions have reduced dramatically this year compared to the previous two years.
- Potential risks when students go off-site for alternative provision, work experience or at lunch times are appropriately monitored.

- Students have a good awareness of how to stay safe and the importance of considering the safety and well-being of one another during breaktimes, when moving from one lesson to the next and when using equipment in practical lessons.
- Staying safe is promoted frequently through assemblies, visitors and explicit teaching in the personal, social and health education programme. E-safety has a high profile and is well-understood by students.
- While attendance is improving, that of too many students does not reach the national average.

The leadership and management require improvement

- The impact of the actions taken by the senior leadership team and the governing body shows that they have the skills and determination to make further improvements. They need more time to demonstrate that their influence leads to sustained improvement and good performance.
- Improvements since the school required special measures have been rapid and well-founded on strong, decisive leadership of teaching by the new headteacher and, previously, by the executive headteacher.
- The executive headteacher took a direct, strategic approach to what had to be done urgently and staff made the changes that they were asked to make. Robust procedures were established to tackle the underperformance of staff and students.
- The new headteacher provides a strong collaborative approach, encourages initiative and greater responsibility, and promotes the aspects of the school's work that deal with special educational needs without compromising students' entitlement to a good secondary education.
- Managing staff performance, including assessing the work of support staff, has a high profile and helps to improve practice. Pay awards and additional support are linked appropriately to performance.
- A special educational needs coordinator from a nearby school has given part-time support this term and has sorted out two important things that are helping students in Years 10 and 11 to have better opportunities to succeed. First, individual programmes have been set up in collaboration with students and their parents, and staff and are beginning to use these in their lesson plans and for mentoring. Second, additional support is now in place for those entitled to extra help during examinations and staff have been trained how to do this effectively. These improvements will be extended to Key Stage 3 students by the end of term.
- The leadership of subjects is not yet well developed.
- Over the past 12 months, more subjects have been added to the timetable and a wider range of qualifications is now in place, which means that students have greater opportunities to succeed, particularly to achieve GCSEs. There are appropriate plans to develop this further.
- Students appreciate the improved opportunities for examination subjects. They would like better facilities for physical education and upgraded information technology resources.
- The school effectiveness adviser, the school action group and local authority consultants give good support. Their challenge works well to set high expectations, while ensuring that the

responsibility for improvement rests firmly with the senior leadership team and the governing body.

- Teachers make good use of support from staff at other schools, particularly Bushey Meads School. The support helps to check the quality of students' work and the suitability of the subjects taught.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Arrangements to safeguard students meet requirements.
- Challenge and guidance from the local authority's school action group and the school effectiveness adviser, the new headteacher and previously the executive headteacher, have helped members of the governing body to review their practice and fulfil their responsibilities appropriately.
- In tandem with the rest of the school community, the governing body has now focused its main business firmly on checking the quality of teaching and students' achievements.
- Governors are much better informed about the performance of staff and students and come into school regularly to gain first-hand information.
- Governors have not yet ensured that the views of parents and students feature prominently enough in school improvement.
- The governing body knows how finances are spent, including staff pay rises and additional funding for students, such as the pupil premium.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117686
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	432725

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Reid
Headteacher	Jonathan Kemp
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2013
Telephone number	020 8950 2505
Email address	admin@falconer.herts.sch.uk

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