

Falconer School

Falconer Road, Bushey, Hertfordshire WD23 3AT

Inspection dates	21–22 June 2016
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

- The headteacher leads the school with the conviction that all staff and pupils can achieve high standards in their work. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in many aspects of their work.
- Governors have become increasingly knowledgeable about pupils’ achievements and the quality of teaching. They support and challenge leaders to ensure that pupils achieve high standards and staff are held to account.
- Leadership roles beyond the headteacher are being carefully and thoughtfully developed. Changes made to the leadership of special educational needs and of behaviour have resulted in significant improvements in the quality of the support provided for pupils.
- Teachers work together in school and across other schools to review and develop their work so it best meets pupils’ needs. As a result, pupils’ learning and behavioural needs are increasingly well met and the quality of teaching continually improves.
- Pupils are proud of their uniform and of their school. They behave well in lessons, when they move around school and when they relax together. Relationships between pupils and with staff are respectful. Because what pupils have to say is valued by leaders and staff, improvements reflect their views and sustain their engagement.
- Almost every pupil moves on to further education or training that they remain in and complete because it is well suited to their interests and abilities.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Although they say they feel safe at school, pupils say there is some bullying. Some pupils do not feel this is managed as well as it could be.
- New leaders are not as rigorous in their monitoring as they could be because they lack the necessary experience.
- In some lessons pupils, particularly the most able, are not challenged and enthused sufficiently, so they do not make progress as rapidly as they could.
- The good practice, developed by specialist staff in intervention, is not replicated well enough in lessons.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further so that all groups of pupils make good and better progress by:
 - sharpening teachers’ expectations of pupils in lessons, particularly of the most able, so that they are challenged at the right level
 - providing learning activities in English and mathematics lessons which enthuse pupils as much as those in other subjects such as art and information technology
 - sharing the expertise used to enhance pupils’ progress in intervention sessions more widely so that teachers use these strategies to support pupils in lessons better.

- Improve the quality and impact of leadership and management by:
 - training leaders at all levels to monitor teaching and learning rigorously and provide colleagues with sharply focused feedback to develop their practice
 - making sure that the actions identified to address the outcomes of the bullying survey are quickly taken
 - ensuring that the curriculum engages pupils in learning enough about other faiths and cultures.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher has effectively used his previous experience of mainstream education to raise expectations of pupils and to both challenge and support staff. He has established an open culture of collaboration among the staff, who feel able to take the lead in development and to share any difficulties they are experiencing.
- The high standards expected of pupils are reflected in many aspects of the school's work. Displays of past pupils' successes provide good role model examples for current pupils. Increasingly challenging targets for pupils' learning are clear in their books and in the learning conversations they have with their teachers. In all aspects of the school's work, pupils are quickly supported to do well.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate. Planning for improvement addresses identified weaknesses well, although measures for showing the success of actions sometimes lack precision. Where teaching needs to improve, challenge and support are effective in ensuring that it develops. Leaders have received good advice and help from the local teaching school alliance and from the local authority to improve teaching, manage behaviour and support pupils. Since the last inspection, the actions taken have improved teaching, improved behaviour and raised standards. The school is well placed to continue this journey.
- The headteacher is securing strong leadership by recognising the qualities of staff who work at the school and by ensuring that they receive the training and recognition they need to take on new roles. For example, the member of staff leading on behaviour has made a positive difference to how pupils' behaviour is managed. Incidents of poor behaviour are reducing and pupils say that they see the value of working hard and remaining in lessons more. Because some leaders are still very new to their roles, the quality of monitoring and evaluation is not always sufficiently detailed or rigorous.
- Pupils' progress is frequently assessed and recorded. Action is quickly taken when pupils start at the school to identify how well they are doing in key aspects of their work. Targets for their progress are rapidly set and, as pupils settle, are extended to accelerate their learning. Leaders and teachers from the adjacent secondary school and from other local special schools support staff to review their practice and to ensure that their assessment of pupils' work is accurate.
- The special educational needs coordinator has achieved a great deal in the short period of time she has been in post. Pupils' needs are carefully analysed and extra support, in appropriate surroundings, helps them to manage their emotional and social needs as well as those that impact on how they learn. Where necessary, this includes the advice and guidance of a number of different specialists. Extra training has been provided for staff to ensure that they manage pupils' needs and anxieties well. The strong work developed to support pupils with very specific needs that takes place in intervention sessions is not always replicated in their wider lessons.
- Extra support given to pupils and their families, through the home liaison team, is effective. Home visits are undertaken when needed to help parents understand how to manage their children's needs and to address any barriers to their success, for example poor attendance. The majority of parents are confident that the school communicates well and feel that their children's needs are well met. A number say that the improvements in their children's behaviour and attitudes are life-changing. In a small number of instances, where parents feel the school is not well matched to their children's needs, they express less confidence in how well their children are progressing.
- The curriculum, including lunchtime and after-school clubs, is well suited to ensuring that pupils achieve the best academic results they can, as well as developing socially and morally. The headteacher is committed to ensuring that as many pupils as possible will attain GCSE qualifications in English and mathematics as well as in other subjects. Leadership and teaching in some subjects, for example information technology and art, are particularly strong. While social and moral education, which enables pupils to understand fundamental British values, is embedded in many learning activities, including outdoor and adventurous pursuits, pupils learn less about other religions and cultures. Leaders have just started to enable pupils to access subjects that the school does not currently offer, at other local schools, for example French.
- Extra funding the school receives to enhance the learning of disadvantaged pupils is used to provide a wide range of extra activities and support which enables pupils to make better progress in their learning and to develop their social skills. Academic tutoring, one-to-one support, counselling and outdoor adventures all contribute to ensuring that pupils make similarly good progress to their peers in school. However, current analysis does not make clear which strategies provide the best value for money.

■ The governance of the school

- Governors understand and support the work of leaders well. Through their engagement in the local authority action group, they have developed more rigorous challenge to leaders about the impact of the school's work. They explain in good detail their knowledge of the quality of teaching and its impact on pupils' achievement. Because this is not recorded in detail at meetings, they do not subsequently revisit aspects of challenge quickly.
 - Governors make regular checks to ensure the suitability of staff to work with young people. They have an excellent understanding of the vulnerabilities of pupils at the school, know that appropriate risk assessments are in place and ensure that staff are trained to implement safeguarding requirements effectively.
 - Governors check that staff performance is managed carefully, through their work with the headteacher. They make sure that staff are set appropriate targets to improve their work and are only rewarded when these are achieved.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Personnel records include appropriate references and the record of staff suitability to work with children and young people is up to date. Where necessary, risk assessments are in place. Robust evidence was shared during this inspection to demonstrate that leaders take rapid and rigorous action when risks to pupils' well-being are identified. Staff understand why pupils might be vulnerable and know what to do to protect them. Pupils are well supported to understand how to keep themselves safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teachers have positively responded to the challenge to develop their practice. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. This is because expectations of pupils are higher and their learning is well planned for.
- Teachers use accurate assessment to understand how well pupils are making progress. They have developed this accuracy through work with each other and with staff in other schools. They use this information to plan learning activities that meet pupils' needs and engage them in developing their understanding. Pupils know how well they are doing as well as what they need to achieve to move on to the next stage in their learning. In a small number of instances, activities are not as well considered, which means that pupils, particularly the most able, do not make the progress they could.
- Most teachers use effective strategies to make clear to pupils what they are expected to achieve in a lesson. For example, in physical education lessons, pupils have readily accessible guidance for the skills they are taught to develop. They review this independently, and together, using their increasing understanding to improve the quality of their work very well.
- Teachers and teaching assistants question pupils carefully about their learning. This helps them to develop their knowledge and move their learning on. In all subjects, approaches to marking pupils' work match the school's expectations. Some teachers use this effective marking to make very clear to pupils what will help them move on quickly.
- The ethos of high expectations is endorsed by teachers and is evident in pupils' books. While carelessly presented work has not been eradicated completely, the standard of presentation in many books and folders is good. For example in mathematics, pupils use a range of ways to set their work out carefully. In a small number of lessons, too little is expected of how pupils will set out their work independently.
- Increasingly, pupils are expected to use their literacy skills in other subjects. Teachers have received training on developing pupils' reading skills and encourage the use of these in lessons. Specific support is given to help pupils make up for gaps in their previous learning. This information is shared with teachers, who encourage and reward pupils for reading aloud and developing their skills in lessons. Work is underway to give a sharper focus to supporting pupils to develop their writing skills across subjects.
- A remarkable aspect of most lessons is the extent to which many teachers engage pupils in sharing both their successes and the points at which they make mistakes or understand less. As a result of the careful management of this by teachers, pupils learn to reflect on why they have or have not done well and what they need to do to improve their work. Where this shared responsibility is less evident, pupils lose concentration and make slower progress.
- In subjects such as art, information technology and music, the standards teachers set are high. Work is continually assessed and developed in partnership with pupils. They learn to overcome the barriers they have faced to being successful because teachers are both patient yet challenging. Year 11 pupils showed remarkable focus on their art examination work, using resources with care and demonstrating significant

respect for each other's work. In information technology, the teacher's focused attention to detail in the assessment of pupils' work, and painstaking monitoring, results in pupils achieving high standards in their work.

- Teaching assistants provide knowledgeable and effective support to pupils. They have good subject knowledge and use this to intervene at appropriate points in lessons when a pupil's learning might stall. A strength of their work is that they have the same high expectations of pupils as leaders and teachers. They use effective strategies to ensure that pupils make the required effort themselves. As a result pupils are kept on task and remain engaged in their learning.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupil's personal development and welfare is good. A high priority is given to helping pupils overcome previous poor achievement and to supporting them to understand and manage their emotional needs. The special educational needs coordinator and the home liaison team work seamlessly to plan appropriate provision for each individual pupil. Teachers receive guidance on the needs of pupils so they can support them to overcome their difficulties in lessons.
- High levels of trust and respect are evident between staff and pupils. From the start of the day when pupils are helped to address any issues they are facing in breakfast club (one pupil shared exam anxieties during the inspection) through the family group lunchtimes to the extended day activities, pupils receive caring, patient guidance and support. This helps them develop positive relationships with each other as well as increasingly focused attitudes to their work.
- Personalised programmes of support for pupils include academic tutoring as well as specific intervention such as support for anger management, personal mentoring and counselling. Staff communicate on a daily basis to ensure that pupils at risk of not managing the day in school can be supported.
- In line with the expectations set by the headteacher, staff strive to ensure that all pupils develop positive personal attitudes which enable them to overcome previous failures and to make up on the significant gaps in their learning. This work is successful. In most of the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils showed resilience and a determination to succeed. However, in a small number of instances, when the expectations of staff are not so high, pupils do not meet the high standards shown in other lessons.
- Staff have a good understanding of pupils' vulnerabilities. Pupils are taught about keeping themselves safe when working online and about other risks, for example those associated with drug-taking and with different forms of exploitation such as radicalisation. They are supported to understand how to manage themselves in difficult situations and learn key skills such as life-saving, cycling proficiency and first aid.
- Pupils and their families are well supported to understand the challenges they face and to use strategies to overcome them. Where pupils face a high level of risk, staff are in daily contact with their families and with the wider agencies which support them. Pupils are confident that the home liaison team will support them to manage their difficulties if necessary.
- Pupils are well supported to explore the various options they can pursue when they move on from the school. In the past two years all pupils have been well prepared to face the challenges of the next stage in their education and have moved on to develop their learning through further education or training. Links that the school maintains with pupils show that almost all have remained on track for success in their chosen courses.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils are smart, well-mannered and engage positively with staff, each other and visitors. They are proud of their school and speak eloquently about the difference it is making to their self-belief and their lives. The school day is calm and orderly. Pupils enjoy spending time with staff and with each other.
- The recently introduced systems for managing behaviour are effective. Messages about the importance of sustaining learning are clearly shared and endorsed when pupils have to leave classrooms because their behaviour does not meet the standards set. At these times, they are expected to continue with their work, receive support to manage the issues that trouble them and are given opportunities to return to class. Pupils say this system works. Records show a strong downward trend in the number of times the use of this approach has been necessary.
- The rewards aspect of behaviour management works equally well. Pupils appreciate the accumulative approach to rewards and value the opportunities they receive as they build these up. They say the behaviour cards which teachers sign at the end of lessons work well because they 'motivate pupils to

come into school and work hard'. Through these procedures pupils learn well the consequences of positively managing their own behaviour.

- Overall attendance is below the national average. However, there is robust analysis which shows that the vast majority of pupils improve their attendance once they have settled into the school. Many arrive with low attendance records as well as poor records of behaviour. A very small number of pupils are absent for significant periods of their education. The home liaison team work with families, as well as engaging wider services, in ensuring that these young people are safe and are given opportunities to continue their learning if they are not at school.
- The headteacher responded quickly to concerns raised by a pupil about bullying at the school. He took the concerns seriously and, working with the pupil, implemented a detailed questionnaire for all pupils. The results of this survey suggest that bullying does happen at times. Inspectors spoke to a number of pupils to gauge the extent of this issue. Pupils say they, despite the survey outcomes, that they feel safe at school and that they know they can speak to a member of staff, their tutor or the home liaison team if they have any problems. The survey outcomes have been shared with pupils in an assembly, they are clear that bullying of any sort will not be tolerated. Action is in place to engage pupils in identifying when this happens and to eradicate it.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- The headteacher, supported by leaders and governors, has established high expectations for pupils' progress and for the outcomes they attain by the time they leave the school. These expectations are evident in the targets that are set for pupils. These are continually revisited and extended as pupils move through the school and catch up with previous lost ground. Pupils are well supported to follow an appropriate range of academic and vocational courses.
- An evident strength in the school's work is the learning pupils engage in prior to finishing an academic year. This enables their teachers to understand how well they are doing and to plan carefully to meet pupils' needs quickly at the start of the next year. Inspectors saw Year 9 pupils starting to engage in their motor vehicle course. Through this early practical work, their teacher was able to establish an understanding of their skills and make plans to develop these in September.
- The vast majority of pupils start at the school with low levels of attainment and poor records of behaviour and attendance. As they move through the school, they make good progress in their learning and as they make up ground to catch up with age-related expectations, their progress accelerates further. The school's assessment information and pupils' work show that the pupils who start with low levels of attainment often make outstanding progress.
- Pupils learn to take pride in their work and to present it carefully. Standards of presentation are not strong in all subjects and the quality of pupils' writing remains a focus for development. Action led by the special educational needs coordinator to analyse pupils' reading skills and improve their spelling is gradually improving these elements of their work.
- Particular focus has been given to improving teaching in English and mathematics. Local authority advisors and staff with expertise from the local teaching school alliance have supported the improved use of assessment and developed practice. As a result, the majority of pupils now make at least expected progress, and the proportion attaining a recognised qualification, including GCSEs, is continually increasing.
- In 2015 three quarters of pupils attained five GCSE qualifications. The overall proportion of pupils making expected progress in English was above the national rate but was below it in mathematics. Assessment information shows that this year the good progress in English will be sustained and mathematics will improve to be more in line with national figures. Progress and attainment in science have improved because teaching is stronger.
- Pupils are taught well in information technology, art, physical education and music. They make good progress. The quality of their finished work is high because they learn techniques well and use them confidently. Slightly fewer pupils attain well in humanities because the quality of teaching is still being developed.
- Disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as all pupils because the extra funding received to support them is used well. Within this group, pupils who are looked after by the local authority make much better progress than similar pupils nationally.
- The most able pupils receive good support which enables them to regulate their own behaviour and to focus on their learning. The most able pupils do not all make good rates of progress because the level of challenge in some of their lessons is not sufficient.

- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The school makes a significant difference to pupils' resilience and determination to succeed. They develop positive attitudes to learning and achievement. All pupils secure a place to continue their studies in education and training and are well prepared for the challenges they will face. Review of pupils' successes over the past two years shows that almost every pupil has remained studying their chosen course.

School details

Unique reference number	117686
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10008129

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Reid
Headteacher/Principal/Teacher in charge	Jonathan Kemp
Telephone number	020 8950 2505
Website	http://falconer.herts.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@falconer.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–12 March 2016

Information about this school

- Falconer is a school for boys who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Each pupil has an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs.
- Admissions to this school are the responsibility of the local authority.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for support through the pupil premium (extra government funding for pupils who are looked after by the local authority or eligible for free school meals) is well above the national average.
- At the time of the inspection, the school was not using any alternative provision.
- The school's website meets requirements.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in lessons across the school. Observations were undertaken with the headteacher and assistant headteacher. During these inspectors looked at pupils books and spoke to them about their learning and behaviour.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders including the special educational needs coordinator. They met with five governors and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised leaders' analysis of pupils' achievements, behaviour and attendance, records of the monitoring of teaching, development planning, assessments of pupils' attainment on entry and minutes of governors' meetings.
- Inspectors looked at the information and policies available for parents on the school's website and met with a group of four parents. They also spoke to two parents at their request. There were insufficient responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire for parents, for them to be taken into account. However, account was taken of the school's own parent questionnaire and of the text responses received during the inspection.
- Records of staff recruitment, documents relating to safeguarding and child protection procedures were examined.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils to discuss their learning and their understanding of how behaviour and safety is managed at the school. They observed pupils as they moved around the school and at break and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors were aware during the inspection that allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the allegations were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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