

Falconer School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117686
Local Authority	HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number	290895
Inspection dates	2–3 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Steven Parker

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	64
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs B Lamb
Headteacher	Mr Mark Williamson
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001
School address	Falconer Road Bushey Hertfordshire WD23 3AT
Telephone number	020 89502505
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Falconer School educates secondary aged boys who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Up to 12 students access boarding provision in a typical week and many more are offered extended day activities, which they share with the boarders. The Herts Motor Project is accommodated within the school and provides accredited motor vehicle courses for pupils from this and other local secondary schools. Most students come from the urban areas of southern Hertfordshire and many have backgrounds of social disadvantage. Students are predominantly of White British heritage with a small number coming from dual heritage families. Many are known to social services or the justice system and seven are looked after children. The school has recently undergone a comprehensive building programme that has extended and enhanced its accommodation.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Falconer is a good school with some exceptional features, and it is well placed to continue to improve. Outstanding pastoral care helps all students, no matter what their backgrounds or difficulties, to develop a sense of self-worth and a positive attitude to learning. They therefore make good overall progress in their personal development and well being and many engage actively in education for the first time in their school careers. Parents praise the school's impact on their sons' lives, appreciating that 'staff bring out the best in children' and 'my son has changed dramatically for the better'. The experienced headteacher has extended and developed engaging and effective vocational courses. He works in creative partnership with his senior management colleagues and leads by example in encouraging a strong 'can do' culture in the school. This encourages open debate and has a significant impact on the way students are encouraged to do their best. As a result, most students greatly enjoy their time in school and many improve their attendance dramatically, although attendance overall remains below national average, despite the school's best efforts.

The school has improved well since the last inspection and provides good value for money. It is ambitious to improve its provision further. Staff are encouraged to show initiative and enhance their skills through training and professional development. Consequently, everyone contributes to the continuing development of the good, relevant curriculum and highly effective support systems. Significant improvements have been made to the accommodation, to ensure that there are good facilities for teaching practical subjects and the outside environment is more attractive and usable. The residential wing has also been refurbished and this has helped boarding provision to become outstanding. The school still does not have appropriate facilities for teaching physical education, but the very recent creation of a hard surface play area and improved access to community facilities have alleviated the situation. The excellent Herts Motor Project provides outstanding vocational training in motor maintenance and an extremely popular motorcycle club after school. The Project is soon to occupy impressive new, purpose built accommodation on site.

Although standards remain below average, students make good progress in their learning and achieve well in a range of accredited courses by the time they leave. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers and their assistants know the students well and use that knowledge to plan their learning effectively. However, there is not a consistent approach across all subjects to planning for development of the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) in individual students' programmes of learning. Furthermore, the system to involve students in setting their own academic targets and assessing progress towards them is not yet fully effective.

Leadership and management are good overall and becoming even more effective as responsibilities are increasingly shared across the school. Successful partnerships have been developed and sustained with parents and other services and agencies. The school makes clear evaluations of its strengths and weaknesses, but underestimates the quality of its performance. It has already identified the areas for improvement recommended in this inspection. Much information is collected about the school's work, especially about students' achievements. However, the data is not yet analysed fully to evaluate effectiveness and inform improvement planning. Governors are, therefore, constrained in their ability to challenge, although they do provide very good overall support.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The residential element of the school makes an outstanding contribution to students' education and personal development. It provides them with high quality week-night boarding provision of high quality. A larger group benefits from very good extended-day activities. Regular reports from the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) praise the care and support provided and recognises that all their regulations are fully met. Care staff work in successful partnership with educational staff, led by their able and creative head of care. The benefits of the provision are fully integrated into the life of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop better analysis and presentation of performance data and use them more effectively.
- Ensure that teachers' planning of lessons enhances the learning of key skills for every student across all subjects.
- Involve students more effectively in the setting of their academic targets and evaluating their own progress towards meeting them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The great majority of students make good progress and achieve well in all subjects. Many arrive at the school having suffered a disrupted education and most are attaining well below national expectations. A significant minority of students join the school after Year 7, but they make equally good progress to that of others, as do those who experience particular learning or social difficulties. This consistently good progress is attributable to good teaching and learning throughout the school. Some teaching is outstanding, and enables a few students to make excellent progress. Standards remain below the national average at age 16, but the gap between students' attainment and national results has narrowed. This is especially evident in practical subjects such as art, where students attain standards close to national expectations. In 2006 there was a dramatic increase in the number of students entered for GCSE examinations, and in their success rate. Six of the seven students who attended regularly gained five or more GCSE at B' to 'G' grades '

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. They become increasingly aware of how to keep themselves safe and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Students adopt healthy eating and actively engage in sport and other physical activities. Assemblies, religious education and a thoughtful programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education contribute significantly to students' developing exceptional spiritual, moral, social and cultural sensitivities. They show impressive awareness of each other's needs, insightful understanding of important moral issues and an appreciation of how they should conduct themselves as good citizens, despite the pressures on them in their lives outside school. Both in class and around school their behaviour is generally good and most respond very positively to the structured token reward system. Students' relationships with each other and all staff are excellent, resulting in a calm and orderly atmosphere around the school and students' considerable enjoyment. The important work of the team of learning mentors makes a significant contribution to students'

positive attitudes. An empathetic person is always available to deal sensitively with any bullying concerns that students are confident to raise, knowing that they will be dealt with speedily and effectively. Students contribute their opinions about school life through the very effective school council. Elected members' involvement in the appointment of the headteacher was outstanding practice and showed how much the school values their views. Students are encouraged to be active members of the school and wider communities, often fundraising for charities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes outstanding. A key feature of teaching is that teachers and teaching assistants share a strong commitment to ensuring students' success. The high expectations of all staff are evident in lessons and in students' work. Students benefit from teachers' very good subject knowledge. Careful planning, well informed by assessment information, provides a good variety of interesting practical activities. Full account is taken of students' interests and needs and lessons run at a brisk pace.

Staff are very successful in helping students to manage their behaviour and so increase their readiness to learn. Teachers and teaching assistants who are new to the school are already making a very positive contribution to students' learning. Students are fully involved in identifying and monitoring their success towards behavioural targets, but this is not fully replicated with academic targets, the use of which is inconsistent. Written comments do not always make clear to students what they need to do to improve their work. However, staff do know students extremely well, provide them with a good level of challenge, and give constructive verbal feedback in lessons. The school has a positive ethos shared by all staff and focused on helping students to achieve well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has a good curriculum that is now broad, balanced and relevant to all students' needs. Valuable improvements have been made since the last inspection to improve facilities and extend study opportunities in order to provide the full range of National Curriculum subjects. Literacy and numeracy are better covered in Key Stage 3, although they are not yet fully developed across all subjects. Students are now much better prepared for their future life beyond school because of better opportunities for work experience, careers advice and planned transition for most students into appropriate further education courses. Learning is well adapted to meet students' particular needs, either through supported attendance at local secondary schools or in college. There are clear plans in place to extend these opportunities through further vocational training and the learning of enterprise and financial skills. A wide range of extended learning activities, including sailing, golf and music enrich the curriculum very well and enable students to develop new skills and promote their enjoyment. Provision of relevant qualifications and accreditation of learning gives students a sense of achievement, increasing independence and the ambition to gain better life chances.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's pastoral support is outstanding and focuses particularly effectively on the needs of more vulnerable students. It makes every effort to safeguard their health, safety and welfare. All aspects of care are treated seriously. Risk assessments are rigorous and child protection procedures are secure and known to everyone in the school. All staff undertake the local authority's required therapeutic crisis intervention training. They work in very effective partnerships with a wide range of professionals and agencies, including Connexions and the youth offending team. Students receive appropriate guidance and sensitive support is available at times of stress. An increasing number of students experience serious emotional and psychological difficulties and the school works closely and productively with the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) to provide well targeted help. An important part of the school's support network is the home school liaison team. They provide much appreciated support to ensure that parents and carers can work in successful partnership with school staff and others in relation to attendance, reintegration after exclusion and at other challenging times. Their work contributes very well to the improved attendance of many students. Whilst students are productively involved in setting and reviewing their own personal and behavioural targets, academic guidance is less secure.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher gives a strong lead, creating and sustaining a strong sense of team with all staff and governors as well as providing valuable support and encouragement to individuals. Members of the senior management team are accountable for their areas of responsibility, so that strategic planning and delivery of any necessary improvements are increasingly a shared activity. This has resulted in significant improvements to many aspects of the school, including students' achievements, the curriculum, accommodation and the excellent care and boarding provision. Whilst the school knows itself well, the use of performance data and evaluative analysis of other information are not yet fully effective. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties properly and plays an important role in advocating for the school in negotiations with the local authority. Governors also help to ensure that the school's finances and resources are well managed. However, they lack sufficient performance data to enable them to challenge managers fully. The able administrative team plays an important role in the efficient day-to-day running of the school. A particular strength of the school is the management of recruitment difficulties. Staff are successfully encouraged to take on new responsibilities and supported to undertake further appropriate training.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4th May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Falconer School, Bushey, Hertfordshire, WD23 3AT

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited you. We came to see how well the school works, how well you are getting on and whether there is anything that could be done better. We agreed with you that yours is a good school that has some particular strengths. You told us that you enjoy being there and we could see that. Those of you that attend regularly are making good progress in your studies and getting a good education in preparation for the next stage of your life beyond school.

The things we liked best were:

- the exceptional support and encouragement you receive from all staff makes you feel good about yourselves and more positive about your futures
- many of you are enjoying school for the first time and, as a result, attending regularly
- the school has done its best to make sure that you can study all subjects in well equipped classrooms
- teachers and their assistants teach you well, so that you gain good qualifications by the time you leave
- you have the opportunity to participate in an exciting range of extra-curricular activities. We were particularly impressed with the outstanding Herts Motor Project
- the boarding provision is excellent
- the headteacher is good at his job and helps all the staff to do their best for you.

We found three things that we thought the school could do even better.

- Make better use all the information it has to plan improvements.
- Make sure that you learn literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects
- Involve you more in the setting of your academic targets and assessing your own progress.

We wish you all the best for your future and hope that the school council continues to represent you as well as it does at the moment. Do try to attend school regularly. It makes such a difference to how successful you can be.

Yours sincerely

Steven Parker Lead inspector