

Ferndown Upper School

Inspection report - amended

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|--------------------------------|----------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 113854 |
| Local Authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 311405 |
| Inspection dates | 5–6 March 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Robin Gaff |

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

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|---|--------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Comprehensive |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 13–19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1121 |
| 6th form | 317 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Keith Wilkes |
| Headteacher | Alexander Wills |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 December 2003 |
| School address | Cherry Grove Ferndown BH22 9EY |
| Telephone number | 01202 871243 |
| Fax number | 01202 893383 |

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|--------------------------|----------------|
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Amended Report Addendum

Report amended due to factual inaccuracy

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ferndown Upper School is a mixed 14-19 comprehensive school, which obtained specialist status as a Visual Arts College in September 2004. It is slightly larger than average and is currently undersubscribed. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and of students with a statement of special educational needs are below the national average. The great majority of students are of White British heritage. The percentage eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school's sixth form, which has recently considerably increased in size, works in collaboration with another local school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Ferndown Upper is a good school that has steadily improved since the last inspection. The headteacher, senior team and governing body provide good leadership and all are committed to improving students' attainment and promoting their well-being. The school has gained wide recognition for its work as a Visual Arts College. This has had a positive impact on the students and wider community. Students' cultural development is enhanced by the many displays of high quality artwork, which they helped create. Students and their parents comment positively on the school's improvements, one example being the significant increase in the number of students staying on into the sixth form.

The focus of senior leaders on improving examination performance is having an impact. Examination results are improving in line with national trends. In 2007, standards attained by students at GCSE were broadly in line with those found nationally. The progress they made, given their starting points, was good. The school has set targets that are more challenging this year and the progress students are making towards meeting these is good. The standards students are now attaining are above average in most subjects. In the sixth form, students achieve standards in line with national averages, and their progress is good. Students' improving performance is due to good teaching. Most teachers plan effective lessons that engage students in their learning. A broad range of strategies is used but there are insufficient opportunities for students to develop the skills required to become independent learners. In a few lessons, the pace of learning is too slow because teachers do not deal effectively with low-level disruption and fail to apply consistently the school's system of rewards and sanctions. The curriculum is broad and balanced, with visual arts provision a strength in Years 10 and 11, although requirements for citizenship are not fully met. The school day too often does not get off to a sufficiently sharp start, as tutorial time is not used effectively. The school provides a good curriculum for sixth form students.

Most students enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in the positive relationships they have with their teachers, and by the high numbers who participate in clubs, visits and events. The school is working hard, with some success, to improve attendance, particularly that of a very small minority of non-attendees. The school is particularly successful in involving students in its continuing development and they feel that their voice is listened to and their views acted upon. Students make a good contribution to the school through their enthusiastic participation in representative bodies such as the school council, and in a range of fund raising and community activities. Their preparation for future economic well-being is good. Although most students feel safe and exclusions are low, students' behaviour is satisfactory, as they require considerable supervision. They are aware of the importance of eating well and exercising for good health, and the school is working hard to address issues related to smoking. Students appreciate the good care and support they receive. They feel that the house system has developed an increased sense of community and enables younger students to benefit from the help they get from older ones.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students' attainment when they join the sixth form is slightly below average. The school is adding value, because many students go on to achieve above expectations in their examinations. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. Most teachers have high expectations of their

students and help them acquire the necessary skills to become independent learners. The target setting and review system provides senior managers with good quality information about students' progress at key points during the year. This information is used well to monitor and support the performance of individual students and results in high retention rates.

Students enjoy being in the sixth form and play an active part in the life of both the sixth form and wider school. The student union works actively to improve the facilities for students as well as raise money for a range of charities. The curriculum meets students' needs well and is enhanced by specific events organised to develop further students' personal development and academic progress. A wide range of visits, including international destinations, is a strong feature of the curriculum. Good guidance is provided for students to inform their future choices, and the numbers going to university is steadily increasing. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Monitoring and evaluation of work across the sixth form are thorough and provide leaders with a clear agenda for future improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Disseminate best practice in teaching and learning in order to enable students to become independent learners.
- Ensure that all teachers take a consistent approach to managing behaviour in their lessons.
- Ensure tutorial time provides a focused start to the day and prepares students for learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' attainment on entry in Year 9 fluctuates slightly year on year but is broadly in line with expectations. The standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 and the progress they make from entering the school have been steadily improving and are in line with national averages. The school has set the current Year 9 more challenging targets and the students are on course to meet these.

The progress students make at GCSE has improved over the last three years. There was significant improvement in 2007 with students' progress being good. The standards students attain have also shown a steady improvement over the last three years. In 2007, performance was particularly strong in the humanities subjects, drama and home economics and students made significant progress in English compared to their starting points. Standards were below expectations in mathematics, information technology and communication studies. The school has acted swiftly to address under performance in these subjects. Evidence from a range of sources, including recent GCSE modular examination results in mathematics, demonstrates considerable improvement this year. In most subjects, students are now attaining standards that are above average.

Most students are on track to meet their challenging targets this year. The school is aware of the differing performance of some groups of students, such as those on school action plus, and has put in place strategies which are raising the achievement of these groups.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Many students take part in activities, such as the annual community party, which raise money for local causes and develop students' social and leadership skills. Visits to, and links with, other countries extend students' understanding of other cultures. Parents comment on how much their children enjoy school, how quickly they settle in, and that they make good progress. Many students echo this view. As one Year 11 girl said, the school 'is a friendly place to work in with a good atmosphere. Everyone has the opportunity to express themselves.' Students participate confidently in their house and school councils and they feel that they can make a difference to their school. They point to changes the school has made in response to their views, such as the new school tie and healthier menus in the canteen.

Students' behaviour around the school is satisfactory and, generally, they treat one another with respect, but they do not set consistently high standards for themselves. A small minority of parents expressed concerns about the adverse effect of a few students upon the learning of others. This was the case in a few lessons where teachers did not manage effectively occasional incidents of low-level disruption. Exclusion levels are low and bullying is not a concern, and when it does occur, students say the school deals with it effectively. Students' attendance is satisfactory. The school uses a range of increasingly effective strategies to monitor and target individual students' attendance patterns. There are encouraging signs of improvement with the very small minority of students whose attendance is a major concern. For example, one student felt that the introduction of the electronic registration system and a personalised plan had been a key factor in the improvement of both attitude and attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers plan lessons to provide a good range of activities that are well suited to their students' needs and abilities. This engages their interest and enables them to make good progress. Teachers make good use of their strong subject knowledge and the good range of resources available to them to bring lessons to life. They use information and communication technology (ICT) creatively to involve students actively in their learning. For example, in mathematics, a teacher used an interactive program well to illustrate quadratic graphs. Although teachers often organise activities using pairs or small groups of students, too much learning is teacher directed and there are not enough opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills. Teaching assistants are deployed well so that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully involved in lessons and make good progress. In the sixth form, teaching is most successful when students are engaged in active learning activities. In history, for example, they are able to discuss issues in good depth and detail, and learn to appreciate and evaluate a range of different viewpoints.

Teachers use questioning effectively during lessons to check students' progress. In the most effective lessons, they encourage students to assess their own and their peers' work, which helps them to identify for themselves what levels they are reaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's curriculum generally meets the needs of the students well. The school's specialist status provides all students with the opportunity to take arts-based courses in Years 9 to 11. There is a range of courses that provide a good match to students' differing needs and talents. Although citizenship is delivered through 'theme days' and personal and social education lessons, coverage is not sufficient to ensure that students have enough opportunities to develop fully their knowledge in this area. The school day does not always get off to a sufficiently crisp and focused start, because too often tutorial time is not used effectively. Students in Years 10 and 11 whose work-related courses enable them to benefit from placements with local employers are fully able to access subjects such as mathematics and English at school. Some students have tailored and personalised learning packages planned to meet their specific needs and these have helped spark their interest and improve their attitude and attendance. The school provides a wide choice of extra-curricular activities ranging from sporting activities and orchestra to model railway. These are well attended and much appreciated by students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school knows its students well and provides good pastoral support for students in all year groups. Students appreciate the house system as it provides a sense of belonging. Support for vulnerable students and those with learning and behaviour difficulties is good, and is becoming increasingly effective as new procedures are fully embedded. This support includes effective links with a wide range of external professionals who offer specific expertise, which the school uses well. As a result, students make good progress, despite facing challenging circumstances. There are effective links with the middle schools and this, together with the house system, has eased the move to the upper school for most students. Staff work well together and with parents to help students overcome problems. Several parents comment upon the promptness and efficiency of the school in responding to their concerns about the well-being of their child. Safeguarding arrangements are robust, as are child protection procedures, vetting of staff appointments and risk assessments.

Students receive good guidance on subject and career options, which enables them to make informed choices for the future. They understand the school's system for setting targets and are aware of their target grades and what they have to do to achieve them. The use of students' targets by teachers to support learning is variable. In the best practice, such as an engineering lesson, students and teachers work together using a 'traffic light' system to indicate different levels of performance and discuss what small steps need to be taken to reach agreed target grades.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and senior leaders communicate a clear vision to staff and students about their drive for improvement. They have raised expectations across the school community, and the school is making good progress towards meeting challenging targets in terms of students' attainment. It has already substantially improved students' achievement in weaker subjects, for example, in science, by implementing tighter monitoring procedures and making staff more accountable for outcomes.

Leaders at all levels have accurately identified the school's strengths and areas for development. Clear plans have been established to indicate how the improvements will be achieved and these are being effectively implemented. Middle managers are taking more responsibility for their own areas and are monitoring performance rigorously. The school manages its finances well and makes good use of the resources available.

The school has established good relationships with a range of bodies, including local schools, companies and the youth service. This has provided enhanced opportunities for students inside and out of school to broaden their experiences. These positive relationships are contributing to the school's growing reputation locally.

Governors bring a good range of expertise to the school, which they put to good effect, for example, in enabling the school to deploy staff more efficiently. They know their school well and provide effective challenge as well as support to the headteacher and his senior team. The school's leaders and managers have good capacity to bring about further improvement.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

| | | |
|---|----------------|-------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall | 16-19 |
|---|----------------|-------|

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 | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 | 2 |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | 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? | 3 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 | |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | |
| 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 | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 | 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 | 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 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 | 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

7 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Ferndown Upper School, Ferndown BH22 9EY

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for your contribution to the recent inspection. We all enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views on your school. I am writing to you to give you a summary of what we found.

Ferndown Upper is a good school, which is well led by the headteacher and his senior staff. Many of you make good progress in your courses and gain qualifications that will stand you in good stead later on in life. The school wants to improve your results even more and you can help by working hard to meet your targets. Most of the teaching in the school is good but there are not enough opportunities for you to learn from each other, and to work and study on your own. . The curriculum helps you learn but could be improved by making better use of tutor time.

You say that you enjoy school, including its out-of-school activities, and that you feel safe and well supported there. Most of you appreciate the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. We agree with you that the house system has helped to give the school a real sense of community. Many of you are making a valuable contribution through the house and school councils, and you rightly believe that school takes what you say seriously. Some of you need to make more effort to get to school regularly, and some behaviour in lessons needs to improve so that everyone can concentrate fully on learning.

All the staff and the governors want to make the school even better. We have asked them to focus on the following points:

- Help you become independent learners by sharing the best practice in teaching and learning.
- Improve behaviour in some classes by applying the school's systems of rewards and sanctions more consistently.
- Make better use of tutorial time so that you are ready to learn right from the beginning of the day. We wish you all the very best for the future! Yours sincerely

Robin Gaff Lead inspector

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Yours sincerely

Robin Gaff
Lead inspector