

Frederick Gent School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112941
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	325722
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Kevin Sheldrick HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	935
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ross Fletcher
Headteacher	Mr Martyn Cooper
Date of previous school inspection	5–6 July 2006
School address	Mansfield Road South Normanton Alfreton Derbyshire DE55 2ER
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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors. The inspectors visited 31 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They looked at the school's documentation, scrutinised students' work and read 263 parental questionnaires.

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

- the quality of teaching and learning
- the effectiveness of assessment in enabling the school to target interventions and fine tune teaching to meet the needs of individual students
- the current rates of progress of different groups of students, particularly boys and girls.

Information about the school

This average size secondary school largely serves the South Normanton and Pinxton areas of north east Derbyshire. The vast majority of pupils are White British. About 3% are from a range of different minority ethnic backgrounds, including a small number from the Traveller community. Slightly below average numbers of students are eligible for free school meals. The attainment of students entering the school is average. The school has slightly below average numbers of students with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also slightly below average. The school has had specialist status for mathematics and computing since 2004. A new headteacher has been in post since September 2008.

Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The recently appointed headteacher has had a positive impact. His infectious enthusiasm is spreading to senior staff and middle leaders. Students enjoy lessons because they are interesting and there are plenty of opportunities for students to work collaboratively with others. Independent learning is encouraged but in some lessons weaknesses in assessment result in students not achieving outcomes in line with their capabilities. Students increasingly know their targets but do not consistently know what they must do to improve.

Students behave well and contribute positively to the community. They live healthily, feel safe and are prepared well for the next stage in their education. The school's specialist status has been beneficial in enabling teachers and students to use information communication technology (ICT) effectively to support learning. This has helped to raise boys' attainment so it is beginning to more closely match that of the girls. Although some of the very challenging specialist targets have been missed, there are promising signs that these will be reached in the next few years, for instance, students are making better progress in their new vocational options.

The school's capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory. There have been improvements to behaviour, the curriculum and targets are based on a more accurate analysis of students' achievement. The school has consistently ensured virtually every student has gained a good number of qualifications and achievement is rising.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to improve the rate of progress of all groups of students,:
 - ensuring lessons are consistently well-planned so that all students are appropriately challenged and make the progress of which they are capable
 - ensuring all students are given opportunities to evaluate their learning in relation to challenging, individual targets

- ensuring students have a clear understanding of what they must do to improve
- raising expectations to ensure that students work at a greater pace, particularly when working independently
- evaluating the curriculum more promptly in order that it can be fine-tuned to meet the needs of all groups of students.

How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

3

At the end of Year 11 students' performance at GCSE is average. The picture in years 7 to 9 has been similar where results in the English, mathematics and science tests have been average. The proportion of students gaining 5A* to C including English and mathematics has gradually improved and is broadly average. The school does well ensuring virtually every student gains 5A* to G grade GCSEs. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with a statement, make expected progress. These more positive outcomes are a direct result of the effective, support guidance and care, particularly the way in which teaching assistants are deployed. Adaptations to the curriculum result in Traveller students making satisfactory progress. Although boys attain less well their achievement was better in lessons where high expectations were communicated and teachers praised them for the progress made. The results since the last inspection highlighted some lower achievement that was fairly evenly spread across different ability groups. This was a direct result of a lack of challenge in some teaching and the schools previous curriculum that did not inspire all students. Students are positive about the wider choices they now have and the school has increased the challenge in lessons by increasing the emphasis given to students reaching their challenging targets. Better progress was particularly apparent in lessons where teachers ensured students had access to the criteria used for assessment. Rates of progress have improved, particularly at Years 10 and 11, and are now satisfactory.

Students say that they eat healthily and take regular exercise. Students have a good understanding of how to stay healthy. There are high levels of participation in a particularly broad range of activities that promote physical exercise. Packed lunches and restaurant meals are healthy. Older students in Year 11 were positive about how the school makes learning about being healthy more interesting by inviting in a range of visitors. Students enjoy school and this contributes to good levels of attendance. They have good computer skills with many able to learn independently through the schools' rapidly expanding virtual learning environment. They are quite adept at working in groups and have good relationships with adults. They know a lot about the world of work and the pathways they need to follow to be successful. This knowledge and good personal skills result in students being well prepared for employment or the next stage in their education, even though achievement is satisfactory. The many students inspectors spoke to all indicated that they felt safe in school and on various trips. The vast majority of respondents to the student questionnaire and the students who spoke to inspectors were positive about how the school tackles any bullying or the very occasional racist incidents that occur. Students contribute well to their school community. For example, more able students

can frequently be seen helping others that are having difficulties in lessons and there is a well-established system of peer listeners. The school council is effective in helping the school to improve, for example in helping improve the options available to older students. Pupils in local primary schools benefit from the school's specialist status when students perform outreach work. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good overall, although the school recognises that the multicultural nature of British Society needs to be reflected more in the work of the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	2
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

The quality of the school's work

The more effective aspects of teaching and learning included:

- Subject knowledge is used well, often with good links to real world examples
- A wide range of activities, including many that were ICT based, increases levels of enjoyment and maintains student interest.
- Clear time related targets, motivated students, particularly boys
- Group work is used frequently and develops important personal skills
- Teaching assistants make an important contribution to ensuring students with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress.
- Termly, key assessments are often helping students recognise what they need to do to improve.
- The better lessons ensured students had the opportunity to undertake work matched to their abilities, for example in mathematics students were able to select work that was clearly labelled with a level.

¹ Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

The less effective aspect of teaching included:

- Lesson planning is not consistently linked to the assessments of pupils previous learning
- Activities in lessons did not always appropriately challenge the full ability range of pupils. Scrutiny of student work confirmed that, too often pupils of different abilities produce outcomes that were similar, particularly in years 7 to 9.
- The effective approach of identifying areas of improvement through termly assessments is not consistently being used to inform teaching.
- Sometimes the effectiveness of teaching assistants is diminished because teachers talk for too long.

Most students know their targets but the impact of this is limited because teachers do not refer to them enough in lessons, particularly in years 7 to 9. Assessment of students' progress is moderated to ensure accuracy and it is used effectively to target support for individual students. Although work is marked, students are not routinely provided with clear guidance about what they must do to improve. The school has been successful in engaging an increasing number of parents in their children's learning through a series of meetings. This is contributing to the increased motivation of students to achieve their targets.

The school has been successful in improving the curriculum. Current Year 9 and 10 students spoke positively about the choices they have and how much they value the vocational options that are available. ICT is used extensively by staff and students. More relevant and well-timed basic skills assessments are being used to motivate students and build learner confidence. 'Opening minds' gives younger pupils the opportunity to work independently and teaches important group work skills, although the brevity of lessons reduces the opportunity for extending learning. Most students participate in the out of normal hours activities and the school has very sensibly targeted some popular team games at students with the greatest need. There are many trips, residential experiences and visitors to the school to enhance learning. There are above average levels of participation in the learning of languages.

The pastoral needs of the majority of students are met well through the work of form tutors alongside a well-respected personal social and health education programme. Heads of year, working under the leadership of a deputy headteacher, ensure high levels of consistency in the care provided. There is very effective monitoring of student well-being through regular vulnerability assessments. As soon as any issues become apparent support is available. This includes peer mentors, teaching assistants, learning mentors and a wide range of external agencies. Detailed records are kept of support provided and these clearly demonstrate its effectiveness. Parents are particularly positive about the links with primary schools that aid transition. Students were very appreciative of the guidance they receive at option times and when thinking about post-16 possibilities. The support for children who are looked after, and Travellers, has been effective.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	3
Effective assessment	3
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	2
Support, guidance and care	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has quickly won over the support of staff, students and parents. He has successfully engaged staff in decision making through a range of strategic improvement and focus groups. Leaders know the major strengths and weaknesses, although it is too early for action to address identified shortcomings to have made a difference to students' progress and achievement remains satisfactory. Teaching and learning is improving slowly and some new provision, such as the 'Opening Minds' course, has not been reviewed, even though it has been in place for 18 months. The school has improved its use of assessment information and has recognised the need to close the gap between the attainment of boys and girls. Although some improvement in boys' attainment is evident, further action is needed to improve the performance of all groups. The school's promotion of equality and tackling of discrimination is satisfactory.

All safeguarding requirements are met and risk assessments are undertaken to ensure students are safe. The school is beginning to seek feedback from parents and students. The system to maintain and update the safeguarding arrangements is kept under review. The expertise of governors is used well, for instance in deciding on the most effective approach to broadband connectivity. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and ask the right questions. They are well organised and are increasingly visible around the school. Governors have challenged the school about the under-achievement in recent years and there are signs that the governing body is now being effective in holding the school to account.

The school recognises that parental support is vital if students are to achieve challenging targets. It is successfully making the development of links with parents a priority. For example, parents are now provided with more accurate and regular updates on their children's progress. Partnerships with other organisations and services are having a good impact on students' well-being and achievement. The effectiveness of support, guidance and care, and the improvements to the curriculum, are a direct result of partnership with other providers. The school has a clear understanding of what is required to promote community cohesion and attempts are being made to broaden horizons of students about the nature of society and the world. The school has identified that links to different communities in the United Kingdom are relatively under-developed at present.

These are the grades for leadership and management

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	3

Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	3
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	3
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	3
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	2
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	3
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of the 263 parents who responded to the questionnaire are positive about the school. They strongly agree that the school keeps their children safe and that the school is well led. A small number of parents praised the high visibility of the new headteacher and the effectiveness of form tutors. The attendance of parents at recent tutor led consultation meetings has risen sharply to 89%. Several parents mentioned how behaviour has improved. However, a few mentioned that there was disruption to some lessons caused by poor behaviour by students. A few parents referred to incidences of bullying that were not dealt with effectively. Inspectors investigated these concerns and the evidence, including questionnaire returns from 593 students, suggests that the school almost always handles behaviour and bullying well.

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. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
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. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
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.



6 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Frederick Gent School, South Normanton, DE55 2ER

I would like to thank all of you and particularly the students we interviewed and the 593 of you who took the time to complete and return a questionnaire, giving your views about the school. We judged the school to be satisfactory. Until quite recently achievement was below what might be expected but we found that the school has done well to improve the situation. The students we interviewed were positive about most aspects of the school and we could see why. The school does well in ensuring you feel safe, live healthily, develop good social skills and become caring individuals. You do your best to contribute positively to the school through the school council and by helping other students who find work difficult. Staff and students are enthused by your lively new headteacher. The school has identified the improvements needed and we saw good evidence of progress being made.

Our observations of lessons confirmed the school's view that teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory. You often enjoy lessons because your teachers provide a wide variety of activities and you have quite extensive opportunities to work independently. However, the evidence from our observations of lessons and from your books pointed to quite a number of occasions when teaching did not ensure you achieved the outcomes that would enable you to reach your challenging targets, particularly in years 7 to 9. To make achievement good, we are suggesting the school increases the proportion of lessons that are good and outstanding. We think the school needs to ensure that you have a much better idea of how you can reach your targets. In addition we have asked the school to monitor what it does and make the changes that will lead to higher achievement more quickly. You can help by asking for clarification when you are uncertain of what to do to improve.

I wish you all the best and trust you enjoyed raising money through the Red Nose Day activities you were planning.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Sheldrick
Her Majesty's Inspector

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