

Fernwood School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	136724
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	384805
Inspection dates	18–19 April 2012
Lead inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1016
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Irons
Headteacher	Ann Witheford
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2007
School address	Goodwood Road Wollaton Nottingham NG8 2FT
Telephone number	0115 9286326
Fax number	0115 9854250
Email address	a.witheford@fernwoodschool.org.uk

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Michelle Parker

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sean Thornton

Additional Inspector

Rena Saggu

Additional Inspector

Glen Goddard

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 32 teachers and 32 lessons, including 12 joint observations with members of the senior leadership team and two occasions when several short observations of lessons were conducted. Meetings and discussions were held with groups of students and members of the governing body, parents and carers, and the school staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school development plan, minutes of the governing body's meetings, documents relating to safeguarding and teaching records. Inspectors analysed 452 questionnaires from parents and carers, in addition to those completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

Fernwood is a larger than average-sized secondary school, located on the edge of Nottingham. It became an academy in May 2011. It is an oversubscribed school that has specialist technology, mathematics, science status. The school was identified as a centre for excellence for German teaching in 2005 by the British German Association. It is recognised for excellence in languages, expressive arts and sport. The school has a rich cultural mix of students with around 40% coming from a wide range of different ethnic heritages. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is more than twice the national average. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs – requiring additional support from external services or with a statement of their special educational needs – is below average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum requirements for students' attainment and progress. The school has Leading Edge status.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school in all aspects. It is successful in living up to its motto of 'high achievement with care and discipline for all'. Much of this success is because the excellent leadership of the school at all levels supports high-quality teaching. Although the school has worked hard to ensure that parents and carers are well informed of their children's progress, communication with a small minority does not fully engage them in the life of the school and in their children's learning.
- All groups of students achieve outstandingly well in all subjects, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Teachers interest, motivate and engage students extremely well in learning. They have high expectations of what each student can achieve. Consequently, students make exceptional progress.
- Students' outstanding behaviour makes an exceptional contribution to the school's safe and positive learning environment. Students are respectful of each other's differences and behave maturely around the school. They are exceptionally well-motivated to learn. Attendance is above average and is improving and students are punctual to lessons.
- Leaders and managers enable the school to perform exceptionally well in all aspects. The impressive curriculum provides a broad and balanced range of rich and memorable experiences that greatly enhance students' learning. The school enthusiastically embraces the broad range of different heritages represented. As a result, students develop an informed view of the world which strongly underpins their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen existing systems and lines of communication with parents and carers

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to ensure that all are actively engaged in the life of the school and the learning of their children.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The progress and attainment of students over the last three years, including those known to be eligible for free school meals, and students who are disabled and those who have special educational needs, are significantly above the national average. Students achieve outstandingly well – irrespective of their ethnic heritage. From average starting points on entry, students' rapid progress enables them to reach above-average standards, including achievement of five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics.

Last year saw their best-ever set of mathematics results. Performance in English slipped a little in 2011. Leaders have been quick to rectify this situation. Students' reading ability is checked when they join the school and this information is effectively used by staff. Consequently, students are very well supported and they become confident and fluent readers. Strategies have been successfully introduced to ensure that levels of literacy for all students continue to improve. All staff take responsibility to ensure that students are given opportunities to practise reading aloud in lessons. Students are always expected to use technical words accurately – and they do so. Strategies to improve students' writing and literacy skills are given a high priority across the school and are embedded across the curriculum and contribute well to the above-average standards gained.

Staff rigorously monitor the progress of all students and systems quickly identify any student whose performance is giving cause for concern. Staff are particularly successful in raising the achievement of those students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. The many for whom English is an additional language are confident users of the language and access the full curriculum with confidence. All students make at least good progress in lessons because work is carefully matched to their starting points and needs and they are encouraged to work at a challenging level. Excellent learning was seen, for example, in German and drama lessons, where highly effective questions developed students understanding and enabled them to make exceptional progress. In mathematics lessons students' high level of discussion promoted a deep understanding of the problems they were working on and enabled them to make exceptional progress. High levels of independent learning in design and technology lessons increased students' confidence in their own learning skills and promoted in depth research.

The school has identified some relatively weaker performance among certain groups of students, such as boys known to be eligible for free school meals, and a few who are disabled or who have special educational needs receiving external support. A

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range of successful strategies have been employed to rectify these weaknesses. For example, the school runs extra lessons which are open to all and weaker students are encouraged to attend. Homework clubs are run for each year group and led by staff so that help is on hand for those who are finding homework difficult. Every teacher is held accountable for the progress of each student they teach. There is close focus on narrowing gaps in attainment and progress for any student identified as underperforming and outcomes are invariably positive. Carefully tailored support is put in place which includes extra one-to-one tutoring and small-group work.

Inspectors' evaluation that students' achievement is exceptional is fully endorsed by parents and carers, who are rightly pleased with the progress their children make.

Quality of teaching

Teaching is outstanding, and students, parents and carers fully endorse inspectors' views of its quality. Teachers interest, motivate and engage students extremely well and have high expectations of them as learners. The pace of learning in lessons is brisk and supports students in making rapid and sustained progress. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to encourage students to assess their own work to enhance their understanding of the subject. Feedback during lessons helps students understand how to improve their work and to ascertain the next steps in learning.

Staff are rigorous in ensuring students' examination work meets high standards. Students have a clear understanding of what they need to do in order to reach higher levels. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to extend students' understanding, particularly through effective questioning. Teachers focus on how to challenge students most effectively to perform at their highest level through using 'stretch and challenge' questions in every lesson. This technique was particularly effective in a music lesson observed where students were skilfully introduced to Calypso music. Students made rapid progress so that by the end of the lesson they were able to use their newly acquired knowledge to compose their own piece of music using a Calypso beat. In a German lesson, key words and phrases were introduced and practised so that learning moved on at a fast pace.

The teaching of students with disabilities and those with special educational needs is carefully matched to their individual needs. Staff know students exceptionally well and this develops students' trust and self-confidence in their ability to be successful. The deployment of teaching assistants to support students with disabilities and special learning needs is well matched to those needs, and students are encouraged to become independent learners.

The school believes passionately in creating 'global citizens' and this guides much work to enhance students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, Year 9 students' work at the Beth Shalom Centre, enabled them to reflect on the impact of the Holocaust. The culmination of this work is the Year 9 'Peace Prize Challenge' when every tutor group submits original work they have made,

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individually or in groups, ranging from students' own musical compositions, poetry, film, paintings and a 'garden' to reflect their response.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students feel very safe in school. They have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning and their conduct around school is exemplary. The majority of Year 10 students apply to become prefects in Year 11 because they value the opportunities provided for leadership and responsibility within school. Some parents and carers raised concerns about bullying. However, the inspection team found that students recognise different types of bullying and are aware of how to deal with these situations. Rare occurrences of bullying are managed promptly and there are high expectations that all members of the school community will be equally respected. Students are confident that staff will act swiftly if they have any concerns. One student summed up the views of many that, 'The school is a family which we are proud to be part of.'

Exclusions are well below the national average because poor behaviour is rare and staff 'never give up' on a student. The very rare occasions when a student is temporarily excluded are because the school takes a firm stance, insisting on the highest standards. High standards of behaviour coupled with the school's careful nurturing environment ensure that students who arrive after the usual joining time are quickly integrated and supported to achieve well. A few parents and carers raised concerns about disruption to lessons, particularly chattering, but students explained this was rare and quickly dealt with by staff. Movement around school is calm and orderly.

Students arrive punctually to school and lessons because they enjoy their school life. Attendance is above average and the school has a wide range of strategies which are effectively improving attendance even further.

Leadership and management

The headteacher demonstrates an impressive vision for the school through the 'Fernwood way' which is effectively shared by staff at all levels. The newly reorganised senior leadership team work highly effectively together to support and challenge staff and to set high standards for quality and performance. Thorough analysis of all school data enables leaders and managers to hold all staff to account for the quality of learning and progress of students. Leadership is encouraged at every level and this has developed a strong 'can do' culture across all staff. Staff are keen and encouraged to develop their own initiatives. Particularly successful examples include the development of reading, work undertaken by pastoral staff to track students' progress and initiatives to share information. The development of learning communities now plays a key role in supporting improvements in teaching and learning. These learning communities are closely linked to the professional development of staff and are used in identifying and sharing good practice in order to move the whole school forward.

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The curriculum very effectively promotes high levels of achievement, good behaviour and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. All subject leaders have evaluated how their subject contributes to the development of the curriculum. This ensures that cross-curricular themes are effectively used to stimulate students' interest and literacy and numeracy skills are embedded in every subject.

The governing body is exceptionally well informed and understands the school very well. Members of the governing body use their professional expertise to challenge the school and hold senior leaders to account. In addition, members of the governing body have a keen interest in promoting equality through regularly monitoring the progress of all groups of students and ensuring that the school rapidly tackles any discrimination. Arrangements for safeguarding meet all statutory requirements. The school promotes a culture of safety very effectively. The school successfully attracts high-quality staff and provides opportunities for them to develop both their professional and leadership skills. Its impressive track record of improvement since the previous inspection in achievement and the high quality of teaching ensure that the school has an excellent capacity for further improvement.

The school is keen to develop links with parents and carers and uses a wide range of modern technologies to communicate with them to help them understand the progress their children are making. However, some parents and carers are concerned that they do not know how well their children are progressing, and are unclear about the learning intended for them.

Glossary

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.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



20 April 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Fernwood School, Nottingham, NG8 2FT.

Thank you for the warm welcome and courtesy you gave us during the inspection of your school. Your comments were helpful in giving us an accurate picture of your school. Thank you to those students who completed the inspection questionnaire. Your comments were very helpful. We were very impressed with your positive attitudes to learning and your politeness.

We agree with you that you go to an outstanding school, which provides you with memorable and rich learning experiences. Your school is exceptionally well led at all levels. Since your school was last inspected, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been well above that reached by similar students nationally. Previous weaknesses in English and mathematics have been successfully addressed. Most of the teaching is outstanding, providing you with a high level of challenge and expectation of you as learners. Your school listens to your views well and this has helped to develop the curriculum. We were impressed with the leadership roles you take on – such as reading with Year 7 students and becoming prefects. Many of you return to school as volunteers to support students as mentors – well done for that.

Although a few of your parents and carers are concerned about disruptive behaviour in lessons, you told us poor behaviour was a rarity. We were impressed with your cooperation and good behaviour, both in lessons and around school. You understand how to keep yourselves safe and you are punctual to school and your attendance is good. Your school uses a wide range of technologies for communicating with your parents and carers. A few of them are concerned that they do not have enough information on how well you are doing or what you are learning, and we have asked your school to make sure all are fully informed.

We wish you success in all you do.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

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