

Sir Frederic Osborn School

Herns Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL7 2AF

Inspection dates 10–11 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Standards at GCSE are below the national average in too many subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- Recent improvements in teaching have not yet resulted in good achievement for all students. The progress of girls, boys and students with different abilities varies; in 2012 boys nationally performed far better.
- Teachers' expectations of students are not always high enough. As a consequence, standards of presentation and homework, behaviour in lessons, and the depth of thinking vary widely. Some targets are set lower than students' current work.
- Not all teachers show good subject knowledge or literacy skills.
- Leaders have not been effective in making the best practice in assessment, marking and planning for different abilities widespread.
- Senior and middle leaders do not focus enough on how well students develop their subject skills, knowledge and understanding when evaluating teaching.
- Students' cultural development is not promoted as well as their spiritual, moral and social development. Visits and visitors are not used sufficiently widely to enrich the curriculum, raise aspirations and stimulate achievement.

The school has the following strengths

- Students achieve well on most work-related courses. The school's strong emphasis on physical and social development contributes well to their preparation for life.
- The quality of teaching is improving. The best teachers use their subject knowledge to adapt and apply whole-school initiatives skilfully.
- Students' attendance is good. They behave well around the school. Those with responsibilities contribute to other students feeling safe and supported.
- There is a strong emphasis on improving students' literacy skills across the curriculum. Pupil premium funding is having a positive impact on improving students' reading skills.
- The sixth form, run in collaboration with a local college and other schools, is good.
- The school is making effective use of support provided by the local authority. Work with an outstanding school is strengthening leaders' capacity to accelerate improvement.
- The new governing body is starting to challenge leaders and staff more rigorously.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 37 lessons, of which eight were seen jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors visited a sample of tutor periods and observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of parents and carers and a representative of the governing body.
- Inspectors talked with many students about their learning and life at the school. They held meetings with three groups of students and reviewed their work in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors took account of 32 questionnaires completed by staff and 54 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team observed the school's work; reviewed current data about students' achievement; examined records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance; and looked at documents used by leaders in monitoring and evaluating the school's work.

Inspection team

Ian Middleton, Lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sue Street	Her Majesty's Inspector
Mary Hinds	Additional Inspector
Beverley Mabey	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Sir Frederic Osborn School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school works collaboratively with five schools and a college offering post-16 courses. No students in Years 7 to 11 are educated away from the school site.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium (extra government funding to support particular groups of pupils) is above average at 35.7%.
- An above-average proportion of students in Year 7 are supported by catch-up funding because they did not achieve the expected Level 4 in English while at primary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average, as is the proportion supported through school action plus or a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportions of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and those who speak English as an additional language are below the national figures.
- The proportion of students who join or leave the school other than at usual transfer times is above average.
- In 2012 the school did not meet the government's floor standards, which set minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that the impact on students' achievement is sustained by making sure that all teachers:
 - set a strong example to students with regard to literacy and subject knowledge
 - make high expectations explicit in all classrooms, lessons and homework assignments
 - use assessment data to match different lesson activities to students' needs, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to promote independence in learning
 - use questioning to challenge students' breadth of knowledge and depth of understanding
 - mark students' work thoroughly, showing what they need to do to reach higher standards.
- Raise students' achievement to at least national standards in all subjects by making sure that all teachers:
 - use students' progress information to set suitably challenging targets, including for more-able students capable of the higher grades at GCSE and A-level
 - work with subject leaders in other schools, including primary schools, to check the accuracy of assessments.
- Improve students' behaviour in lessons by making sure that all teachers:
 - apply the school's behaviour policy consistently well
 - use students' personal and social skills to engage all boys and girls actively in lessons.
- Strengthen leadership and management by making sure that senior and middle leaders:
 - make improvement plans clearer with regard to the standards expected by different groups of students in different subjects and by when, in order to accelerate improvement

- take more account of students' learning, progress and attainment when evaluating teaching
- develop teachers' subject knowledge so that whole-school initiatives are adapted to different subjects and contribute to raising standards in subjects
- increase opportunities for students to gain GCSE qualifications
- use curriculum enrichment activities more strategically to boost students' achievement and improve their cultural development.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the school in Year 7 with standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are significantly below average. In 2012, at 83% more students left with five or more GCSE A* to C grades or equivalent qualifications than in previous years. The 39% that achieved five or more GCSE A* to C grades including English and mathematics was lower than in previous years, well below the national level of 58% and below the government floor target of 40%. The poor performance of boys was a contributory factor.
- Most parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire consider their children make good progress at the school. Some students do make good progress but inspectors found inconsistencies between the progress made in different subjects. The performance of different groups of students varies year on year. In 2012 girls achieved particularly well in mathematics. Fewer middle-ability students than expected achieved the higher grades. Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress at least in line with that of their peers.
- The school uses early entry in mathematics to encourage more-able students, conscious that students should not settle for lower grades than they might otherwise achieve.
- The progress made by students who are known to be eligible for pupil premium funding is closer to that of other students at the school than is seen nationally. Progress records indicate that students known to be eligible for free school meals and students in the care of the local authority are on course to make the progress expected in English and mathematics while at the school. Similarly, students who had not reached the expected levels before starting at the school are benefiting from additional Year 7 'catch-up' funding.
- Students' reading is improving rapidly; assessment data show that reading ages have increased markedly. The school has introduced a range of initiatives to increase students' interest in reading. For example, students take part in 'accelerated reading' sessions and sixth-form students help to stimulate younger students' interest and motivation to read. An increasing proportion of students are using the school library in lessons and at lunchtimes.
- Students who study for work-related qualifications and awards achieve well because the courses they take are generally well matched to their needs and interests. However, the school is rightly guiding more students to GCSE qualifications because their success in some subjects shows what they are capable of. For example, students consistently attain GCSE A* to C grades at or above national levels in modern languages.
- Stronger teaching in the sixth form and students' commitment to their continuing education enables students to progress well. A below-average proportion of students start the sixth form having attained A* to B GCSE grades. Retention rates from AS to A-level are above average. Although a respectable proportion of students progress on to higher education, the proportion of A* to B grades achieved at AS and A-level remains below average and this limits students' options.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The school's monitoring and students' views indicate that the quality of teaching is improving. However, although there is an increasing amount of good and outstanding lessons, not enough teaching is consistently good for students to sustain their good progress. This is reflected in the

standards attained by students in examinations, which are too low.

- Where teaching requires improvement, teachers do not use information about students' progress sufficiently well to prepare activities that engage all abilities equally. Not all teachers show confidence in diverging from their lesson plan, based on students' responses. In some lessons, the targets set for students are no higher than their current work. These aspects of teaching are stronger in the sixth form, where a good transition programme enables teachers to pitch work at appropriate levels for individual students from the start.
- The quality of marking is variable. There are some excellent examples where teachers have adapted the school's marking policy to suit their subject, for example, in design and technology. However, not enough teachers provide comments or examples showing how work can be improved. Poor presentation of work is not challenged often enough.
- The school's behaviour policy is generally applied well. In the small minority of lessons where students are easily distracted, the level of challenge is too low. Where students' behaviour contributes positively to their learning they are actively involved by working collaboratively in groups, by leading activities or by using their interests out of school. These are common features of the physical education lessons, an established strength of the school.
- The best lessons have good pace because the sequence of activities is well planned. They are challenging because students' thinking is stimulated through questioning, and are relevant because all students are involved through practical or problem-solving activities linked to their own lives. A series of well-researched history assignments showed how Year 9 students had investigated topics of interest, for example chocolate, from an historical perspective.
- Teachers often use computer technology effectively to introduce new topics or to consolidate learning. In a drama lesson the teacher used film effectively to develop Year 12 students' evaluative skills. However, few lessons observed or work that was reviewed showed that students use ICT regularly to support their learning in different subjects.
- Most teachers promote literacy well by widening students' specialist vocabulary, explaining how to write for different purposes, or involving students in reading. Some activities test students' listening skills and promote clear and confident speaking. However, not all teachers model good presentation or grammar. For example, marking is sometimes untidy and opportunities are missed to correct errors in punctuation or spelling.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' behaviour in lessons is not consistently good. Students are sometimes too passive, and this is evident in their reluctance to ask or answer questions, minimal contribution to group work or limited confidence to express originality. This contrasts starkly with their enthusiasm and engagement in lessons that capitalise on their personal and social skills, for example modern languages.
- In a small proportion of lessons students' lack of interest leads to poor behaviour which slows the pace of learning for all. The concerns of a few parents and carers about behaviour matched the results of the staff questionnaire. However, the students interviewed agreed that behaviour is generally positive, supported by new rewards systems and more consistent use of the school's behaviour policy by staff.
- Students behave well around the school at break and lunchtimes. This contributes to a sense of

community and safety. Older students support younger ones; sixth formers set a good example by taking their school and community service responsibilities seriously. Students are aware of different forms of bullying and feel confident that incidents of bullying or harassment are taken seriously by staff. There have been no exclusions this year.

- Attendance is above average. The proportion of students supporting additional opportunities to prepare for examinations is increasing. When challenged to do extended homework, younger students respond well and show that they too are keen to improve. While these examples show that positive attitudes to learning are developing, not all students take full advantage of the opportunities available.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The school is managed efficiently. The leadership team includes strong teachers who set a good example to staff; the quality of teaching is improving. However, leadership and management require improvement because the pace of improvement is slowed by the inconsistent application of school policies in the classroom. For example, weaknesses in marking existed at the time of the last school inspection in 2010, the monitoring inspection by HMI in 2011 and the local authority review in 2012.
- Senior and middle leaders' plans to improve the school further include appropriate whole-school and subject-specific priorities. However, these plans do not show clearly enough the expected gains in attainment by different groups of students. The timescales are not specific enough, or planned in sufficiently small, measurable stages. This limits the effectiveness of leaders and governors in holding staff to account.
- The school has demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve, albeit recently. Decisive action has been taken to address underperformance at all levels. The system for managing staff performance is better-informed as a result of improved monitoring and evaluation of teaching that includes lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny, surveys and data analysis. However, senior leaders are aware that some of the teaching judged good or outstanding has not yet had a proven impact on students' achievement over time.
- Leaders use the resources available judiciously. Thorough monitoring and evaluation of funded initiatives enables efficient deployment. For example, the school's analysis shows that pupil premium funding is being used to good effect in English and mathematics. One-to-one tuition has improved the grades of 17 Year 11 students in English and 14 in mathematics this year.
- A new vision statement for the school is helping to focus the actions of staff, with the support of students, parents and carers. Improvements in students' attendance to above-average levels show what is possible when concerted actions are taken.
- The curriculum makes a positive contribution to students' achievement and their spiritual, moral, social, and to a lesser extent their cultural development. Optional activities, visits and visitors strengthen students' physical and social development particularly well. However, there is not enough strategic use of enrichment activities to boost achievement in other subjects such as the arts or religious studies. Cross-curricular work is at an early stage of development. Cross-phase work with primary schools is largely related to the school's sports specialism. Work with other schools in the sixth-form consortium widens students' choices and has a positive impact on their achievement.
- The safeguarding of students complies with national requirements.

■ The headteacher is making effective use of support provided by a National Leader in Education (NLE) arranged through the local authority. A deputy headteacher from an outstanding school is working with senior leaders to help accelerate improvements in teaching. The local authority has monitored the school closely in the past year through regular meetings with senior staff. The local authority reviewed the school's progress in November 2012. Subsequent reorganisation of the senior leadership team and governing body has added impetus to the school's improvement.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Led by a new Chair of Governors, the governing body has increased the level of challenge in holding leaders to account. Increased availability of students' progress data is enabling governors to ask searching questions about the achievement of students and performance of staff. They fully understand the procedures for performance management and the structures for improving the quality of teaching. They know how additional funding is spent and about its impact on students' achievement. The headteacher provides governors with comprehensive updates about the school's improvement. However, governors have recently taken a more direct role in monitoring and evaluating the school's work, for example through their involvement in 'results management group' analyses that hold subject and the school's directors of learning, to account. The local authority is monitoring governance in order to help strengthen the school's capacity to improve independently.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117525
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	401670

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	687
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	63
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carole Connelly
Headteacher	Susan Lewis
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2010
Telephone number	01707 351350
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