

Fitzharrys School

Northcourt Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire, OX14 1NP

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Require improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Achievement at the end of Year 11 is not yet secure. In particular, all students do not reach the standards they are capable of in English and mathematics.
- Students' achievement is too variable between subjects and between groups of students. Students known to be eligible for the pupil premium make less progress than their peers.
- The quality of teaching is not consistently good and some teachers do not plan activities at the right level of difficulty for their students.
- The stronger features of teaching are not sufficiently shared across all subject departments.
- The sixth form requires improvement because the progress of its students is not rapid enough.
- The effectiveness of staff with leadership roles is too variable; some are not contributing enough to raising standards.

The school has the following strengths:

- Teaching and achievement have improved since the previous inspection. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics is increasing.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make good progress.
- Students feel safe in school and their behaviour is good, both in lessons and around the school.
- Governors are effective and show a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed parts of 32 lessons, of which nine were jointly observed with a member of the school's leadership team. Inspectors visited an assembly and some tutor group periods, and made a number of shorter visits to classes that included students with special educational needs.
- The inspection team held meetings with two groups of students, talked with students in their lessons and around the school and scrutinised samples of their work.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, other staff with leadership responsibilities and five members of the governing body. A telephone discussion was held with the school's improvement consultant from the local authority.
- A variety of school documentation was examined, including the school's records of current students' progress, self-evaluation summaries and improvement plans, behaviour and attendance logs, minutes of governors' meetings and records relating to safeguarding and to the management of staff performance.
- Inspectors took account of the questionnaires completed by 36 staff, 64 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and two letters from parents or carers.

Inspection team

Sean Thornton, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Melvyn Blackband	Additional Inspector
Jackie Jones	Additional Inspector
Peter Thomas	Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is much below average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. This additional funding is provided for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals, in local authority care or who have a parent or carer in the armed forces.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school site includes provision for students who need extra support to improve their communication skills, including some students who have autistic spectrum disorders. This unit is run by the local authority.
- The school's sixth form courses are organised in collaboration with Abingdon & Witney College, John Mason School and Larkmead School. No other students attend alternative provision.
- Twenty eight students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding, which is for students who did not achieve the expected Level 4 in reading or mathematics at the end of Key Stage 2.
- A National Leader of Education, the headteacher of Faringdon Community College, provides the school with advice on its performance and areas for improvement. Further support is provided by other members of this college.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of good and outstanding teaching by:
 - ensuring that the features of good teaching present in the school, relating to planning, pace, challenge and questioning, are used as a model to improve the overall quality of teaching
 - making sure that all teachers provide students with regular, detailed feedback on their work and clear advice on how to improve.
- Improve students' achievement so that all groups of students, including those eligible for the pupil premium, make more rapid progress throughout the school by making sure that work set is always at the right level of difficulty.
- Increase the impact of school leaders by ensuring that all staff with leadership roles are fully involved in raising students' achievement.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the school with attainment that is in line with the national average. Following a dip in achievement in 2012, the proportion of students that gain five or more GCSE grades at A* to C, including English and mathematics, at the end of Year 11 increased in 2013. The school's provisional data for 2014 indicate that attainment is now in line with national averages.
- Students' attainment and progress are not consistent and, in particular, boys make less progress than girls in English. There is too much variation between the progress that students make in different subjects; for example, progress is strong in social studies but much weaker in art. The most-able students do not make as much progress as they should in English and mathematics.
- School leaders have taken strong actions to raise standards and these are showing increasing effect. In 2012 progress in mathematics was slow but, by improving teaching and working with external support, progress is now much more rapid. The school's projections, supported by evidence gathered during the inspection, indicate that students' rates of progress in both English and mathematics have increased substantially and are now at least in line with national figures.
- Students in the sixth form show commitment to their studies but achievement requires improvement because they do not make rapid-enough progress to fulfil their potential.
- Recent improvements have been made to the school's tracking systems so that, instead of concentrating on attainment measures, there is a clear focus on the progress of all students; this is contributing to the improving achievement of all groups of students seen by inspectors. Students are now making more rapid progress in Key Stage 3 and this is leading to higher attainment further up the school.
- The school monitors closely the progress made by disabled students and those with special educational needs. As a result of the good support provided, these students make good progress.
- Students who are eligible for the pupil premium are well known by their teachers, and parents and carers of these students have met individually with the headteacher to plan appropriate support as needed. Although the gap in attainment between these students and their peers was almost two GCSE grades in English and mathematics in 2013, they are now making better progress and attaining standards closer to those reached by other students. Raising the achievement of these students is a main improvement focus for the school and is shared by all subject departments.
- Additional funding for those students in Years 7 and 8 who need help to catch up with their peers in English and mathematics is spent well. A summer school helps them to make a good start in the school and extra individual and small-group teaching helps almost this entire group to make good progress in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.
- In November 2012 some students were entered early for some GCSE examinations but this practice has now been discontinued.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement. It is not consistently good enough across the school to ensure that all students make the best possible progress from their starting points. Very few examples of outstanding teaching were seen during the inspection.
- School leaders have increased the focus on improving the quality of teaching but the strategies introduced have not yet had enough time to show the necessary impact. Moreover, they are not being implemented by all teachers.
- Too often teachers do not plan activities that are at the right level of difficulty for their students. Lessons sometimes lack pace and questioning does not probe and extend students'

understanding. As a result, students are not challenged to think for themselves and progress is reduced.

- Where teaching is better, teachers provide a variety of engaging activities for their students and ensure that no time is wasted. They check students' understanding frequently and use questioning skilfully to make sure that students make good progress. For example, in a Year 10 mathematics lesson on scale drawing, the teacher provided a variety of challenging tasks so that students were fully engaged in a range of problem-solving activities; these ensured rapid progress and deepened students' understanding.
- Many sixth form students benefit from good teaching but, again, there is variation and teaching is not of a consistently high-enough standard to accelerate the progress of these students so that all achieve well.
- The school has developed a marking policy but this policy is not being implemented consistently and the quality of marking and feedback varies between subjects and teachers. Examples of good marking were seen that clearly identify what students have done well and what they need to do to improve. However, on many occasions, marking by teachers lacks enough subject-specific advice and makes vague, general statements that are not accurate enough to enable students to progress to the next level of achievement.
- The school has introduced a policy to promote literacy skills across all subjects and this is being implemented in many, but not all, subjects. In many lessons, teachers focus on providing activities that allow students to read and show good understanding of challenging texts, practise their speaking and listening skills, or produce extended writing about topics within their areas. For example, in a Year 7 science lesson, skilful teaching enabled a group with low literacy skills to develop an understanding of language and vocabulary through science.
- The school is using several strategies to share the good practice in teaching evident in some areas. This sharing of good practice has not yet led to enough whole-school improvement in the quality of teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of students is good. In the large majority of lessons students concentrate well, attitudes to learning are very positive and students show a desire to learn. When given opportunities by their teachers they participate well in classroom activities.
- Students have been involved in drawing up the school's behaviour code and they are clear about the system of sanctions and rewards. Students report that, on the rare occasions when there is disruption in lessons, it is dealt with effectively. They value the school's system of nominating a 'student of the week' from each year group.
- Specific behaviour plans are produced for the small number of students who do not follow the agreed code of behaviour and this has led to closer relations with parents and carers who are involved in the plans. As a result of this work, the behaviour of many such students has improved greatly.
- The rate of fixed-term exclusions increased in 2012 as part of a deliberate drive to improve students' behaviour but has now fallen rapidly and is below average. This reflects the considerable improvements to students' behaviour over the past year.
- Students show courtesy to each other, to staff and to visitors. There is very little litter, no evidence of graffiti, and the many wall displays are respected.
- The school has worked hard to raise attendance, which has increased significantly since the last inspection and is now average.
- Students are encouraged to put forward their views in the school council and their representatives attend the meetings of all governors' committees.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure on all parts of the school site is good. Students feel safe in school and the curriculum supports them well in learning how to stay safe. They have a good understanding of e-safety, including how to avoid unsafe websites, because of

the emphasis the school places on this issue.

- Students reported that incidents of bullying, including racist or other forms of prejudice-based bullying, are rare and are dealt with swiftly by the school's staff.
- The attendance and welfare of sixth form students who attend other sites for their courses are checked daily. These students are good role models for the younger members of the school.
- Almost all respondents to Parent View considered that behaviour is managed well, that their children are happy at school and that they feel safe.

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the quality of teaching is not yet good and, consequently, students are not yet making good enough progress. School policies, such as the marking policy, are not applied consistently by all staff and, as a result, students' progress is inconsistent.
- The effectiveness of subject leaders is variable. Not all are fully involved in checking the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility and so their contribution to school improvement is limited.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form require improvement because the systems used for checking the quality of the school's work in this area are not finely developed and do not enable students to make rapid-enough progress.
- The senior leadership team has been extended to provide a firmer focus on improving teaching. However, some initiatives have been introduced only recently and have not had enough time to show real impact.
- The headteacher and the governing body are committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to do as well as possible. They have high expectations and high ambition for the future. The school is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for all its students and no form of discrimination is tolerated.
- Self-evaluation is accurate, identifying the strengths of the school and the priorities for improvement. Systems are now in place to raise the rates of progress for all groups of students.
- Checks on the quality of teaching in lessons are frequent, and joint observations with members of the senior leadership team confirmed the accuracy of their judgements. However, the quality of teaching is still too variable across the school. This is in part due to the fact that features of the best teaching are not yet being shared widely enough across all subjects.
- The school has benefited from working closely with a national support school which provides good advice and support. The local authority has also provided a range of support for the school and is continuing to monitor progress and assist school improvement.
- Arrangements for the appraisal of teachers' performance and the application of the Teachers' Standards are linked closely to the targets for improving students' progress. Salary progression occurs only when merited by sustained good performance.
- The curriculum is well organised to meet the students' needs. The school provides a good range of GCSE courses and, within its limited finances, is broadening Key Stage 4 provision. Plans for teaching and assessing the new National Curriculum are in place. Students have many opportunities to engage in a wide variety of activities outside the school day, including a range of sports.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well, both through the curriculum and through the general life of the school. There are many opportunities for reflection and for celebrating achievements, together with effective assemblies and well-planned religious studies lessons. Students benefit from a variety of enrichment activities in music and drama which contribute to their cultural development.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is particularly well informed about all aspects of the school's work. An external review of governance was completed in March 2013 and led to three areas of focus

which have been addressed by a detailed action plan. The governors have a good understanding of how well the various groups of students are progressing and have arranged for an external review of pupil premium provision. Minutes of meetings confirm that governors are prepared to challenge the headteacher and other school leaders, for example when analysing the 2013 examination results. They know how well the school is performing in comparison to others. Governors are involved in checking the quality of teaching by visiting the school frequently and receiving detailed reports from subject leaders. They also play a full part in identifying and supporting initiatives for school improvement, such as strengthening the leadership team. Governors understand the importance of improving teachers' performance and the systems for doing so. They manage finances well and understand how the pupil premium is spent and the degree of its impact. Governors make sure the school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet all current government requirements.

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	123257
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	426368

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
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	665
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	118
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynn Fathers
Headteacher	Jonathan Dennett
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 October 2012
Telephone number	01235 520698
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