

Fort Hill Community School

Kenilworth Road, Basingstoke, RG23 8JQ

Inspection dates

25–26 February 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Since the previous inspection, leaders have been unable to secure good achievement for most students or consistently high quality teaching. As a result of significant changes in staffing and leadership, the pace of improvement is too slow.
- Not all leaders are similarly proficient in contributing to raising standards.
- Relatively few parents are actively engaged in the life of the school.
- Behaviour requires improvement because students' attitudes to learning are not consistently positive in all classes. Students do not always show enthusiasm for learning and are typically too passive in class.
- A minority of students are prone to become inattentive. Not all students attend regularly enough, which has a negative effect on their achievement, especially in Year 11.
- Leaders' secure plans to improve teaching have not had time to be fully translated into consistently effective practice. Teaching is still too variable across and within subjects, including in how well effective writing skills are promoted.
- Students are not always challenged enough to reach the highest standards they can. Teachers are not routinely quick enough in assessing how much students have achieved in lessons.
- Not enough students make consistently good progress over time. Performance in different subjects is too variable. The proportion gaining five good GCSEs, including in English and mathematics, is not rising quickly. The way in which information about students' progress is presented means it is not easy for leaders and governors to check trends.
- The gap between the achievement of disadvantaged students and other students nationally remains too wide. Additional funding for this group is not having enough impact.

The school has the following strengths

- Current leaders have begun to establish a clear sense of direction for the school. Governance is now more effective than in the recent past.
- Students generally conduct themselves well around the school site. The rate of fixed-term exclusions is reducing.
- Students report that they feel safe in school.
- As a result of improving teaching, current Year 11 students are on track to attain more highly than in the past two years. Rates of progress are also beginning to increase, including in Key Stage 3.
- Students with special educational needs who attend the resource unit achieve well because of good quality support.

Information about this inspection

- During the inspection, 34 part lessons were observed, including visits to an assembly and tutorial time. Meetings were held with: senior leaders, including the executive headteacher and head of school; middle leaders; members of the new federation governing body, including the former Chair of Fort Hill; and three groups of students. In addition, the lead inspector met with a senior local authority officer responsible for school improvement.
- Inspectors looked at: planning and school self-evaluation documentation; information on students’ progress; examples of students’ work; and a range of policy documents.
- Inspectors took account of the 19 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). In addition, inspectors took account of the 22 responses to a questionnaire for members of staff.

Inspection team

Ken Bush, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Deirdre Fitzpatrick	Additional Inspector
Nicholas Simmonds	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Fort Hill is smaller than most secondary schools. The number on roll has fallen since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs in the school is close to the national average. The school operates a small specialist resource unit for students with specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. This can cater for up to 18 students. There are currently 12 students supported by this provision for part of their education.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is broadly average. This is additional government funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after.
- About one in five of Year 7 students are supported by separate catch-up funding. This is for those students who had not reached the expected levels in English and mathematics by the time they completed Year 6 in their primary schools.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- A very small number of students in Years 10 and 11 follow vocational courses at Basingstoke College for part of their education. The achievement of these students is not reported in detail.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to teaching staff and to leadership responsibilities. The previous headteacher left at short notice at the end of the summer holidays of 2013. The current executive headteacher, who was formerly also the headteacher of another local secondary, Cranbourne Business and Enterprise College, began working with Fort Hill in September 2013 in a part-time capacity. She began as interim executive headteacher and divided her time between the two schools. An acting full-time head of school was then appointed at Fort Hill from October 2013. Supported by the local authority, on 23 February 2015, Fort Hill and Cranbourne federated, with both leadership posts – executive headteacher and head of school – becoming permanent.
- Arrangements for governance have also undergone significant change. The Chair of the Governing Body at the time of the previous inspection resigned during 2013. There were other numerous changes of personnel at that time. With the start of the federation, a new single governing body for both Fort Hill and Cranbourne has just come into existence; it met for the first time at the beginning of the week of the inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and raise achievement in a range of subjects for all groups of students, including for those who are disadvantaged, by making sure that teachers:
 - set tasks in lessons and for homework which provide the right level of challenge
 - systematically check how effectively students are learning in lessons and make timely adjustments where needed
 - provide students with consistently clear and regular advice on how to improve the quality of their writing, including regarding its technical accuracy
 - help students become more motivated and enthusiastic about their learning, and more able to remain fully attentive during lessons.
- Ensure that all groups of students continue to attend more regularly, especially, but not exclusively, in Year 11.
- Increase the impact of leaders on raising standards more rapidly by:
 - ensuring that additional funding for disadvantaged students results in gaps closing more quickly and consistently, especially in English and mathematics
 - enabling all leaders, especially those at middle level, to make a strong contribution to school improvement
 - ensuring that information about student achievement is presented in a user-friendly manner to allow easier checking and more effective interventions by leaders and governors

- renewing the school’s efforts to engage more parents in the life of the school.

An external review of the school’s use of pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how effectively this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

require improvement

- Since the previous inspection, the school has undergone a period of significant turbulence. There has been a considerable turnover of staff and extensive changes in leadership, including of governance. As a result, the pace of improvement has been slower than expected; leaders and governors are acutely aware that it now needs to accelerate.
- Although there is clear evidence of progress in most areas, leadership and management require improvement because neither the quality of teaching nor achievement is consistently good.
- Under the leadership of the current executive headteacher and the head of school, the school has begun to acquire much greater stability. Although the federation with Cranbourne has only just come about formally, links with that school are already well established. This has enabled widespread and increasing sharing of good practice. Senior leaders are developing a raft of well-designed measures to improve teaching and behaviour. These have only had a limited impact to date on how well students' achieve by the time they leave the school in Year 11; this is because of the legacy effect of less than good teaching over time.
- School self-evaluation is comprehensive and robust and draws upon an increasingly wide range of evidence. Teaching is monitored closely and regularly and linked to the school's appraisal system, which is well regarded by staff. There is a sound understanding of policy that pay progression must be aligned to improving student achievement and challenging targets for teachers' performance. This policy is being implemented well.
- The systems for ensuring that there are regular updates on students' progress have been extensively overhauled. There is now much more information available than in the past, but this is not always presented in a form which is easily accessible to leaders, staff and governors. This means that monitoring progress against the school improvement plan and undertaking interventions are not as easy as they should be.
- Leaders of subjects and other middle leaders benefit from support from Cranbourne and from the local authority. Leadership capacity is increasing. However, as a significant number of those in post at middle and senior levels are new or relatively inexperienced, they are not all making a similarly strong contribution to school improvement. This explains, at least in part, why achievement across subjects is too variable.
- The curriculum is largely fit-for-purpose and, in Key Stage 4, enables students to make suitable choices. Students are given effective guidance before taking their options and are well supported in understanding the opportunities available to them in education, training and careers once they leave Fort Hill. The proportions of leavers following different routes post-16 are broadly similar to those found nationally, including a very small proportion of those not in education, employment or training.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well promoted, as is their understanding of modern British society. During the inspection, students were exploring the theme of 'respect' through assemblies and tutor-led activities. Students spoken to by inspectors were clear about the importance of tolerance of people with different faiths, cultures and ethnicity, and the dangers of discrimination.
- The progress, attendance and behaviour of those students who are educated partially offsite are closely monitored by leaders. Liaison between school and college staff is frequent and effective, with parents regularly updated on progress.
- The school has made some useful inroads into engaging more effectively with the parent body. This has resulted in improved attendance at events such as 'Progress Days'. However, the very low response rate to Parent View is an indicator that not enough parents are regularly and actively engaged in the life of the school. A significant minority of those who did respond conveyed some lack of confidence in how the school is moving forward. For example, only just over half stated that they would recommend the school to another parent.
- The local authority has monitored the school closely over a period of time and especially since the previous inspection. Useful support has been provided to leaders in specific subjects to help to improve the quality of teaching. The local authority has also helped to broker the federation arrangements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Despite numerous changes of personnel, the school's previous governing body (before the recent creation of the federation) gradually began to increase the effectiveness with which it held the school to account. Governors had a sound general awareness both of the school's track record of achievement and of the quality of teaching. They were less clear about how well current students are performing. They also understood the link between how well teachers are performing and salary progression.

- Governors were provided with details of how the additional funding for disadvantaged students has been allocated, but had only a limited appreciation of how much impact different strategies were having on raising standards and why gaps had only recently begun to close.
- The governing body ensured that arrangements for safeguarding students meet statutory requirements. This helps to ensure that the school is a safe environment for all students. Governors also ensured that the school had a clear commitment to promoting equality of opportunity, despite the fact that the students at Fort Hill achieved less well than most students nationally.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

require improvement

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Their attitudes to learning are improving, but are not consistently positive. They occasionally exhibit a lack of enthusiasm in lessons. When teaching fails to engage them, a minority tend to go off task and, on occasions, this results in low-level disruptive behaviour.
- Students report that most of their lessons are not interrupted by poor behaviour; some remarked that this is much less the case when they have irregular supply teachers. They are clear about, and largely supportive of, the rewards and sanctions policy. Their affirmation that instances of serious misbehaviour are decreasing is reflected in the decline in the use of fixed-term exclusions.
- Strategies to improve students' behaviour are increasingly well led. This is leading to greater consistency in the management of behaviour in classrooms across the school. Around the school site, students generally conduct themselves in a responsible and sensible fashion, including at lunchtime and during breaks. During the inspection, the site was largely tidy and litter free.
- Robust school measures have contributed to a declining number of students frequently absenting themselves from school. The overall attendance rate is improving, but only very gradually. It remains below the national average for secondary schools, although for groups such as disadvantaged students, it is starting to improve.
- A significant minority of staff and a small proportion of parents indicate that they do not feel students are typically well behaved. Inspectors agree that behaviour is not consistently good.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Students spoken to by inspectors gave a strong endorsement that the school is a safe place. They feel that the school prepares them well for life outside and beyond school by making them safety conscious.
- Students are knowledgeable about internet safety and different forms of bullying, including those related to sexual orientation, text messaging and social media.
- Students report that while there are the occasional incidents of bullying, these are infrequent and are dealt with well by staff. Inspectors did not discover any evidence to suggest that bullying is any more serious than students indicated.
- Those few students involved in off-site provision at Basingstoke College typically behave well and, like their peers, are kept safe.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching requires improvement because the well-conceived plans to increase its effectiveness have not yet had time to have a full impact. Consequently, although beginning to improve, achievement, like teaching, is not consistently good.
- There are no deep-rooted or endemic weaknesses in teaching. On the contrary, there is some strong practice in the school. However, there is not consistently effective teaching across or within all subjects, including mathematics. Consequently, the overall standard of teaching is still too variable.
- Considerable progress has been made in establishing a framework to enable teachers to plan their lessons in a more effective way across the school. Where this works well, students are clear about what it is they are to learn. They are provided with stimulating tasks and make noticeable gains in the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Where learning is less effective, teachers underestimate what students are capable of and do not provide sufficient challenge, including in homework tasks. This weakness is not restricted to the most able students. During the inspection, low attaining and middle attaining students occasionally had insufficient demands made of them. Along with limited productivity, this almost always led to a notable increase in

students' inattentiveness and occasionally low-level disruption.

- During the inspection, there were notable examples seen where teachers used questioning effectively to deepen students' understanding. However, some teachers do not use their questioning sharply enough to ascertain how much students have already learnt. In such cases, teachers are often not quick enough to make the necessary adjustments to their planning and delivery; learning typically slows as a result.
- The school has had some success in promoting the development of literacy. Students are given a range of opportunities to develop and accelerate their reading skills, including those who join the school at below average levels for their age.
- In some subjects, such as in English and history, students are given ample opportunities to write at length for different purposes. In these subjects there is also close attention paid to eliminating errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Across the school as a whole, however, not enough attention is paid to developing proficiency in writing. Consequently, students' work, in a range of subjects, is not always as well structured, fluent, precise and technically accurate as it could be.
- With some minor variability, the standard of marking has improved significantly since the previous inspection, so that students, in the main, have a better understanding about what they need to do to improve their work. This is a contributory factor to the increasing rate of students' progress.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Not enough students make consistently good progress from their different starting points. As a result, the proportion of students who leave at the end of Year 11 with five good GCSEs, including in English and mathematics, although improving, is not rising quickly enough over time.
- Students' performance in different subjects is still too prone to fluctuate from year to year. In 2014, achievement in mathematics declined, whereas in the previous year performance in that subject was considerably stronger. The school does not enter students early for any GCSE examinations.
- There is still considerable variation across subjects. For example, in 2014, students attained close to or above the national average in GCSE grades A* to C in design and technology, information technology and most science courses, but were below or well below in art, geography and Spanish.
- There are no major differences in how well different groups of students achieve, but none of any significant size progresses as rapidly as they should. This includes disabled students and those with special educational needs in mainstream classes. However, those students who work mostly in the specialist resource unit make good progress as a result of teaching which is well tailored to meet their specific needs.
- There are fewer of the most able students at Fort Hill than in most schools. They do not achieve consistently well, including in English and mathematics. This is because, like other groups of students, they are not always pushed hard enough to reach the highest levels. There are exceptions, however, illustrating that there are pockets of effective practice in the school. In history, for example, almost a quarter of examination entries resulted in the highest A* and A grades.
- Disadvantaged students, supported by additional funding, progress at a similar rate to their peers in school. They make slower progress than other students nationally, although their achievement is better in English than in mathematics. In 2014, the gap between the attainment of Year 11 students in this group, compared with other students nationally was equivalent to a grade behind in both subjects. The gap with other students in the school was slightly narrower.
- As a result of improving teaching, attainment gaps between disadvantaged students and others have closed significantly for the students currently in Year 11. With some minor variations between different subjects, this is also the case in other year groups. Consequently, gaps are now beginning to narrow as the impact of the additional funding gradually increases.
- Students in Key Stage 3, in general, are now making better progress than in the past. This includes those who are supported through additional catch-up funding.
- Those students who attend Basingstoke College make suitable gains in their learning; most achieve accreditation for their efforts. This helps them to be better prepared for the next stage of their education and/or training once they leave Fort Hill.

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	116444
Local authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	453671

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	563
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Clasper
Headteacher	Betty Elkins
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 March 2013
Telephone number	01256354311
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