

The Forest School

Robin Hood Lane, Winnersh, Wokingham, Berkshire RG41 5NE

Inspection dates

23–24 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the school's leaders do not ensure that pupils make consistently good progress across subjects and year groups.
- Leaders' evaluations of current work and plans for school improvement do not focus sharply enough on the progress that pupils make. Consequently, governors are not able to focus their challenge and support for the school effectively.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not as strong in Key Stage 3 as it is elsewhere in the school.
- Systems of assessment and tracking pupil progress have not yet secured good achievement in all year groups, especially for pupils who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs.
- Teaching often does not offer sufficient challenge to all pupils. Teachers do not consistently use information about pupils' progress to match learning activities to their abilities.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons varies according to the quality of teaching. In some areas of the school, low-level disruption slows the pace of learning.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher has introduced many changes that have improved the school.
- Leaders' monitoring and evaluation of performance information, together with coaching and training for teachers, has led to some recent improvements to teaching.
- Well-established systems and practices ensure that the school's work to safeguard pupils is strong.
- Pupils achieve well in GCSE mathematics.
- Pupils' personal development, welfare and behaviour are good. The vast majority of pupils behave in a polite and respectful manner in lessons and around the school.
- Teaching in the sixth form is strong and learners are supported well to meet their aspirations to progress to their chosen universities.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - sharpening the accuracy with which senior leaders review how well the school is doing so that plans for improvement are focused on the right things
 - improving governors' challenge by improving their understanding of progress information and the ways in which the pupil premium grant is used.

- Improve outcomes by ensuring that:
 - pupils who have special educational needs or disability make the same levels of progress as their peers
 - disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as their peers, particularly during Key Stage 3.

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good by ensuring that:
 - teachers use information about pupils' progress to design learning activities to meet the needs of all pupils in their classes
 - teachers' assessment and feedback gives pupils high-quality information on how to improve their work, and teachers ensure that pupils act on this information
 - teachers provide consistent challenge through activities which inspire and engage pupils of all abilities, particularly the most able
 - behaviour management is more consistent.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The current headteacher has been in post since September 2014. She and her new senior team have worked with great determination to improve the culture and ethos of the school and to raise aspirations, and this is slowly starting to take effect. Many pupils, parents and staff report an improvement in the atmosphere and behaviour in the school.
- Senior leaders have implemented a wide range of initiatives and systems which are beginning to make a contribution towards school improvement. An example includes the various activities targeting support for Key Stage 4 pupils at risk of underperforming. However, leaders are not rigorous enough in their evaluation of these systems and initiatives, and so are unclear as to which are having the greatest impact. Consequently, the school's current improvement plans lack focus and clear priorities.
- Leaders recognise that the quality of teaching is variable across the school and are committed to raising standards. However, work to improve teaching has not had sufficient impact on pupils' achievement across the school. Leaders have not yet closed the achievement gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers in Key Stage 3.
- The headteacher and senior leaders regularly make short visits to lessons in order to monitor behaviour and observe teaching. However, the improvement targets that senior leaders set for teachers do not focus strongly enough on the progress that different groups of pupils make. As a result, the quality of teaching across the school is too variable with too many lessons lacking appropriate support and challenge for pupils with different starting points.
- Middle leaders work well as a team; they trust and respect the senior team and appreciate the challenge senior leaders bring to their work. Working together has ensured improvements to the teaching of Key Stage 4 classes in English, mathematics and across nearly all other subject areas. Leaders and governors are aware that more needs to be done to ensure that all teaching in Key Stage 3 is consistently good.
- Leaders have recently refined the school's systems for staff training and professional development, and have linked these to the school's monitoring systems. Teachers work in small groups to coordinate support for targeted teachers through coaching and sharing good ideas. It is too early yet to demonstrate the impact of this new system upon pupil outcomes.
- Leaders have ensured that a revised package of interventions and activities, funded by the pupil premium grant, are targeted towards raising the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Although published information does not yet show a significant reduction in the gaps in standards achieved by disadvantaged pupils and their peers in English, these gaps are closing for pupils currently in Year 11. More needs to be done to embed these improvements across all subjects, particularly at Key Stage 3.
- In the past, leaders have used Year 7 catch-up funding to purchase laptop computers in an attempt to improve literacy and numeracy for those pupils arriving in the school with lower than average attainment in English, mathematics or both subjects. However, they have not evaluated the impact of using laptops upon literacy skills. Due to the high prior attainment of pupils, there are currently no pupils in Year 7 who qualify for this additional funding.
- The leadership of pupils who have special educational needs or disability has experienced difficulties due to a period of staff absence. This has impacted upon the progress that this group have made. Current leaders of special educational needs have implemented a range of suitable support and challenge for this group of pupils, but it is too soon to see an impact on their outcomes.
- Leaders ensure that the school's vision of 'learning through inspiration' is met through a curriculum that offers a broad and balanced education. In addition, leaders provide a wide range of after-school enrichment opportunities, including regular competitions, sporting events, trips and visits. At Key Stage 4, all pupils receive good guidance for their chosen careers or future study. Consequently, nearly all pupils progress to sustained places in education, employment or training.
- House assemblies are used well to stimulate interest in a broad range of issues, inspired by current affairs. This, plus a well-planned religious education programme and a range of opportunities in other subjects, combines to promote a good awareness of moral, social and cultural issues. Leaders are aware that the school's work to promote spirituality through reflection, awe and wonder is less well developed and there are plans in place to address this.
- Senior leaders and governors make use of advisers from the local authority to support key aspects of school improvement. Monitoring and review visits take place to affirm the quality of teaching and the

support offered to newly qualified teachers. In addition, close working relationships with other local schools have led to better teaching and leadership in a range of subjects.

■ **The governance of the school**

- The governing body are keen to support the headteacher to achieve her aims for whole-school improvement. A planned calendar of focused meetings and visits enables governors to evaluate aspects of the school such as safeguarding, provision for pupils who have special educational needs and the quality of teaching. This has ensured that they have an improving understanding of the school's day-to-day work.
- Leaders report regularly on their areas of responsibility, but their analysis of the school's performance lacks rigour and too frequently it is focused on attainment rather than the progress pupils make. Governors do not insist on firm evidence to support the assertions of leaders about the impact of key aspects of the school's work. This means that governors are unable to offer sufficiently robust challenge to leaders about the effectiveness of the school's systems and initiatives. This includes how effectively leaders are raising the quality of teaching and how well the pupil premium funding is used to improve disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.
- Governors have a good understanding of the way that staff performance is linked to salary progression. Through effective checks on the fair and consistent application of policies, they ensure that only good performance is rewarded with pay rises.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders ensure that vulnerable pupils are well looked after at The Forest School. Risk assessments and staff recruitment processes are sound. All staff and governors receive suitable safeguarding training. This means that they understand and carry out the school's policy and procedures well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently good enough across all subjects to secure good progress for all pupils. Although strong in mathematics and becoming stronger in English, pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 is inconsistent.
- Improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not had a big enough impact on closing the gap between the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and that of others at Key Stage 3. Equally, the gaps in progress between pupils who have special educational needs or disability and their peers in Key Stages 3 and 4 are not closing quickly enough.
- Some teachers are not making good enough use of pupils' progress information to ensure that the work they set is suitably demanding for all pupils. For example, in some science classes, pupils are not being required to explain key scientific concepts or link ideas to form explanations. Across different subject areas, there are some teachers who do not insist that pupils complete the tasks set and this further slows pupils' progress.
- The impact of teachers' questioning is variable. Some teachers, for example in English and mathematics, use their good subject knowledge and assessment skills to design engaging learning tasks and use probing questions to challenge pupils' understanding. As a result, pupils make good progress in lessons and over time. However, some teachers spend too long posing questions to the whole class that only a minority of pupils respond to. Consequently, not all the pupils, particularly the most able, are stretched sufficiently.
- The school rightly recognises that poor handwriting skills are slowing the progress that some pupils make. Literacy is a whole-school target for improvement this year. However, inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work revealed that, with the exception of English lessons, very few teachers challenge poor presentation or offer effective support for pupils to develop their writing skills. This hinders learning and reflects low expectations from some teachers.
- Most teachers follow agreed approaches to giving feedback on pupils' work when they mark it. This is starting to have an impact on raising standards. In some subjects, such as English, geography and history, teachers give regular assessment-based feedback and challenge the pupils to improve their work. This promotes learning for all pupils. Leaders are aware that this approach is not yet used as successfully across all subject areas.
- Where teachers know their pupils' strengths and weaknesses well, this helps to promote good learning. For example, in one design technology lesson seen by inspectors, the teacher expertly worked with a few pupils to model difficult acoustic and loudspeaker design concepts to the whole class. In some lessons

seen, including in mathematics and science, teachers are less familiar with their pupils' prior attainment and so learning activities are not always sufficiently challenging enough.

- When lessons are less challenging, some Key Stage 3 pupils in particular can tend to be passive and not engage in learning. Occasionally in lessons, and particularly during tutor time, a few pupils can disrupt learning with off-task behaviour.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the 16–19 study programmes is much more effective; teachers know their learners well and set regular tests using examination questions from previous years. They model thinking skills together with examples of good answers. They also provide detailed feedback to demonstrate how sixth formers can improve on their performance in future tests. Teachers modify their teaching in response to any misconceptions highlighted by learners' answers to test questions.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are safe and secure in the school and they feel content there. Well-established systems are in place to offer help and support to vulnerable pupils, sometimes involving external agencies when appropriate. A large majority of parents responding to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire affirmed that their child is well looked after at school and is happy there.
- Pupils can confidently explain how they keep themselves safe in and around the school, as well as online. Learning about e-safety is given an appropriately high priority.
- The Forest School clearly cares about pupils' personal development, and working relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Pupils value what the school does for them, in particular the extra time and coaching that teachers willingly provide in English and mathematics as well as the wide range of after-school activities and trips. Parents agree and believe that these good relationships underpin the progress that their children make.
- Overall attendance is above the national average. Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs or disability have contributed disproportionately to absence levels in the past, but there are good indications that this is currently being addressed, although gaps do remain.
- Pupils are well aware of the school's tightened behaviour expectations; exclusions for poor behaviour are falling and are in line with national averages. In the past, disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs or disability have had higher exclusion rates than their peers. The school's recent investment in better resources and systems to support these groups of pupils has led to improved behaviour and attitudes. As a result, the differences in exclusion rates are being reduced.
- The very small number of pupils in Key Stage 4 who learn elsewhere for part of the week benefit from their experience of a broader and more vocational curriculum. Their progress and welfare is overseen by a nominated member of staff who liaises frequently with the other provider. These pupils' learning in core subjects when back in school is carefully organised.
- Careers advice and guidance is well organised and effective and a good range of careers reference materials are available. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are able to speak with confidence about the range of opportunities open to them at age 16, including the variety of courses, different institutions and qualifications needed to support their aspirations. They are well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils conduct themselves well around the site at all times. Nearly all pupils are confident, polite and respectful to staff, visitors and each other.
- The school's house system encourages a family approach to the welfare of pupils, encouraging them to socialise well and have a clear empathy for each other. Some Year 11 pupils were proud to explain to inspectors how they act as mentors to support younger pupils.
- In most lessons, pupils show an enthusiasm for their learning and engage well in the tasks they are given. Punctuality is generally good and the pupils come well equipped and ready to learn.
- In a minority of lessons, behaviour is not as impressive. In these lessons, not all pupils receive the challenge they need to maintain their interest or keep them fully engaged in their work. Where this happens, some boys disrupt learning with chatter or silly, off-task behaviour.

- Bullying is rare and limited to a small number of pupils. Pupils are very confident that any apprehensions can be shared with adults in the school whom they trust to handle any potentially awkward situations sensitively to resolve problems quickly.

Outcomes for pupils

require improvement

- Pupils' outcomes, despite improvements, are not good. Examination results in 2015 showed that overall attainment increased from the year before. However, disadvantaged boys and those who have special educational needs or disability made significantly less progress than their peers.
- In 2015, overall progress in mathematics was very strong with high proportions making and exceeding expected progress. This was not the case in English where progress was much lower.
- In previous years, too few disadvantaged pupils who achieved the top levels in English and mathematics at primary school made expected levels of progress in either subject, or more than expected progress in English, by the end of Key Stage 4. Currently, in Year 11, better teaching has ensured that these gaps are narrowing in both subjects. However, in Key Stage 3 there are still gaps between this group and their peers.
- Different groups of pupils do not make equally good progress in their learning. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs, who do not make as much progress as their peers during Key Stage 3.
- The most-able pupils currently in the school are not consistently exceeding the progress expected of them across all year groups. This group have made slower progress because challenge and high expectations are not provided in all lessons and learning activities are not always matched to their abilities.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language achieve as well as, and frequently better than, their peers in the school. This is because the support that they receive is well matched to their needs and allows them to play a full part in lessons and the life of the school.
- Outcomes are not consistently good in all subject areas, particularly at Key Stage 3. Not all teachers check pupils' learning regularly enough, have high enough expectations or provide effective support and guidance for any who lag behind. Inspectors' scrutiny of current progress information and pupils' work indicate variable rates of progress, and a variable quality of work over time, being produced within English, mathematics and science and other subjects.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- The school provides effective careers advice and guidance and a suitable range of study pathways with clear routes to further study or employment. Learners in the sixth form are ambitious; most progress to further education, training or employment in their chosen field and many progress to good universities.
- Leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form well. They are ambitious and have detailed plans and strategies in place to achieve them. New tracking systems have been developed to monitor progress and improve the number of learners who remain on the course to the end of Year 13.
- Subject leaders regularly check learners' progress towards demanding targets. A raft of support measures are delivered by subject teachers and tutors for any learners who start to fall behind. Sixth formers take a pride in their school and they appreciate the commitment and support teachers give them.
- Teaching in the sixth form is much stronger than elsewhere in the school. Teachers have higher expectations and use their good subject knowledge to design learning activities which engage and challenge learners. Teachers regularly ask probing questions which demand that learners think deeply and make connections between topics. Detailed feedback enables many learners to work independently to improve the quality of their work. As a result, they learn well in lessons and over time.
- Sixth formers make progress in line with national averages. Attainment in the range of A-level subjects, and the small number of vocational subjects, has been sound in the past and is improving. Although many learners achieved the A-level grades they needed to take their places at university, leaders are aware that a greater proportion could be achieving the highest grades. To improve outcomes, leaders have introduced a more detailed monitoring system and ensure teachers work together to share good practice about what constitutes good A-level teaching.
- This year, progress in most A levels is good, but in some subjects such as physics and photography progress is less strong. The progress being made in the small number of vocational subjects is

consistently good. Leaders are aware of these variations and are reducing them by working closely with heads of department and subject teachers.

- Leaders ensure that the small number of learners who entered the sixth form without English or mathematics at GCSE grade C or above are supported to retake the exam and improve their grades. This is a significant improvement on the previous year.
- Sixth formers provide good role models for younger pupils. For example, inspectors witnessed Year 13 House Captains confidently presenting details of a charity fundraising event to younger boys during an assembly. Sixth formers are mature, tolerant and respectful of difference. They have a very good understanding of how to look after themselves and be safe.
- Tutor time is used well to reflect on social and moral issues and to help learners prepare for adult life. In addition, sixth formers told inspectors that they particularly value the advice and support that their tutors offer them to help them apply for the next steps in their education or employment. Many learners take up leadership roles, such as mentoring younger pupils. This contributes well to their development as responsible citizens.

School details

Unique reference number	139853
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10003386

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,170
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Auger
Headteacher	Mary Sandell
Telephone number	01189 781626
Website	www.forest.wokingham.sch.uk
Email address	office@forest.wokingham.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14–15 September 2011

Information about this school

- The Forest School is a boys' school which admits girls to the sixth form. It is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The Forest School converted to become an academy in July 2013. When its predecessor school, called Forest School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be good overall.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is below the national average.
- A small number of pupils in Key Stage 4 attend alternative provision at Include at Wokingham College.
- The school is the education provider for the Reading Football Club Academy.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is slightly below the national average.
- Just under a third of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Most pupils have English as their first language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectation for attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 40 lessons and made short visits to a further 23 lessons in order to gather evidence to contribute to inspectors' evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. For some of these visits, inspectors were accompanied by senior leaders. Inspectors also attended tutor periods and assemblies, visited the library and observed pupils' conduct around the site at break and lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the governing body, senior leaders, teachers and support staff, a representative of the local authority and several groups of pupils and sixth formers.
- A wide range of school documentation was scrutinised, including safeguarding processes and records, policies, the minutes of governors' meetings, strategic planning documents, self-evaluation documents, information about pupil achievement, behaviour and attendance information and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 145 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View.

Inspection team

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