

Fitzharrys School

Northcourt Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1NP

Inspection dates

7–8 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, ably supported by his senior team, provides good leadership. They have forged close partnerships with other schools which have led to significant improvements in all aspects of the work of the school since the previous inspection.
- Subject leaders are sharply focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects. This drives improvements strongly.
- Teaching is securely good because there is a shared drive for continual improvement. Governors and leaders ensure that staff are held to account and that high-quality training is provided.
- Teachers know their pupils and sixth formers well and plan engaging lessons to meet their needs.
- Pupils achieve well in English and mathematics and in most other subject areas.
- Gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils currently in the school have either closed or are closing rapidly.
- Fitzharrys offers a very caring and supportive community where pupils flourish. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the heart of the curriculum and staff passionately strive to ensure that their welfare needs are met.
- Pupils and sixth formers are rightly proud of their school and attendance and behaviour have improved. Many pupils become actively involved in bringing about improvements in the work of their school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teaching offers pupils the very high levels of challenge found across most of the school.
- A few teachers do not yet mark pupils' work precisely enough in order to help them understand what they have to do to improve.
- Pupils with special educational needs, and disadvantaged pupils, have attended less often, and have been excluded more often, than others in the past. This is improving, but gaps remain.
- A very small number of pupils sometimes exhibit poor behaviour.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of all pupils' learning to the standard of the best currently in the school, by ensuring that all teachers:
 - provide consistently high levels of challenge to all groups of pupils, including the most able
 - challenge the quality of presentation and precision in pupils' work and provide more frequent opportunities for extended written explanations
 - secure very high standards of behaviour from all pupils.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management in ensuring that outcomes for all groups of pupils are outstanding, by:
 - eliminating remaining gaps in achievement between disadvantaged pupils and others
 - continuing to improve the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs or disability and reducing their fixed-term exclusion rates still further.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher knows the pupils and sixth formers well and is passionate about wanting the very best outcomes for all of them. A warm and welcoming culture with a shared drive for continual improvement is evident from the top down. Leaders, teachers and pupils are proud to be a part of Fitzharrys' success. Nearly all of the parents who expressed an opinion praised the quality of leadership and management, and would recommend Fitzharrys School to other parents.
- Senior leaders know their school very well. Their self-evaluation of every area of its work is accurate and this has driven good development planning around entirely appropriate priorities. Their evaluation of the quality of teaching is perceptive, accurate and keenly diagnostic.
- The headteacher and governors have forged strong partnerships and close working relationships with other local schools which have led to better teaching and leadership in a range of subjects. Regular monitoring and review visits from link advisers take place which usefully affirm the quality and impact of their improvement work.
- Senior leaders have implemented new systems to monitor the quality of teaching and so they know individual teachers' strengths and areas for development well. Training is effective and sharply focused on school priorities. There are strong links between the identification of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and the provision of more focused support for individual teachers.
- Senior leaders have ensured that a very effective induction programme has enabled new middle leaders to bring about rapid improvements in their subject areas. As a result, current outcomes are much stronger in English, mathematics and across the curriculum than they were last year.
- Middle leaders and teachers respect and trust the headteacher and senior leaders. They value greatly the support and challenge that leaders bring to their work. Working together has ensured that the teaching is securely good, particularly in subjects such as English, mathematics, physical education and the arts.
- Teachers are an enthusiastic and committed team and they are driven to continually improve standards in their subject areas. A culture of collaborative learning, coaching and professional dialogue has led to improved teaching and learning across the school. The effect of this high-quality teamwork is to generate high levels of staff morale and satisfaction with the leadership of the school, evident in the staff surveys returned. Leaders are aware that in some areas more needs to be done to refine the quality of feedback and improve the level of challenge, particularly for the most able pupils.
- Governors and the headteacher have ensured that the leadership of special educational needs and the comprehensive and bespoke support offered for vulnerable pupils are particularly effective. As a result, these pupils make good progress at the school. As one parent commented, 'The special educational needs team have been brilliant with their support and teaching for my son and they have been very supportive to me as a parent as well'.
- The pupil premium grant is used effectively. It has funded a well-managed programme of staff training, interventions and extra help in lessons which have had a demonstrable impact on the progress that disadvantaged pupils have made. Although published information does not yet show a significant reduction in the gaps in standards achieved by this group and their peers, these gaps are closing much more convincingly for disadvantaged pupils currently at the school.
- Leaders ensure that the Year 7 catch-up funding is used to good effect to raise standards of literacy and numeracy for those pupils arriving at the school with lower than average attainment in English, mathematics or both subjects.
- The curriculum meets the needs of pupils well and leaders ensure that Fitzharrys' ethos of 'Together Everyone Achieves More' is at the heart of school life. This, along with a range of opportunities for learning beyond lessons and opportunities to undertake leadership roles, underpins pupils' achievements. Consequently, pupils' progress, although not yet outstanding, has improved considerably since the previous inspection.
- 'Fitzfocus plus' time offers a well-planned personal, social, health and citizenship curriculum which, together with philosophy and ethics lessons, combine to promote a very good awareness of spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. Pupils respect people from different backgrounds, cultures and beliefs.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are passionate and enthusiastic about the school and they manage the performance of the headteacher well. Members of the governing body bring a range of skills and educational experience

which they use generously to support and challenge leaders at all levels. Governors ensure the fair and consistent application of policies and that only the best teaching is rewarded with pay increases.

- Governors have successfully challenged leaders to raise the quality of teaching and learning and hold them to account for further improvements. Regular meetings and visits enable governors to evaluate aspects of the school such as safeguarding and provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- Members of the governing body scrutinise performance information, alongside externally produced analyses, in order to assess the success of the school against its own targets and national standards. As a result, they have a good understanding of the school's performance and its day-to-day work.
- Governors make sure that finances are managed well, including checking that pupil premium funding is used to improve disadvantaged pupils' outcomes.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school and the chair of governors monitors this aspect of the school's work closely. Leaders liaise well with external agencies if there are any safeguarding concerns about pupils. Regular high-quality training for all staff is provided by the school on safeguarding matters and careful records are maintained. As a result, staff understand and apply the school's policy and procedures well, ensuring a culture of vigilance.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Good teaching drives good achievement for all groups of pupils across the school. The best teaching is exciting, lively and challenges pupils of all abilities to achieve high standards. For example, in physical education lessons, pupils demonstrated a mature and professional approach to their work, using the skills, confidence and subject-specific vocabulary which the teachers had modelled so very effectively.
- Teachers know pupils' strengths and weaknesses well and have high expectations for progress over time. Staff use their specialist subject knowledge to good effect to design and deliver engaging lessons. Access to accurate and detailed information about pupils' achievement enables teachers to provide very effective additional support where necessary.
- Teachers' planning is effective and teachers and other adults work well together to support pupils with special educational needs. Teaching assistants skilfully support pupils to solve problems by breaking down complex tasks into a series of smaller steps and encouraging them to persevere to find a solution. As a result, pupils gain confidence and their learning has improved.
- Teachers use a consistent approach to marking and feedback across the school. In many lessons pupils are given time to reflect on the feedback that they have received. The majority of pupils find this opportunity useful and many use it to refine and improve their work or to contribute further ideas in the form of a dialogue in their books which improves their understanding. This was seen to be particularly effective in English and Spanish lessons, where it has supported pupils to make rapid progress.
- Teaching in English is effective and enables pupils to make good progress. Leaders ensure that the most effective teaching approaches and resources are shared across the department. Pupils are challenged to creatively analyse texts and are generally supported well to produce extended examples of writing in different styles. However, in some lessons learning needs to be personalised to the needs of the range of pupils in the class so that all can thrive.
- Teaching in the best mathematics lessons is strong because teachers know their pupils well and are very clear about the approaches that are needed to ensure that all groups of pupils make progress. Teachers use effective questioning techniques to ensure pupils are actively engaged in a series of problem-solving activities. Assessment is used well to enable pupils to track their own progress and developing mathematical skills.
- Teachers' subject and assessment knowledge is good and the great majority convey an enthusiasm for their subject. Work of an appropriate level of demand and challenge is provided for different groups of pupils and expectations of the achievement of all pupils are appropriately high in most classrooms.
- Not all of the teaching promotes rapid and secure learning, however. In some areas, some pupils, particularly the most able, do not make as much progress as they could. This is because not all teachers routinely challenge them to apply their skills of literacy and numeracy well enough when producing their own extended written explanations and analyses. Occasionally a lack of pride in their presentation goes unchallenged and these pupils are insufficiently accurate in their use of diagrams, charts and graphs.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to enjoy learning in different ways in school and beyond the school day. There are field trips in geography, museum visits and trips to other European countries. The

school runs a wide variety of clubs including a wealth of different sports clubs, craft, film and science clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare **is good**

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Fitzharrys School cares a great deal about pupils' achievement and personal development and so working relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Pupils told inspectors that they particularly value the extra time and support teachers willingly provide. Parents agree and believe that these good relationships underpin the progress that their children make.
- Pupils are safe and secure in the school and they feel content here. Excellent systems are in place to offer help and support to vulnerable pupils, sometimes involving external agencies when appropriate. An overwhelming majority of parents responding to Parent View affirmed that their child is well looked after and happy at school. Parents' faith in Fitzharrys is well founded; this is a very caring community.
- Pupils value the opportunities that they have to learn about keeping themselves safe, in and around the school as well as online. Learning about e-safety is given an appropriately high priority.
- Attendance has risen and is now above national average. Disadvantaged pupils, and pupils with special educational needs or disability have contributed disproportionately to absence levels in the past, but there are good indications that this is being addressed although gaps do remain.
- 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.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils enjoy each other's company at social times and value the good friendships they make here. They are respectful to each other, staff and visitors and enjoy the pleasant and secure environment the school offers.
- Bullying is rare and pupils say that it is limited to a small number of pupils and tends to be about day-to-day relationship problems. They are very confident that concerns can be shared with adults in the school who then make appropriate responses. Pupils are pleased that adults handle potentially awkward situations with sensitivity, but also solve problems effectively and promptly.
- Exclusions for poor behaviour are falling and are only used sparingly and as a last resort. In the past, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs or disability have had higher exclusion rates than their peers. School leaders have implemented better systems to support these groups of pupils and behaviour and attitudes have improved. Any differences in exclusion rates are being eliminated.
- 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 small 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, it tends to be a small number of the boys who can disrupt learning with chatter or silly, off-task behaviour. Pupils say this is rare and regard it as not in keeping with how they see their school and want it to be.

Outcomes for pupils **are good**

- GCSE results in 2015 went down, particularly in English. However, as a result of higher-quality teaching the current achievement of key stage 4 pupils demonstrates much higher standards. Inspectors' scrutiny of current Year 11 progress information and pupils' work indicate much improved levels of progress for all groups of pupils in English, mathematics and across the curriculum.
- In the past, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs or disability have made less progress than other pupils nationally and within the school. This is changing. Disadvantaged pupils currently in Year 11 are making improved progress in English and gaps are narrowing. They have made very good progress in mathematics and gaps are nearly eradicated. The headteacher and governors are well aware that there is more to be done to eliminate the remaining gaps in English.

- The school has made good strides to improve the progress over time of pupils with special educational needs. Better identification and support is now ensuring improved progress for these pupils across the curriculum. Leaders share relevant information with classroom teachers, helping them to improve their planning, and teaching assistants offer bespoke support and guidance. Consequently, current pupils with special educational needs are making much better progress.
- In key stage 3, progress is good in English, mathematics and across the curriculum. The majority of pupils are on track to meet, or exceed, the appropriate targets set for them. Improvements in the quality of teaching have rapidly narrowed the gaps between different groups of pupils.
- Outcomes are consistently good in most subject areas. Teachers regularly check pupils' learning and provide a range of helpful support and guidance for any who lag behind. This means that pupils achieve well across the full range of subjects.
- Pupils who arrive from primary school needing to catch up in English, mathematics or both are given the right support to help them improve.
- Pupils benefit from high-quality careers advice and guidance and the library is well stocked with relevant information. Pupils in key stage 4 feel well informed about the range of opportunities open to them at age 16, including the variety of college courses, different institutions, and the qualifications required to support their aspirations.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leadership of the sixth form is a strength of the school. The headteacher chairs the Abingdon Consortium for Education, enabling local schools and further education colleges to work together to improve resources and ensure that sixth formers in the area can access a rich and broad curriculum. Leaders have ambitious plans for further improvement of the sixth form and the strategies in place to accomplish them.
- Although the sixth form is small, it provides a selection of academic courses and through the Abingdon Consortium for Education students are able to access a wide range of academic study pathways with clear routes to further study or employment. Learners in the sixth form are ambitious; most progress to good universities, while others choose to gain access to further education, training or employment in their chosen field through apprenticeships.
- Leaders and tutors use effective tracking systems to regularly check students' progress towards their challenging targets. Teachers know their students well and offer targeted support for any who start to fall behind.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good. In English and physics lessons seen by inspectors, teachers have very high expectations and use their expert subject and assessment knowledge to design learning activities which engage and challenge students. Teachers regularly ask probing questions which demand that students think deeply and make connections between topics. Detailed feedback enables students to work independently to improve the quality of their work. As a result, they learn well in lessons and over time.
- Historically sixth formers have made progress in line with national averages for all A-level subjects and this continues to be the case. Achievement at AS level is improving. Inspectors witnessed how well teachers are preparing students with the range of skills and in-depth understanding needed to attain the highest grades in their exams.
- Many sixth formers engage in work experience and all are given an effective programme of support, guidance and work-related learning which equips them with the skills required to progress to their chosen universities or apprenticeships.
- Leaders ensure that nearly all students who retake English or mathematics GCSEs successfully gain a grade C during their time on a 16–19 study programme.
- Sixth formers told inspectors that they particularly value the extra support and the high-quality impartial careers information and guidance that the school offers. Many learners take up leadership roles, for example supporting younger pupils' reading or organising charity fund-raising events. This contributes well to their development as responsible citizens.
- Sixth formers are mature, tolerant and respectful of difference. They develop appropriate attitudes and are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Teachers provide regular opportunities to discuss controversial topics in a manner appropriate to their age. They have a very good understanding of how to look after themselves and be safe.

- Students take a pride in their school and they appreciate the support teachers give them to achieve their high aspirations. Sixth formers provide good role models for younger pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	123257
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10002406

This inspection 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 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	542
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lynn Fathers
Headteacher	Jonathan Dennett
Telephone number	01235 520 698
Website	www.fitzharrys.oxon.sch.uk
Email address	office.4127@fitzharrys.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	February 2014

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-size school.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding) is less than the national average. Some students are eligible for the Year 7 catch-up premium.
- The school serves a community with relatively little ethnic or cultural diversity.
- A very small number of pupils in key stage 4 attend Trax Motor Project part-time to follow vocational courses.
- The school has dedicated provision to support the needs of pupils with speech, language and communication needs or autistic spectrum disorder. Ten pupils are currently supported in this unit.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for attainment and progress.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with the governors, the headteacher, school improvement partners, senior leaders, teachers, support staff and several groups of pupils.
- Inspectors observed pupils in 30 lessons in order to gather evidence to contribute to inspectors' evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In addition, walks around the school were conducted jointly with members of the school leadership team to observe what the school provides, and pupils' learning. Inspectors also attended tutor periods, breakfast club and an assembly, and observed pupils' conduct around the site at break and lunchtimes.
- A range of school documentation was scrutinised, including that relating to: policies; records of academy council meetings; strategic planning documents; safety; self-evaluation documents; pupil achievement; behaviour and attendance information and a wide range of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the views expressed in 42 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View survey and 29 staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

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 Her Majesty's Inspector

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