

The Forest School

Comptons Lane, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5NT

Inspection dates

7–9 March 2017

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school is well led. The headteacher and senior leaders consistently transmit their well-thought-out vision for the school. They insist boys are well mannered, industrious and have high aspirations.
- Leaders have successfully implemented many new approaches, including robust monitoring of teaching. New strategies are helping the school to move forward.
- Pupils thrive at the school because they are nurtured, intellectually stimulated, and provided with rich opportunities for development.
- The school has a very positive environment. Consequently, pupils are highly receptive to learning and most make strong progress from their starting points. Outcomes in humanities are impressive.
- Pupils are provided with good support and most achieve well in their key stage 4 qualifications. Pupils' achievement in mathematics is generally stronger than in English. However, recent changes are leading to some improvements in English.
- Better teaching and targeted support mean that differences between disadvantaged pupils and others are mostly diminishing.
- Effective teaching enables most pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding across a range of subjects.
- Teaching in some lower sets is not as strong as in other sets, especially in science.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge well when providing advice, feedback and assistance, which helps pupils to learn better and succeed in examinations.
- Safeguarding is effective and well managed. There is an open culture in the school and boys are taught how to make healthy lifestyle and relationship choices.
- Pupils' behaviour is mostly very courteous and considerate. Leaders respond effectively on the rare occasions when it falls below expectations.
- Governance is effective because governors challenge leaders to meet the needs of every pupil as well as they possibly can.
- Disadvantaged pupils' attendance has improved. However, despite the school's efforts, persistent absence rates for disadvantaged pupils are not reducing fast enough.
- Leaders' and governors' evaluations of the curriculum and new approaches are not always based on a deep exploration of their impact on different groups of pupils' progress and outcomes.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and governors should ensure that decisions made about the curriculum are analysed in depth, focusing on evaluating its short and long-term impact on different groups of pupils so:
 - all groups of pupils, including the less able, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make the progress of which they are capable
 - pupils who have the potential to exceed their targets are given the opportunity to do so.
- Leaders and governors should rigorously monitor and evaluate new approaches for reducing persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils and swiftly make changes if they are not having enough impact.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders ensure that pupils experience a diverse range of opportunities that help them to develop both academically and socially. Pupils benefit from the positive ethos, which encourages them to give of their best, treat others with respect, and aim high. Most parents spoke highly of this aspect of the school's work, one commenting on how the school is, 'an excellent school with a good ethos, well run and with caring staff'.
- The headteacher has steadfastly improved the school so the provision successfully enables pupils to pursue their next steps. She has rightly insisted that staff should not use the fact that it is a boys-only school as an excuse for low expectations, underachievement, or rowdy behaviour. Consequently, pupils display a high level of courtesy along with very positive attitudes to learning.
- Leaders monitor pupils' behaviour closely, including the behaviour of pupils engaged in off-site learning. The vast majority of pupils at the school, and off site, behave well. Leaders are highly responsive when, on rare occasions, the conduct of a minority of pupils falls below expectations. For instance, leaders have responded forcefully to very recent friction between a small number of pupils, arising from tension between different groups in the local community.
- Senior leaders' checks on teaching are effective because they rightly focus on whether teachers set work that is sufficiently challenging for all pupils in the class. They also apply high standards when judging how well teachers provide support for those pupils who struggle. Rigorous evaluations of teachers' practice are leading to improvements. Subject leaders make a strong contribution to improvements by providing teachers with guidance in how best to teach key topics.
- The new leader responsible for inclusion has strengthened the tracking for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. He closely monitors the impact of additional funding, where necessary making changes to the content of support programmes and how they are delivered. Recent approaches designed to deepen the impact of teaching assistants are well focused and are leading to some noticeable improvements. Overall, the additional funding is supporting this group well.
- Inclusion leaders have made effective changes to the way in which Year 7 catch-up funding is spent. Recent information shows strong improvements in targeted pupils' spelling and reading skills. Additional literacy support forms a strong element of a wider well-planned transition programme. This programme rightly focuses on ensuring that Year 7 learning builds effectively on pupils' prior knowledge, skills and understanding.
- The pupil premium funding is spent effectively and includes supporting pupils who have significant barriers to education in overcoming them, as well as additional, small-group teaching. The differences between the achievement of those eligible for additional funding and others is diminishing, most noticeably in English and mathematics for middle and low-ability pupils. For some disadvantaged pupils, persistent absence remains too high.
- Leaders have designed a broad curriculum aimed at stimulating boys' engagement and raising aspirations. However, leaders have not fully enough explored the impact of the

curriculum on different groups of learners. For instance, all pupils undertake key stage 4 learning in science via separate physics, chemistry, and biology lessons, with most taking separate science GCSEs. Leaders have not sufficiently evaluated the impact of studying science in this breadth on less-able pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. As a consequence, some pupils in lower-ability sets are not making the progress of which they are capable.

- Partnerships between the school and other providers are effective. Of note, is the success of the school's collaborations both with the local teaching school, and with local primary schools. Links with local post-16 providers are also beneficial because they support pupils in making a good start in the next phase of their education. The local authority's work with the school has been light-touch and, therefore, its impact is limited.
- The school places a great deal of emphasis on instilling fundamental British values. Ethics lessons in both key stages successfully provide a context for the origin of these values. They also provide rich opportunities for pupils to enhance their spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning. Leaders have explicitly and consistently transmitted the message that recent tension between a very small numbers of pupils constitutes a disregard for the British value of tolerance, which the vast majority of pupils cherish.

Governance of the school

- Governors effectively combine support for the school with challenge, making good use of their relevant expertise in so doing. For example, governors have successfully utilised their knowledge about post-16 providers to ensure that pupils are well supported in their next steps. Governors insist that leaders focus on doing their best for each pupil, including disadvantaged pupils. They rightly apply this high standard, when they rigorously scrutinise the headteacher's recommendations for rewarding teachers' performance. Governors recognise that funding for disadvantaged pupils is having a deeper impact in some areas than others and have provided additional funds in response. Governors need to probe more deeply into the impact of the design and implementation of the curriculum on different groups of pupils, in the short and longer term.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective because systems are diligently kept in good order by safeguarding leaders who regularly and rigorously check them. Leaders' safeguarding training is relevant to the school's needs, fully compliant and up to date. As a consequence, leaders are able to ensure that pupils access the assistance they require, including from local authority agencies and from community police officers, where necessary. They carefully monitor the impact and timeliness of this assistance.
- The personal development and safety programmes effectively support pupils in staying safe. Programmes are carefully targeted to ensure that they provide pupils with age-appropriate support and information. Boys access professional expertise and respond well to training on how to make informed and healthy choices, including about sexual relationships. Dedicated learning days and the posters displayed about issues such as testicular cancer, help create an open culture where boys feel able to share their concerns freely.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across a range of subjects, including some creative subjects, is generally strong. Teaching in mathematics is, as a rule, stronger than in English. However, it is now improving in English after some turbulence last year. Any small pockets of weaker practice are being eradicated due to the well-placed focus on robust quality assurance and developing teachers' expertise.
- In most lessons, pupils are well motivated by the work teachers set. Pupils relish opportunities for healthy debate and discussion and these are strong aspects of pupils' learning across subjects. Pupils' oracy skills are developed through opportunities to clarify their ideas through discussion and questioning. Whole-school literacy initiatives build effectively on these firm foundations, as do extra-curricular discussion clubs.
- Pupils' learning in geography is very strong. Pupils are highly motivated by the care and thought teachers put into ensuring the tasks they set are relevant and stimulating. Pupils respond very well to the opportunities provided in geography to reflect on their learning, share ideas, and make improvements to their work.
- Changes instigated by the new head of the English department are effective. Most pupils are developing their English skills well, confidently analysing and comparing texts. However, in some classes, teachers' questioning is not probing enough. Given the high levels of understanding that pupils display and their thirst to express themselves, some pupils need greater challenge, including in the feedback teachers give on their writing.
- Teaching in mathematics supports pupils in developing confidence and fluency in a range of mathematical processes. Pupils are provided with opportunities to test out their hypotheses using charts and diagrams, which helps them to move fluidly from concrete to abstract learning. Teachers provide extensive support to ensure that pupils meet their targets in examinations.
- Strong and effective modern foreign languages teaching helps pupils to acquire confidence in grammar and vocabulary. Teachers provide pupils with very specific guidance on how to improve their written work and their accents. This assistance helps pupils to communicate more confidently in the target language.
- Teaching and assessment is effectively preparing pupils for the new style, harder GCSEs in English and mathematics. Subject leaders rigorously scrutinise teachers' marking to check that it adheres to the examination board's schemes. Teachers adeptly share their understanding of the new marking criteria with pupils, providing opportunities for pupils to refine their responses to the new style of questions.
- In some lower sets, especially in science, pupils' learning is not as strong as in higher sets. In science, inspectors observed a difference between upper-ability sets and lower-ability sets. Pupils in upper-ability sets were being effectively stimulated, including through teachers' questioning. However, some pupils in lower sets struggled to apply key scientific skills, such as presenting data in graphs.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Of note, are the incredibly high levels of courtesy that permeate through the school. Pupils are considerate and they speak enthusiastically about their learning, appreciating the additional experiences and support that their teachers provide.
- Pupils' life skills, as well as academic skills, are developed very successfully. There is a raft of well-planned opportunities for pupils to gain leadership skills, which include a pupils' senior leadership team, very active school council and school ambassadors. The school's very effective focus on developing pupils' leadership skills has created a culture of respect and high ambition.
- Through dedicated 'challenge days' and in lessons, pupils are taught very well how to cope when challenged or put to the test. External experts, working alongside teachers, provide pupils with the necessary skills to approach emotionally, socially and academically challenging situations with confidence. As a consequence, pupils respond exceptionally well when teachers challenge them to work and think harder.
- Careers guidance and information are highly effective because different elements are successfully combined. The careers coordinator personally provides bespoke guidance for Year 8 pupils making their GCSE option choices, and also organises for successful ex-pupils to return to give talks about their experiences at college. Consequently, in 2016, all boys left with a college place for further study and/or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good and most of the time pupils' conduct is conspicuously positive. Close liaison with off-site leaders means that pupils behave well and are safe when attending alternative provision. Behaviour is not outstanding because occasionally, where teaching is less strong, there is low-level disruption. Another reason is because persistent absence for disadvantaged pupils remains too high.
- Around the school, in lessons, and at breaktime pupils' behaviour is impressive. Many pupils and parents view the disciplined yet caring approach as a strength of the school. Pupils also noted the positive impact of the school's 'zero tolerance' to all forms of bullying, and to any form of physical contact. Pupils commented that on the rare occasions that bullying happens, it is dealt with firmly and effectively.
- Community leaders painstakingly collate and scrutinise information on pupils' behaviour, spotting patterns and identifying hot spots. The school has identified some pockets of low-level disruption and is tackling them by providing well-focused support for staff, as well as carefully considered sanctions for pupils.
- The school has a robust approach to managing the rare instance of poor conduct, applying the full range of sanctions available as appropriate, including exclusion. Over the past three years, fixed-term exclusion rates have declined, as a result of the school's even-handed, yet firm approach. Recent altercations between individual pupils,

due to tensions in the local community, have been dealt with vigorously.

- Leaders have successfully focused on improving attendance for disadvantaged pupils by implementing a raft of measures, such as ensuring 'community leaders', who support pupils pastorally, focus on attendance. Consequently, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved since the start of the academic year. New approaches to reduce persistent absent rates for this group have not been as effective.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- High aspirations, effective guidance and additional support mean that most pupils make strong progress from their starting points. Pupils generally achieve well across a range of subjects.
- Boys at the school make significantly stronger progress than other boys nationally in EBacc subjects (sciences, humanities and languages), especially in humanities subjects. Similarly, across a range of subjects other than English and mathematics, boys' progress compared to other boys' progress nationally, is impressive.
- Pupils achieve well in mathematics. Taking into account results, which are not counted in published performance tables, pupils' outcomes in mathematics are better than they are in English. Following the appointment of a new English subject leader and more stable staffing, current pupils' progress is improving. However, pupils' progress in English is not consistently strong because some teachers do not challenge the most able and some middle-ability pupils enough.
- Strong additional support and close monitoring mean that differences between disadvantaged pupils across the school and others are diminishing, especially in English and mathematics. A small number of disadvantaged pupils, with significant personal barriers to learning, had a negative impact on the overall progress this group made in some subjects in 2016. This was not the case in 2015, when disadvantaged pupils' progress was stronger.
- In science, pupils' progress is broadly in line with national averages. However, pupils' attainment is better in biology than in physics and chemistry. Most pupils take three separate science GCSE qualifications, with some pupils taking two. This approach does not always serve less-able pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, well enough.
- Progress made by most-able pupils is strong across a range of subjects, especially when compared with boys nationally. They achieve particularly well in humanities. In a number of subjects, such as mathematics, pupils take GCSE examinations at the end of Year 10, which they enjoy and which motivates them. Most-able pupils generally achieve their target grades in early examinations. However, some do not make the very strong progress of which they are capable and exceed their targets.
- The vast majority of pupils leave the school very well equipped for their next steps, whether they are academic or vocational. The local post-16 college of choice for most pupils communicated to inspectors that pupils from this school do particularly well, with eight going on to receive offers from top Russell-group universities.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do well at the school and make progress at least in line with other boys in the school. In some areas, their

progress is strong, because of the way their teachers and teaching assistants make sure that the work they are set is both challenging and accessible. Pupils with additional needs make strong progress on reading and spelling programmes.

- Pupils in key stage 3 reach high standards in competitive sports and one school team has progressed to competing in football at national championship level.
- Pupils in alternative provision make strides in their learning on a range of vocational courses, which are carefully chosen to maximise pupils' engagement and provide them with work-place and life skills.

School details

Unique reference number	126065
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10024611

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
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,097
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr C Purvis
Headteacher	Mrs Siobhan Denning
Telephone number	01403 261086
Website	www.theforestschool.com
Email address	office@theforestschool.net
Date of previous inspection	14–15 November 2012

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The Forest School is a single-sex secondary school for boys. It is just over the average size for secondary schools.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below average.
- Relatively few pupils are from minority ethnic groups and for the majority of pupils, English is their first language.
- The proportion of pupils receiving support because they have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion supported through education, health and care plans is below average.

- A very small proportion of students attend courses off-site at Central Sussex College.
- The school meets the current government floor standards which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was initially a section 8 inspection led by an Ofsted Inspector. On being deemed section 5 inspection, one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors took over leading the inspection.
- Inspectors gathered evidence from short visits made to lessons on several separate occasions. Inspectors made short visits to sessions during the ‘challenge day’ when pupils were involved in off-timetable learning. In some instances, inspectors were accompanied by the headteacher on visits. Inspectors also made longer visits to 23 part lessons and attended an assembly. Pupils’ behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaktimes. A telephone call was made to a consultant employed to provide support and challenge to the headteacher.
- Inspectors met separately with the headteacher on several occasions. Inspectors also met with senior leaders for a range of meetings with different foci. Meetings were also held with middle leaders, a group of staff, newly qualified teachers, careers and transition coordinators, and also a representative from the local authority. Inspectors met with six groups of pupils: two groups on the first day and four groups on the second full day of the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised 58 responses to the staff questionnaire, 51 responses to the pupil survey and 200 responses on the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. In addition, inspectors scrutinised 150 comments made via free text.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school’s strategic-planning documents, emails from local colleges, minutes of governing body meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, risk assessments, records of the checks made on staff when they are appointed and records relating to pupils’ safety and academic progress.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Sue Bullen	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Powell	Ofsted Inspector
Keith Pailthorpe	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Matthew Newberry	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Anne Turner, section 8 lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector

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