

Ferndown Middle School

Peter Grant Way, Ferndown, Dorset BH22 9UP

Inspection dates

10–11 January 2018

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

- Senior leaders are not complacent. They and the governing body are continuing to consider and develop ways to improve. They work closely with other agencies and providers to keep pupils safe and raise pupils' achievements.
- Middle leaders, established and new, are a considerable strength of the school. They are articulate and enthusiastic. They are highly supportive of the senior leaders and with them are passionate about providing the very best education for pupils in their care.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They ensure that pupils have work that is at the right level of challenge.
- The school provides a rounded and high-quality curriculum. Over their four years at this school, pupils enjoy rich and stimulating activities in a wide range of subjects. Pupils leave Year 8 well prepared for Year 9 and beyond.
- Pupils in all year groups, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, are making good and increasingly rapid progress. However, the differences between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and those of other pupils nationally are not diminishing fast enough.
- Governors are effective. They understand the strengths of the school and the areas needing further improvement. They provide good strategic direction for the school. They are increasingly challenging leaders at all levels to help improve the school.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Adults provide good support for pupils' well-being, and pastoral development helps them to be successful. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong.
- Parents and carers are generally supportive of the school. However, some parents are not happy with the amount and timeliness of the communication they have with the school.
- Results in the national tests at the end of Year 6 remain too low. They are below those expected for the pupils' age and from their results at the end of Year 2.
- Some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. The school works closely with other agencies to improve attendance. However, the persistent absence of some pupils hinders their ability to achieve their potential.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the outcomes of pupils by ensuring that:
 - achievement improves in the end of key stage 2 national tests
 - the differences in achievement between disadvantaged pupils in the school and that of other pupils nationally rapidly narrow
 - new systems and procedures become embedded in day-to-day practice in all classes
 - all teachers continue to improve and develop pupils' use of modern technology
 - the attendance of those pupils who are persistently absent improves.
- Improve the timeliness and quality of communication with parents so that they feel listened to and can maximise the support they provide for their children's achievement.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- School leaders and the governing body are determined to improve the low outcomes pupils reach at the end of Year 6. They are using the latest research and specialist external support to help pupils make more rapid progress in Years 5 and 6, in English and mathematics. Initiatives, for example to improve spelling, have a good impact on increasing pupils' accuracy and their vocabulary. The school is also involved in mastery research with Bournemouth University, with the result that pupils now consider more ways to solve problems. Nevertheless, there are significant residual gaps in pupils' learning in English and mathematics at key stage 2 that have a negative impact on the end of Year 6 national test results.
- There have been some significant changes at middle leadership level since the previous inspection. The staff in relatively new leadership roles are already having a positive impact. For example, there is an increase in the range and use of information and communication technology (ICT) to improve pupils' outcomes. Mathematics is now used and developed in other subjects, providing real-life experiences that are helping increase pupils' understanding. Other leaders, such as for SEN, behaviour and attendance, have adapted their roles to appropriately accommodate changes in government guidance and legislation. As a result, the capacity for continued improvement is strong, as middle leaders build their skills and influence further.
- Leaders regularly have pupils' work externally moderated to ensure consistency with other schools and national benchmarks. The joint observations with inspectors and analysis of pupils' work with middle and senior leaders clearly demonstrate the accuracy of their judgements. These judgements precisely triangulate with the school's own written records about pupils' achievements.
- The relevance, frequency and variety of homework and use of 'now tasks' (opportunities for pupils to improve their work) are regularly and methodically checked by middle leaders. This monitoring is increasing the quality of the pupils' work and their completion rates. Senior leaders are aware of the inconsistent use of assessment grids and responses to the 'now tasks' in different classes. They take appropriate action to increase the consistency so that they can be assured that pupils know what they have accomplished and what they need to do next.
- The curriculum time allocated to pupils in all year groups is adequate for all subjects. All leaders and managers report that they are treated equally well and that they, along with their subject, are respected and highly valued as part of the school's provision. A significant strength is the joint planning within the school and with Ferndown Upper School. As a result, pupils have rich, cohesive and varied learning experiences. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is thoroughly integrated into the taught curriculum and throughout the whole life of the school.
- The school's curriculum has been altered to reflect the changes to the national curriculum at key stages 2 and 4. Staff receive high-quality training to build on the new approaches to develop pupils' mastery skills and understanding in all subjects. In addition, because middle leaders work closely with Ferndown Upper School, they help to make sure that pupils make good progress and achieve well at the end of Year 8

and beyond. Pupils leave Year 8 with good learning habits, and with a wide breadth of subject knowledge and skills. They are very well equipped to start Year 9.

- In response to parental concerns about bullying and pupils' well-being, the school has introduced a new programme as part of tutor-time. The aim of it is to increase pupils' resilience and to improve their mental health and well-being. This is part of a two-year programme that is being supervised by experienced external experts.
- SMART (specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, timed) targets are used for staff performance management. These are directly linked with the school's development plan. This enables leaders and managers to hold staff firmly to account for their work and to help staff see how their work is helping to drive school improvement. However, the targets used in the school's development plans are not as strong. Some do not have clearly defined milestones against detailed targets. More feedback from the comprehensive reports provided by middle leaders would assure them of what they could do to improve the quality of their reporting.
- Some parents report that they want better and timelier communication with the school. The school leaders and governing body are aware of this. Parents are provided with regular formal information about their children's achievements. Leaders are improving other information about what pupils are learning and what the school can do to support pupils and families. For example, new information about the identification and support for pupils with SEN and/or disabilities has been prepared and is due to be uploaded to the school's website.

Governance of the school

- The governing body is not complacent. Due to recent changes in its membership, the governing body is currently undertaking a review of its work, including redrafting its development plan to reflect these changes. It is using the standards set out under government guidelines and using the expertise of the National Governance Alliance.
- Governors are linked with subject areas where they take a strategic role, supporting and challenging staff. They receive detailed reports from the area leaders, which keep them very well informed about the work of the school, in addition to information supplied by senior leaders. Although governance links are not yet clearly identified in the subject leaders' development plans, it is intended that they will be, following the current governance review. Governors are also aware that the school's development plans need to have SMART targets to help them improve their work.
- The impact of the use of additional funding such as the pupil premium, sport premium, and Year 7 catch-up is strong. It is carefully tracked and checked by the school's senior leaders. The governing body reviews the checking of the senior leaders and holds them firmly to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The use of electronic systems to record pupils' behaviour patterns, along with notes of concerns raised by staff, enable all those with senior responsibilities to have a rounded view of pupils. They use this to keep abreast of concerns about families and to alert

other agencies that need to know or that can provide additional support. Referrals to local authority safeguarding teams are timely.

- Leaders and the governing body have ensured that child protection and safeguarding training for all staff is up to date and in line with statutory requirements. Staff receive regular updates and understand how, and to whom, they must report should they have any concerns. Those leaders with overall responsibility for the safety and safeguarding of pupils work collaboratively to ensure that pupils are kept safe, including where pupils use alternative provision.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The energy, vitality and high quality of middle leadership have a positive impact on teachers' expectations. Effective planning by teachers, along with good-quality support staff, enables pupils to make good progress. They have increasingly high expectations of pupils' learning development, with high-quality work produced in pupils' books.
- High-quality training and involvement with feeder schools and Ferndown Upper School is helping to drive school improvement. As a result, pupils follow a good-quality, diverse curriculum in Years 5 and 6. Teaching successfully builds on pupils' knowledge and understanding ready for Year 9 and beyond, helping to provide pupils with a strong key stage 3 skills base.
- Homework is regularly set for all subjects, marked and used to inform teachers' planning. It is purposeful and is having a positive impact on pupils' achievements over time.
- In lessons, teachers generally set targeted work for individuals that is suitably challenging for them. Pupils also have the opportunity to challenge themselves. An extended challenge written on the interactive white boards is always available for all pupils to try in lessons.
- Learning expectations and individual targets are regularly shared with pupils. However, they are not consistently explained in all classes. Teachers generally use 'now tasks' to give pupils the opportunity to revisit their work and make any corrections before moving on to new work. When given the appropriate time and used consistently, 'now tasks' are helping pupils to improve their work. However, pupils' responses are not consistent across classes and the self-assessment grids that pupils are expected to use are not always revisited at the end of topics.
- Through discrete computing lessons, pupils have learned to programme and control equipment. Other subjects have made less use of computers in the past. Following a thorough review and evaluation of the use of modern technology, this is changing. Pupils now access computers in a wider range of subjects, for example to construct spreadsheets and construct graphs. The leader for computing is fully aware of where further improvements are needed, and these are well planned.
- There is an appropriate graduated approach to supporting pupils with SEN and/or disabilities. Leaders make sure that staff are aware of those pupils who have been identified as needing extra support during the school day, and at what level. Staff are provided with strategy checklists to help them carry out any recommendations from specialists to support pupils' learning.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school has introduced a new programme to build mental health resilience in all pupils in tutor time. For those pupils who need greater levels of support, the school has well-trained specialist emotional support assistants available when needed.
- Pupils are proud of their work, as seen by the presentation in their books. Work on display in classrooms and in corridors is well cared for and looked after by pupils.
- The school builds on the pupils' prior learning and personal development initiated in pupils' first schools. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is further developed during their middle school years, helping to provide a smooth transition into Year 9 elsewhere. When they leave Year 8, pupils have acquired good learning techniques and knowledge of themselves as learners and young people.
- Careers information is appropriately targeted for each year group. Close links with Bournemouth University show pupils what higher education courses are on offer locally. Pupils gain a good understanding of the world of work. For example, an increasing range of enterprise activities enables pupils to gain experience of applying their understanding of business transactions to minimise costs.
- Pupils get to hear and see the rule of law and justice being applied for themselves by visiting magistrates' courts. This builds on the work they have conducted in lessons, heard about in assembly and discussed in tutor time on fundamental British values. Pupils have a good appreciation and knowledge of their rights and responsibilities as set out by the United Nations.
- Combined with good-quality teaching in lessons, visits from police officers enable pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe, in and out of school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are consistently good in lessons. Pupils display positive behaviour to learning and are encouraged to express their views and opinions at appropriate times. Should pupils wander off task, their behaviour is challenged by staff.
- Pupils report that behaviour is not perfect but that generally issues are addressed. They understand the different types of bullying and how to keep themselves safe, for example from bullying online.
- Some parents and pupils had concerns about pupils' behaviour. In particular, behaviour in corridors was reported as sometimes being intimidating for some pupils. Staff are aware of these concerns and have put in place one-way systems and patrols by staff during break and lunchtimes. Staff recognise that there are 'pinch-points' due to the design of the buildings, which can cause disruption.

- Pupils' attendance is slightly below average, but is improving, with persistent absence reducing. The school works appropriately with the local authority and other agencies to secure and increase the attendance of pupils. Nevertheless, some pupils do not attend school as often as they should.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Because of strong leadership and good-quality teaching, pupils make good progress over their four years in this school.
- Baseline testing in English and mathematics is generally conducted in Year 4 before pupils join the school. Pupils' progress in each year group is good based on these generally low starting points. Nevertheless, compared with national figures and pupils' own starting points at the end of Year 2, the results in the national test at the end of Year 6 remain low.
- The achievement gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils remains. Leaders are closely monitoring the progress of this group to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils.
- The achievement of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is good. They are carefully tracked and monitored by school leaders. Wherever possible, in-class support is provided so that they learn alongside their peers.
- The most able pupils are also making good progress because of more challenging activities being provided for them.
- Pupils' weaknesses in writing and grammar are being tackled in all subjects. Staff take regular opportunities to encourage pupils to read in class, which they do with increasing confidence and fluency. Mathematical mastery is also being developed across all subjects in meaningful ways.
- In art and design, design and technology, and food technology, pupils gain a wide range of experiences that prepare them very well for the new GCSEs in these subjects. Their drawing skills are very competent. They produce accurate isometric and orthographic projections to represent 3D artefacts. Their ability to use ellipses and graphical construction techniques means that they can construct very accurate and realistic representations of things such as wine bottles.
- Pupils use a suitable range of media and materials and there are several innovative projects in which they develop and demonstrate good design ideas, leading to well-constructed products. The range of creations they produce in food lessons develops their strong nutritional awareness as well as developing their mathematical skills in proportion. Pupils are increasingly using electronic devices in projects. However, they are unclear about some concepts, for example the differences between light bulbs and light-emitting diodes.
- Pupils' knowledge, understanding and progress in history, geography, music and religious education are equally strong. Again, because of the firm foundation that they get in these subjects, they are able to move seamlessly into Year 9 in Ferndown Upper School.

School details

Unique reference number	113878
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10042681

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	9 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	543
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Tuttiett
Headteacher	Gillian Allen
Telephone number	01202 876556
Website	http://fernmid.dorset.sch.uk/
Email address	office@fernmid.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	June 2014

Information about this school

- There have been considerable changes to the teaching staff, management and leadership roles since the previous inspection.
- The school uses The Forum Centre in Blandford as an alternative provider, when needed.
- The school does not meet the current government floor standard at key stage 2.
- The school meets the Department for Education's definition of a coasting school based on key stage 2 academic performance results in 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors worked with the senior and middle leaders throughout the two days. They conducted joint observations of pupils learning and reviewed pupils' work with them. They also met with members of the governing body, the SEN coordinator, a representative from the local authority and the school's improvement partner.
- The inspectors talked with different groups of pupils, a parent and the headteacher of Ferndown Upper School.
- The inspectors scrutinised the quality of pupils' work, listened to them reading in class and talked with pupils about their school work. The inspectors also observed pupils learning in lessons, without leaders present, and when not in class.
- The inspectors took account of the 58 responses by parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and a letter from a parent. The 109 responses by pupils to Ofsted's electronic questionnaire were considered, as were the 38 responses submitted by staff.
- The inspectors considered a wide range of documentary evidence, including records relating to safeguarding, the quality of teaching, the curriculum, assessment information, the school's self-evaluation and action plans.

Inspection team

Steffi Penny, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Non Davies	Ofsted Inspector
Colin Logan	Ofsted Inspector

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