

Forest Hall School

Forest Hall Road, Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex CM24 8TZ

Inspection dates

17–18 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not ensured that the welfare care for some of the most vulnerable pupils is always well thought out and as effective as it should be.
- Leaders' and trust systems for reviewing their impact on pupils' welfare over the longer term are not precise enough.
- New leaders across a range of areas in the school are still establishing systems to sustain and build on the initial improvements brought about by the executive headteacher and the trust. It is too early to measure the impact of this work.
- Although improving, the local advisory board are not yet confident to undertake their responsibilities fully without the intensive support of the trust. They do not yet hold leaders fully to account.
- There is a small amount of weaker teaching and learning that does not meet the specific needs of pupils, including the most able pupils and those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities.

The school has the following strengths

- Since the school opened, teaching has improved securely and sustainably. Leaders have recruited and trained staff well. As a result, teaching and learning are now typically good and improving.
- The executive headteacher has worked tirelessly and successfully to raise academic standards in the school, and widen the curriculum provision for pupils. Consequently, outcomes are good and improving.
- The trust, led expertly by the chief executive officer, has been pivotal in supporting the school to raise academic standards. The trust's 'no-nonsense' approach to identifying issues and dealing with them effectively has ensured that school leaders have been well supported to improve teaching and raise achievement.
- Behaviour is securely good. Leaders have established high expectations about how pupils behave. Pupils work hard in lessons, are keen to do well, and are polite and respectful.
- Almost all pupils, parents and carers are effusive in their praise for the school. A significant number are very positive about the impact of the executive headteacher and the trust.
- The school's dyslexia support unit, alongside the nurture curriculum in key stage 3, provides high quality support, education and intervention for pupils with specific needs.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of personal development and welfare by:
 - ensuring that all emerging concerns about pupils with the most complex social and emotional needs, are quickly identified, well monitored and supported meaningfully over time
 - further sharpening the quality of the schools records, so that they give a more precise account of the issues and actions taken
 - continuing to improve the quality of the trust’s checking of these procedures.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - continuing to support new subject leaders so that they can build sustainably on the improvements in teaching and achievement brought about by the executive headteacher and the trust
 - further developing the role and capacity of the head of school, specialist teacher for SEN and/or disabilities, and the leader for disadvantaged pupils, so that there is greater depth of understanding about the difference that their work is making to the quality of provision in the school
 - continuing to evolve the skills and understanding of the local advisory board, so that they are able to hold leaders to account more robustly for the provision in the school, including the additional funding for disadvantaged pupils.
- Further improve the small amount of teaching and learning that is not as effective in planning and securing the most rapid progress in lessons, most notably for the most able pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders' systems for monitoring and reviewing the provision for the most vulnerable pupils with the most complex social and emotional needs are not consistently effective. While leaders liaise with parents when there are signs of concern, they do not implement high-quality ongoing follow-on support for pupils. Leaders and governors have not identified these weaknesses, despite routine monitoring. As a result, leaders have an overgenerous view of the quality of personal development and welfare care in the school.
- Subject leadership, although improving quickly, is not yet fully embedded. Since taking post, new leaders have identified the issues that they need to address, but their work is relatively new. They do not yet know the impact of their work in building on the foundations laid by the executive headteacher and the trust to raise the quality of teaching and achievement.
- The school's evaluation of the impact of disadvantaged funding is not consistently precise. However, the additional funding that the school receives for disadvantaged pupils is used appropriately, most notably on intervention and pastoral support. In response to the 2016/17 outcomes, leaders appointed a new leader to raise standards further for these pupils. Despite a positive, quick start, the new leader's work is still in its early stages of development.
- The new head of school has not yet had time to fully embed her work across the school. A significant amount of her time to date has been devoted to handing over her previous roles to new staff, and mentoring them to undertake these roles. She is now starting to refine school systems so that the improvements brought by leaders and the trust can be sustained over time, most notably in the systems for monitoring teaching and learning.
- Leaders' evaluation of the impact of the Year 7 catch-up funding is not thorough. Despite this weakness, the school's use of the Year 7 catch-up funding is, in practice, supporting pupils from low starting points to get a good start in key stage 3. A significant portion of this funding is used to support the school's nurture provision. This additional curriculum capacity supports pupils' specific needs very well.
- Leaders' monitoring of the classroom-based provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is not yet fully embedded. Although pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities achieve well by the end of Year 11, the new leader has focused on ensuring that Year 7 pupils have the correct centralised support. She has not yet had time to review classroom provision more widely.
- Despite the developmental needs in current leadership, the executive headteacher and the trust have raised standards in teaching and achievement. Against a backdrop of significant challenge when the school first opened in 2015, they have maintained a tenacious and successful focus on raising standards for all pupils. In particular, they have recruited staff well and secured high-quality teaching. Consequently, teaching, learning and achievement in the school is now good.

- The trust has been pivotal in bringing the academic and behavioural improvements in the school since it opened. The hands-on chief executive officer has secured expertise from elsewhere in the trust to support the school effectively. She has ensured that the trust continues to provide high-quality training and development opportunities to staff using in-house training and the high-performing schools in the trust. The trust's intensive 'warts and all' review of subjects has led to significant improvements in the quality of teaching and provision.
- Pupils are incredibly positive about the wide-ranging subjects that they can study. Leaders have thoughtfully created a curriculum and guidance for pupils that allows them to achieve well and enjoy their learning. Staff have an insightful understanding about the raised levels of expectations in the early years and primary curriculum, many through their experience of teaching pupils in the trust's primary and nursery schools. The trust, leaders and staff continue to use these experiences to review and refine the curriculum on offer in key stage 3.
- Leadership of the school's dyslexia support unit is of a high quality. The unit provides high-quality individual and group sessions, alongside high-quality guidance and support. As a result, pupils are confident, articulate, feel well supported and learn very well in the unit.

Governance of the school

- The local advisory board do not all yet have a full understanding of their role. While this is improving, they are not yet providing consistent challenge to leaders over the use of additional funding, achievement and welfare provision.
- The role of the local advisory board has understandably evolved and changed since the school opened, and as the trust has expanded. The trust enacted a governance review in September 2017 and has worked steadily to address the areas for improvement identified. It has ensured that the board has recruited some high-quality expertise to support this development, most notably to chair the board.
- The trust has played the central governance role since the school opened in February 2015. It has brought expertise and challenge to school leaders, as well as practical support to raise academic standards rapidly. However, its checks on the ongoing welfare provision for pupils with complex social and emotional needs, although routine, has not been as precise in identifying the potential weaknesses sharply enough.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The single central record of checks on staff is appropriate. The appointments of staff meet statutory requirements.
- Staff are well trained in the most up-to-date guidance, including the 'Prevent' duty, which focuses on preventing pupils from being vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism. Staff make appropriate referrals to the designated safeguarding team, and feel confident to follow up their referrals if they remain concerned about a pupil's well-being.

- Pupils are taught how to stay safe, both online and in the wider world. They access a number of lessons, such as personal, social and health education (PSHE), as well as the school's drop-down days, and assemblies. These give pupils additional guidance about how to keep themselves safe from dangers such as online grooming, sexting, and child sexual exploitation. Pupils say that they feel safe, and that there are staff who they can go to when they are worried about things.
- The work of the designated safeguarding leaders and pastoral teams ensures that pupils receive support from a range of different external and internal services. However, the school's records are not all precise enough, especially about the rationale behind leaders' decisions and the actions that they take. The trust acknowledges that although it undertakes routine checks on safeguarding, its review of pupils' files is not as consistently sharp.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment is typically good across the school with some that is better, most notably, but not exclusively, in key stage 4.
- Teachers have a thorough understanding of the subjects that they teach, and the national expectations in the different key stages. Staff have worked with other schools in the trust on cross-school marking and moderation. This helps teachers to quality assure and check that their judgements about pupils' achievement are accurate and rigorous.
- Most teachers use assessment information to plan lessons over time that help pupils to build on their prior learning. Teachers use this understanding to plan effective learning experiences and assessments, which allow pupils to develop new knowledge and skills, and practice these through well-thought-out assessment opportunities.
- Most teachers' guidance and questioning challenges pupils to think through their answers, and develop their skills of analysis. Most teachers use these opportunities effectively to help pupils re-address some of the previous errors made in their learning.
- Pupils who need to catch up are being very well supported through the key stage 3 nurture curriculum. This curriculum is supporting pupils to read, both in lessons, and out of school, and to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. In particular, they are being supported to structure their written work effectively, across the curriculum. Consequently, the quality of extended written work is becoming increasingly effective for these pupils, and many are making exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Teachers have positive relationships with pupils, based on respect and learning. Pupils are very clear on what is expected of them. Almost all pupils make the most of their learning time, and respond to staff instructions quickly and appropriately.
- Most teachers plan effectively for the different needs of pupils in their lessons. For example, the less able pupils receive timely intervention in lessons to ensure that they learn effectively. In particular, the quality of support and provision for pupils who access the school's dyslexia support unit is exceptionally high.
- This year, a whole-school focus has been on challenging the most able pupils. This has made a real difference to the level of expectation that staff have about what these

pupils can achieve, especially in key stage 4. It is also positively impacting upon the quality of work that pupils are producing.

- Some less effective teaching, in the rare instances where it exists, does not successfully plan precisely or well enough for pupils to make sustained good progress over time. In these instances, this tends to reduce the effectiveness of the learning of the most able pupils, and those who have SEN and/or disabilities more specifically.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The longer-term support for the most vulnerable pupils with complex social and emotional needs is not as effective as it should be. This is because this support over time is not well thought out or timely. Some pupils are waiting too long for meaningful support from the school that makes a real difference. Leaders are not persistently tenacious in chasing external support where pupils are waiting too long for this.
- The welfare provision for the wider school community for pupils on a day-to-day basis is more effective. Pupils and parents speak very highly of this support, particularly the work of the house teams, and staff, to look after them. This includes pupils in the school's dyslexia unit.
- Pupils are being given increasing opportunities to have a voice in the way that the school runs. A significant proportion of pupils are pro-active members of the student senior leadership team. This articulate and thoughtful group of young people meet with staff and leaders to represent the ideas of pupils in the school.
- Almost all pupils say that bullying is not a problem in the school as people appreciate and value the things that make them different. Leaders work hard on developing a community ethos in the school. Lots of pupils say that the 'school is like a family' and appreciate the fact that they are a small school where everyone knows them.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are courteous, confident and kind young people. They hold doors open, are willing to help visitors, and are able to express themselves articulately. They are thoughtful to one another at break and lunchtime, waiting in queues patiently, and taking turns. Pupils interact with one another well during these 'free times' and behaviour around the whole school is calm.
- Pupils are punctual to their lessons and ready to learn. Lessons start promptly and positively. Pupils engage in their learning and respond to staff instructions quickly and enthusiastically. Pupils agree that almost no lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Most pupils are effusive in their praise for how the executive headteacher, his leaders and the staff team have raised expectations about how pupils should behave.

- Pupils value their education and so most attend and behave well. The attendance of all pupils, including different groups of pupils, is better than the national average, as it has been since the school opened. The need to use more serious behaviour consequences, such as fixed-term exclusion, are reducing rapidly.
- A high proportion of pupils arrive at the school part way through the year, some of whom have a less developed understanding about how to behave well. The executive headteacher is adamant that this is the school where these pupils should be able to get a second chance at being successful. As a result, house teams work closely with these pupils when they arrive and many go on to improve their behaviour quickly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Since opening, pupils have achieved well in an ever-widening number of subjects. In the last two years pupils have made progress that is at least in line with the national average, and often higher.
- The progress that pupils made in 2016 was significantly above the national average. In 2017, pupils' progress was broadly in line with the national average but still in the top 40% of schools nationally. School information and work scrutiny also show that current pupils across year groups continue to make good progress.
- A significant proportion of pupils enter the school with attainment that is below the national average. These pupils are supported very well by the school to catch up. In both 2016 and 2017 the lower-ability pupils made rapid progress that was significantly above the national average for pupils from similar starting points. They made particularly strong progress in English and humanities.
- Pupils achieve well in a range of subjects across the curriculum. Despite the small size of the school, pupils study a wide range of subjects including design and technology, Spanish, religious education (RE), drama, art, music, and physical education (PE). In particular, the progress that all pupils made in English and humanities in 2017 was strong while the progress that pupils made in the wider foundation subjects was in the top 20% of all schools nationally in both 2016 and 2017.
- Outcomes for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities has been another strength in the school's Year 11 outcomes since it opened. This is particularly the case in English and the wider foundation subjects in the curriculum. The work of the dyslexia support unit in the school is a firm foundation that supports the progress of many of these pupils.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve well, especially those from middle and lower starting points across year groups and in most subjects. The progress that these pupils in Year 11 made across a number of subjects was particularly strong in 2016 where the cohort made up around one third of the overall year group. A smaller cohort of Year 11 pupils in 2017 did not achieve as well in all subjects, although this was directly affected by a number of individualised circumstances, including a high proportion of later admissions to the school. Where this was the case, the school used its additional funding well to support these pupils' wider needs and ensure that they achieved appropriate post-16 destinations.
- The most able Year 11 pupils in 2016 and 2017 did not consistently attain the highest grades. The school and trust quickly identified that teachers were not as confident in

their teaching and assessment of the higher grades in the new key stage 4 syllabuses. Cross-school moderation and staff training are starting to change this rapidly, particularly in mathematics and science.

- Improvements in achievement, and in the quality of information, advice and guidance, are ensuring that pupils are securing better post-16 provision. The number of pupils who are accessing next-step progressive courses, in schools, colleges and through apprenticeship, is high. This includes pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

School details

Unique reference number	141328
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10041739

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

Type of school	Other secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	461
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of the trust	Dan Kolinsky
Executive headteacher	Stephen Hehir
Head of school	Anna Myatt
Telephone number	01279 813 384
Website	www.fhs.essex.sch.uk/
Email address	reception@fhs.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened as an academy in February 2015 under the sponsorship of The Burnt Mill Academy Trust.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium funding is slightly lower than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is much higher than the national average, especially for those pupils who have an education, health and care plan.
- The school runs a dyslexia support unit which is funded by the local authority and provides education for pupils from the region who meet the local authority criteria for

admissions.

- A very small number of pupils access provision at the local pupil referral unit.
- The school met the floor standards set by the Department for Education for the achievement of pupils in Year 11 in 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school. A number of these observations were undertaken jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, senior leaders, and middle leaders. Meetings were also held with the chief executive officer of the Burnt Mill Academy Trust. Inspectors also met with the members of the local advisory board, including the chair.
- Inspectors scrutinised work from across different key stages, including in English, mathematics, science, history, geography and languages.
- A range of documents were scrutinised, including the school’s self-evaluation, development plan, minutes of meetings, safeguarding records, children looked after files, pupils’ progress information, and school policies and procedures.
- Inspectors analysed 53 responses from Ofsted’s online survey of parents, Parent View, including free-text commentary provided by some parents. Inspectors also held telephone conversations with some parents.
- There were no responses to Ofsted’s online survey of staff. However, inspectors spoke to staff throughout the two days of the inspection.
- There were only eight responses to Ofsted’s online survey for pupils. Inspectors spoke informally to pupils at breaktimes, lunchtimes and in lessons. Inspectors also met formally with pupils to discuss their experiences of school.

Inspection team

Kim Pigram, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Brenda Watson	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Wilson	Her Majesty’s Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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