

Fearnhill School

Icknield Way West, Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 4BA

Inspection dates

12–13 February 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Over time, standards at Fearnhill School have declined. Although leaders' recent actions have stemmed this regression, pupils are not yet making good progress in all subjects.
- Leaders who are newer in post are starting to make a difference in their respective areas but have not had time to have an impact on improving teaching or outcomes.
- Leaders do not focus precisely on how all pupils can make good progress from their starting points.
- Teachers do not use pupils' assessment information consistently well to plan learning that meets pupils' needs. This is particularly the case for boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Teaching does not fully engage pupils in learning. When pupils are less interested in the work, there are some incidents of low-level disruption that distract others from learning.
- The behaviour of pupils around the school is not always good.
- Leaders are working hard to improve attendance overall. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND has not improved quickly enough.
- Outcomes in the sixth form vary between subjects. Students do not typically make as much progress as they should.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are relentless about ensuring that pupils benefit from opportunities to develop well and become model 'Fearnhill students'.
- Pupils' understanding of fundamental British values is well developed by leaders. Being different in this school is fine.
- Pupils benefit from helpful careers information, advice and guidance and so are well informed about the next steps in their lives.
- Sixth-form students are complimentary about the support they receive from staff. They are well cared for and supported to make the right choices.
- The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of sporting, artistic and cultural activities, school trips and after-school clubs.
- Governors are increasingly effective in their roles.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - leaders focus on the progress pupils make and hold teachers accountable for pupils' achievements
 - leaders make use of the information from the assessment systems to support teachers' understanding of how to improve pupils' progress
 - middle leaders' actions contribute well to improving standards across the school
 - leaders use the pupil premium funding to improve the outcomes achieved by disadvantaged pupils
 - leaders use the funding for pupils with SEND to improve the support they are given so that they make good progress from their different starting points.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - teachers use assessment information to plan learning that is suited to the different abilities of pupils, including boys, disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Improve pupils' behaviour and attendance by:
 - ensuring that disadvantaged pupils and those pupils with SEND attend school regularly
 - reducing incidents of low-level disruption in lessons that disrupt learning
 - raising expectations of pupils' behaviour around the school
 - improving pupils' attitudes to learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders evaluate the school as good. The findings of this inspection do not support this view. This is because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment which mean that pupils are not making the progress they are capable of.
- Leaders have not yet secured high enough standards for disadvantaged pupils. Progress measures in 2017 and 2018 show that standards were low for these pupils, most notably in both English and mathematics. Leaders have not yet secured consistently high-quality teaching for these pupils to meet their needs. Where there has been some improvement in provision this year, most notably in English, the actions have not yet had time to make a difference to pupils' achievements.
- Following an external review of spending of pupil premium funding, leaders are making better use of this money to support disadvantaged pupils. More time is needed to see the impact of these actions on disadvantaged pupils' achievement.
- Routine monitoring by senior leaders and further training for staff are beginning to address some of the weaknesses in teaching and learning.
- Middle leaders are not yet making a consistent contribution to school improvement. Leaders who are newer in post are starting to make a difference but have not yet had time to have an impact on improving teaching or outcomes.
- Leaders do not ensure that the funding for pupils with SEND is spent effectively. Adults do not routinely plan teaching and learning that meets the needs of pupils with SEND.
- Recent changes in leadership have enabled the headteacher to increase the school's capacity to improve further. Observations carried out jointly with senior leaders confirm that they know what needs to be done to improve teaching and learning. They shared accurately with inspectors what staff do well and what they need to do to improve.
- Leaders have made changes to the curriculum to make sure that it matches the interests of the pupils. The school offers a range of options, including vocational options such as the BTEC National Diploma in information and communication technology. Pupils participate in and enjoy an extensive range of extra-curricular activities and trips. Pupils' understanding of fundamental British values is developed well by leaders. Pupils told inspectors that their school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and treat people equally.
- Leaders use the Year 7 catch-up premium effectively. Working with a specialist English teacher, pupils make rapid progress in developing their literacy skills.
- Most parents and carers who responded to Ofsted's online survey Parent View feel that the school is well led and would recommend the school to other parents. A small minority would like more information about their child's progress and better communication from the school.
- Leaders have made good use of the support from the local authority. Together, they have reviewed different aspects of the school's work and taken action to improve the school further.

Governance of the school

- Governors have acted on the recommendations of an external review of governance. This is ensuring they are increasingly effective in their roles. However, they identify that there is further work to do.
- Governors have taken effective action to ensure that the school meets its statutory obligations, such as performance management, ensuring that the website is compliant and safeguarding. They keep their safeguarding training under review so that they continue to be well informed about safeguarding issues. They also review the performance and pay of teachers and staff effectively.
- Governors bring a range of expertise to the school and are committed to its success. They introduced a curriculum, teaching and learning committee to be more effective in holding leaders accountable for information about the quality of teaching and learning in the school.
- Governors are aware that the progress of disadvantaged pupils continues to be well below that of other pupils nationally. Recent improvements in provision have not had time to have an impact on this aspect of the school's work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The records of who is safe to work with pupils are complete and well maintained. All necessary checks are made when recruiting staff to work with pupils.
- Leaders ensure that they provide staff with the most up-to-date training and guidance on safeguarding, including the 'Prevent' duty. Therefore, staff are well equipped to raise concerns about pupils.
- The designated leader, ably supported by a team of well-trained staff, oversees safeguarding well. Procedures to raise concerns are well established. Safeguarding matters and the actions taken to resolve them are recorded systematically.
- Pupils say they feel safe and trust staff to support them when they need help. Most pupils say they know who to go to if they have a problem. Pupils say that the support they are given is one of the things they like most about their school. Parents believe that their children are safe and that they are also well cared for.
- Leaders work well with the relevant agencies to support vulnerable pupils. Therefore, they are cared for well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. Strengths in some subjects are not replicated in others. The quality of instruction and the tasks planned for pupils do not always meet their needs. This means that pupils do not make the progress they are capable of in all subjects.
- Teachers do not use assessment information with enough proficiency to plan activities that match the needs and abilities of pupils. This means that some pupils find the work

too easy and some find it too hard. Adults' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough.

- Teachers do not readily adapt learning tasks to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. This limits the progress pupils make. Where pupils are well supported by additional adults, then pupils make stronger gains in their learning.
- The activities planned by some teachers do not take into account the interests of boys. This means that boys do not achieve consistently well because they are not always engaged in their learning throughout the day.
- Teachers know who the disadvantaged pupils are and, in some lessons, they target their questioning to these pupils to make sure they are involved in learning. Some teachers use 'access to learning maps' which suggest strategies to support disadvantaged pupils. Use of these strategies makes a difference to the progress made by disadvantaged pupils. They make less progress in lessons where not enough has been done to identify and meet their needs.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers use their detailed subject knowledge and understanding of curriculum and examination requirements to plan learning that challenges pupils of different abilities. They correct pupils' misconceptions regularly and provide them with good feedback about how to improve their work, in line with the school's agreed procedures.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The idea of the 'Fearnhill student' is well established. Pupils take part in activities and trips, developing skills and attributes, such as high self-esteem and resilience. School trips include visits to Poland, the Christmas markets in France, Auschwitz and a science-themed trip to Euro Disney.
- Most pupils are polite and respectful. They are proud of their school. Almost all pupils agree that the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally.
- Pupils say that they are safe in this school, and inspectors agree. They are taught about staying safe and about how to look after their physical and emotional and mental health.
- The care and support provided for the vast majority of vulnerable pupils are good. The school works well with external agencies to make sure pupils' needs are met.
- Regular assemblies, personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, extended tutorials, drop-down days and a wide range of extra-curricular activities enrich pupils' lives and make a good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Participation in sport and other extra-curricular activities is high for all pupils, including those who are disadvantaged.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the school's and British values. Members of the school council enjoy the responsibilities they are given. They, along with other

volunteers, contribute to 'student voice' in the school. They have been able to work with school leaders to make changes to the school's 'behaviour ladder' and to develop a mental health app to signpost support to pupils.

- Careers guidance and advice are well established throughout all key stages. Pupils of all ages learn about the opportunities available to them, about the qualifications and personal requirements needed for future careers and about further learning at college, university or through apprenticeships. All pupils have a work experience placement in Year 10.
- The school uses the alternative provision at the North Hertfordshire Educational Support Centre. Pupils study English, mathematics, and information and communication technology, along with courses to support their personal development. The school monitors the progress and welfare of pupils in the alternative provision effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Leaders have worked hard to improve behaviour, and, in most lessons, pupils are polite and helpful. However, some poor behaviour still remains in lessons, which disrupts the learning of other pupils. Typically, misbehaviour occurs when there are cover lessons or when pupils are not engaged in learning. There is also some poor behaviour around the school. This was confirmed by a minority of pupils responding to the Ofsted survey.
- Attitudes to learning are not always good. This happens when pupils are less interested in what they have been asked to do or are waiting to be moved on in their learning.
- Absence and persistent absence remain higher than they should be, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- In 2018, fixed-term exclusions were high. Fixed-term exclusions have reduced since the start of this academic year. This is as a result of leaders' actions to support pupils with challenging behaviour.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Over time, standards at the school have declined. The progress that pupils made through key stage 4 was average in 2017. In 2018, pupils' progress was in the bottom 20% of schools nationally.
- In some areas of the school, pupils' progress has improved. Nonetheless, observations of pupils' learning in lessons and scrutiny of work in their books show there is still some variability in the progress made between subjects. Progress is stronger in art, business studies, history and physical education.
- Boys make less progress than they should in English. Observations of pupils' learning in lessons show that they are less interested in the work and are not always challenged to achieve what they are capable of.

- Leaders know that, for some pupils, understanding of words and meanings is limiting their progress in lessons and examinations. They have plans to address this weakness, but the school's chosen approaches are too new to have had an impact.
- Pupils with SEND do not receive support to enable them to progress well enough.
- Disadvantaged pupils have underachieved consistently in recent years. Leaders have taken action to change this. Observations of pupils' learning in lessons and scrutiny of their work show that disadvantaged pupils make better progress when teachers plan lessons that take account of the barriers to their learning.
- Leaders have identified that all pupils are not challenged to achieve the GCSE grades they are capable of. They recognise that teaching needs to be better planned, so that pupils are consistently challenged to achieve their very best.
- Pupils eligible for support through the catch-up premium in Year 7, make exceptional progress in English, due to highly effective teaching in small groups.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language, who are new to the school, make good progress by following an alternative curriculum matched to their needs.
- Despite underachievement at key stage 4, the number of pupils that go on to further education or training remains high. This is because pupils have helpful information to guide their choices about the next steps in their education or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

Requires improvement

- Outcomes in the sixth form vary across subjects. Students pursuing A-level programmes of study are making less progress than others nationally. Information provided by leaders shows that students are making less progress in mathematics, history, English, biology and chemistry and stronger progress in psychology, art and Spanish.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies between classes. Students are generally hard working and sometimes work is well matched to their needs. However, as elsewhere in the school, teachers do not expect enough of students. While some work is based on teachers' understanding of what students already know and can do, some is not.
- Leaders are able to offer a range of A-Level and vocational subjects by working with Highfield School. Leaders know that, in the past, some students were pursuing courses which were not right for them. They now ensure that pupils receive effective impartial advice as they move through key stage 4 to ensure that they choose post-16 programmes of study which suit them. Pupils can now choose a combination of level 2 and level 3 qualifications, combined with work experience. Effective guidance continues through the sixth form to make sure that students make appropriate choices for their next steps in education and employment.
- Leaders know that, in the past, sixth-form teachers were not held sufficiently accountable for students' learning and outcomes. Recent changes to leadership of the sixth form have led to more sharply focused planning, but it is too soon to see the impact of these changes in students' outcomes.

- The progress of students in the sixth form who did not achieve a grade 4 in GCSE English is strong. These students typically make progress in line with, or better than, the national average. The progress of students who did not achieve a grade 4 in GCSE mathematics is weaker.
- Leaders know that attendance of students in the sixth form is not yet good enough and it needs to improve. However, students are well cared for and supported in the sixth form. They are complimentary about the extra personalised support they get in small classes and a small sixth form. Students show tolerance, respect and awareness of different views, faiths and lifestyles.

School details

Unique reference number	117504
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10086778

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

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	432
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	55
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Nye Hathway
Headteacher	Elizabeth Ellis
Telephone number	01462621200
Website	www.fearnhill.herts.sch.uk/
Email address	admin@fearnhill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	16-17 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school is a smaller-than-average-sized school, serving the town of Letchworth and its surrounding area.
- The large majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- The school collaborates with Highfield School for the provision of sixth-form courses.

- The school uses the alternative provider North Hertfordshire Educational Support Centre to provide alternative provision for a small number of pupils.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited parts of 36 lessons throughout the school. Most visits were carried out jointly with senior leaders to gain their views of the quality of teaching and pupils' current progress. Inspectors visited one assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, three groups of pupils and three members of the governing body including the chair. Inspectors spoke to the school's improvement partner, the headteacher of the North Hertfordshire Educational Support Centre and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised pupils' books in lessons. They also scrutinised pupils' work during a learning walk to observe the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school and improvement plans. They looked at safeguarding records and governing body minutes of meetings. Inspectors considered the school's information on pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors considered 35 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View, 42 responses to Ofsted's survey of staff and 54 responses to Ofsted's survey of pupils.

Inspection team

Sue Pryor, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Lawrence	Ofsted Inspector
Sean Powell	Ofsted 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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