

Inspection of a good school: Ferndown Upper School

Cherry Grove, Ferndown, Dorset BH22 9EY

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 December 2021

Outcome

Ferndown Upper School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Ferndown Upper School is a welcoming place. Pupils can be themselves. Everyone is proud to be part of the 'Ferndown family'. Pupils speak highly of the pastoral support they receive. Sixth-form students say that this was a key factor in their decision to continue their studies at the school.

Leaders have high expectations of pupils, including how they behave in the local community. There are clear systems which promote positive behaviour. Although bullying is rare, leaders act quickly and effectively to stop it.

Pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. They challenge one another to be better. Consequently, pupils learn in a purposeful, focused way.

Pupils debate with political leaders and learn from international experts. For example, pupils can join a club to study forensic linguistics with a leader in the field. The school works with local charities to sponsor the personal success of individual Ferndown pupils. Many pupils take on leadership positions within school. They perform these roles earnestly. Through these experiences, pupils become confident, articulate young people.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders provide a curriculum which is ambitious in several respects. Pupils build successfully on what they learn in middle school. The curriculum for Year 9 is broad and demanding. In the sixth form, students follow a wide range of courses. This includes a foundation diploma in art, which is typically offered in higher education settings. The school leads the development of new T-level courses in digital technologies locally.

Across the curriculum, planning is well developed. There is strong subject knowledge among teachers. They use this to identify in advance the likely areas that pupils might find difficult. Leaders keep the curriculum under constant review. This allows them to respond to events quickly, such as periods when remote education is required. Teachers

check that pupils have remembered the important points of the curriculum. They provide clear instructions and demonstrate the standard of work they want to see.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from the rich experiences the school has to offer. These pupils are encouraged to push themselves, for example by joining an extra-curricular club. Pupils are invited to give their views on what is, or is not, working well for them in different subjects. Despite this, in a few subjects, some pupils with SEND do not develop a secure understanding. The curriculum is not adapted well enough to give them the best chance to learn. Leaders are developing their work with parents and carers, so that their views inform pupils' support plans too.

Reading has a high profile. Teachers read interesting literature to pupils as a matter of routine. Pupils who need to improve their reading skills follow a supportive programme. Those in the earliest stages of reading learn a phonics course which helps them to become fluent readers.

In some ways, the key stage 4 curriculum is ambitious. For example, all pupils go on to study GCSE qualifications in separate sciences. However, over time, the proportion of pupils who gain qualifications in the English baccalaureate subjects has fallen. Leaders have taken steps to arrest this decline. For example, the school has a well-established programme of hosting pupils from European countries which is contributing to pupils studying a modern foreign language in greater numbers. However, leaders recognise that there is still more to do to encourage pupils to opt for languages and humanities subjects at key stage 4.

Pupils' behaviour around the school is mature and respectful. They are keen to participate in lessons. Pupils appreciate and understand the different approaches their teachers use to support their learning. The culture is one of mutual support and acceptance.

Leaders deliver a programme which promotes pupils' personal development effectively. Learning is planned carefully and includes elements of religious education. Within the curriculum, pupils learn to help and look out for one another, including with their mental health. In Year 11 and in the sixth form, pupils reflect on the features of healthy relationships. Pupils value the memorable insights they gain.

Pupils benefit from information and advice which helps them consider different ways to their chosen careers. Teachers take time to talk to pupils about the careers linked to their subjects. Pupils receive regular updates on employment opportunities locally, including apprenticeships. Students in the sixth form are well supported with the process of applying for university, although some Year 12 students would like to know more about this earlier.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders know the pupils well. They give staff the information they need to keep pupils safe from harm. Staff readily report their concerns. They have confidence in the school's systems to safeguard pupils.

When pupils experience difficulties, a range of staff meet to identify how they can help. Leaders engage external services and professionals proactively.

Leaders work with the police to protect pupils from the potential risks of criminal exploitation. They have robust processes which they use when sexual abuse or harassment is reported. They teach pupils how to keep safe, including when using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In a few subjects, teachers do not make sure that some pupils with SEND learn the curriculum effectively. In these subjects, some pupils with SEND do not understand or remember the essential curriculum as well as they could. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is adapted to meet pupils' needs consistently well across every subject.
- The English Baccalaureate is not yet at the heart of the curriculum. This means that some pupils choose to follow a curriculum which is not as ambitious as it could be. Leaders should continue to encourage pupils to opt for a broad range of subjects at key stage 4, particularly in modern foreign languages.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in May 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 113854 |
| Local authority | Dorset |
| Inspection number | 10199760 |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Maintained |
| Age range of pupils | 13 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 963 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 220 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair of governing body | Roy Osborough |
| Headteacher | Philip Jones |
| Website | www.fernup.dorset.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 11 and 12 May 2016 |

Information about this school

- This is an upper school. Pupils are aged between 13 and 19.
- The school uses two registered and one unregistered alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, two governors, including the chair of governors, and representatives from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in science, Spanish and art. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at

samples of pupils' work. Inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils about other subjects too.

- The lead inspector met with the headteacher, the designated safeguarding leader and the link governor for safeguarding to discuss the school's work to safeguard pupils. She scrutinised records kept by leaders.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for parents, Parent View, including free-text comments. They considered responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Lydia Pride, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Colin Logan

Ofsted Inspector

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