

Fortismere School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102156
Local Authority	Haringey
Inspection number	286294
Inspection date	18 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Lynn Bappa

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1646
6th form	437
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jane Farrell
Headteacher	Mr Aydin Onac
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001
School address	Southwing Tetherdown Muswell Hill London N10 1NE
Telephone number	020 8365 4400
Fax number	020 8444 7511

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. A meeting was held between 70-80 parents and carers at the start of the inspection. This was convened in direct response to the high volume of telephone calls to the inspection provider before the inspection commenced.

Description of the school

Fortismere is a larger than average, heavily over-subscribed comprehensive school with a very big sixth form. It serves a generally advantaged community. Most students live within half a mile of the school. It enjoys a high level of ethnic diversity. Although the percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than usually found, the proportion with statements of special educational need is higher than normally found. The school has had Technology College status since 1998. The headteacher has been in post for about a year.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Fortismere is a good school with many outstanding features. It strives successfully to ensure that every student succeeds academically and in other ways. As one parent commented, 'I feel the school offers a very vibrant environment together with a strong ethos on aiming high.' Students are lively and energetic and many hold their views with considerable passion. By the time they leave the school, they are confident young adults with strong academic and personal skills. They have a highly developed sense of right and wrong and are keen to express their individuality.

Academic standards are high and students of all abilities achieve well in both the main school and in the sixth form. Students' consistently good progress is supported by good teaching and by students' very positive attitudes to learning. A key factor is a curriculum that promotes high levels of achievement as well as an enjoyment of learning. The pastoral system is highly effective and students receive excellent guidance on future choices. The school's specialist status in technology has added an extra dimension to students' education. It has enabled the school to enrich its curriculum, extend its community provision well and develop good links with local schools.

The headteacher has a very clear focus on raising standards even further and ensuring that all groups of students do as well as they can. A culture of high expectations is promoted by teachers and senior leaders. There is a tangible sense of determination to do even better. A significant minority of parents, however, believes that the school's stated emphasis on 'academic excellence for all' is at the expense of its reputation for ensuring that students of all abilities achieve as well as they can within a supportive and caring ethos. Inspection findings show that this anxiety is not borne out by the evidence. A key priority, however, must be to mend the damaged relationships with these parents and ensure that they feel their views are listened to and, where appropriate, acted upon.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Standards are high and achievement is good. Almost all students gained a grade A-E GCE A level pass in 2006 and a significantly higher proportion than found nationally achieved the highest grades of A and B. Sixth form students of all abilities achieve well in relation to what is expected of them based on their GCSE performance. Those who join Fortismere from other schools settle quickly and achieve as well as their classmates. The progression rate for Year 11 students to the sixth form is high. This is a good indicator of the esteem in which students view the school. A very high percentage of students leave the sixth form to study in higher education, with an increasing percentage being accepted into top universities. Teaching is good and students have very positive attitudes to learning. Teachers act as very good role models. They have good subject knowledge and plan lessons that challenge and motivate.

Students play a very active part in the life of the school and the local community. They provide literacy support for Year 7 students, for example, and delegates from the school regularly attend events such as the Global Young Leaders conference in the United States. Students feel valued and know that their opinions are taken seriously. The sixth form curriculum is good. The school provides a very good range of relevant GCE A level and AS courses. Provision in vocational subjects is limited, however. This was raised as a concern by a significant minority of parents.

Inspection evidence shows that vocational provision is constantly under review to reflect the needs of students.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good, ensuring that resources are used very well to meet learners' needs. Care, guidance and support for learners are excellent, with very good academic counselling, particularly for students who are struggling, and good opportunities for work shadowing. Students report that they are pleased with the guidance they receive on university choices and career pathways.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve relationships with parents.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Attainment is high and achievement is good. Standards in the national tests for 14 year-olds are consistently significantly above average, with a high proportion of students reaching the top levels. The percentage of students gaining at least 5 grade A*-C GCSE passes is significantly above average and almost one third of students gain A* or A grades. Almost all students have achieved at least one graded pass over the last few years. Taken overall, students make consistently good progress during their time in the school. In some respects, their high standards reflect the fact that they arrive with good levels of competence in the core subjects. The school builds well on these strong foundations through good teaching that encourages students to think for themselves and by creating a community eager to learn. The school makes use of a variety of mentoring and achievement projects to raise the attainment of students from minority ethnic groups and those who might be at risk of under-achieving. These initiatives are bearing good fruit. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress relative to their starting points. The school is on track to meet its challenging targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Students are very proud of their school and thoroughly enjoy the activities it offers. They are confident, articulate and friendly and are very well prepared for their future lives. Relationships are positive and there is a strong community feel. A small number of parents expressed concerns about behaviour. Inspection evidence shows that the great majority of students behave well, although there is occasional low-level disruption in a few lessons. Bullying and racist incidents are rare. When they occur, they are taken seriously and dealt with appropriately. Attendance rates are above average, although there is some lateness to lessons because of site size. There are excellent and wide-ranging opportunities for students to take on responsibilities. Students take these seriously, as is evident in their charitable fundraising work and contributions to the community. The school council, which is represented on the governing body, has an active voice on school matters and has succeeded in changing aspects of school life.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students develop a clear sense of what is right and wrong and show a high degree of respect for others. They show an excellent understanding of the wider worlds of art, music and dance. There is a strong commitment to

racial and social equality and the school's diverse population is seen by students as one of its most valuable features. 'This is a tolerant school' is a view expressed by many. Students show a growing understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle, developing a particularly good awareness of the benefits of exercise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Consistently good teaching enables students of all abilities to achieve well during their time in the school. Students generally enjoy lessons because tasks spark their interest and lessons contain a good variety of activities. Typically, teachers ask challenging questions, foster good relationships and manage students' time and behaviour effectively. Students appreciate teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects and their willingness to provide extra support outside lessons. They develop good levels of self-confidence and are able to express their opinions articulately. Work is marked regularly and helpful information given to let students know how well they are doing and how to improve. In one or two lessons observed by the inspectors, students' learning was less successful because teachers talked for too long and a minority lost concentration.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum meets the needs of all groups of students very effectively, and places a strong emphasis on the development of well-rounded individuals. There are well developed programmes for the promotion of their personal development. Good pathways for students aged 14 and over have been developed, including vocational courses and good opportunities for work experience and enterprise activities.

The curriculum is enhanced by excellent extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Year 9 students from minority ethnic backgrounds, for example, have recently taken part in a workshop with London Underground designed to promote mathematics in the workplace. There is a well-attended Mandarin club and wide range of rich musical opportunities, including jazz and funk bands, a musical trip to Barcelona, a DJ-ing club and a full symphony orchestra. A signing choir has just started in partnership with the neighbouring school for hearing impaired children. This aspect of provision contributes significantly to students' personal development and enjoyment of school life. Gifted and talented students benefit from additional courses and support, such as a Year 10 forensic science day, work experience at the Royal Opera House and university taster courses working with professional musicians.

Technology College status adds a further ingredient to a very rich mix of opportunities. The school is currently applying to gain specialist status in mathematics and music, with languages as a secondary specialism. It is very well poised to change its status in this regard to one that it feels more accurately reflects its community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support of pupils are outstanding and contribute significantly to students' personal development and well-being. The school provides a caring and supportive environment where students can flourish as individuals. Senior staff and pastoral teams offer high quality support to vulnerable students. This is reflected in the growing number of positive intervention programmes that the school provides, good examples being the work done to improve the achievement of Black and Mixed Heritage students and the nurture group that supports the most challenging and vulnerable learners. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust and reviewed on a regular basis. Careers advice is effective and students are equipped to make informed choices about their future education and employment. Most students go on into further education and there are growing links with local colleges to provide support and guidance for those who do not continue into the sixth form at Fortismere.

Academic guidance is good. There is an increasingly effective range of initiatives to support students who are not achieving well enough both in the main school and in the sixth form. A significant minority of parents have expressed criticisms about support for students with learning difficulties and disabilities. Inspection evidence does not support these concerns. Following a review and staffing restructure, provision in this area has improved significantly with the result that good procedures for monitoring the progress of students and analysing their test and examination results have been introduced. The school works closely with the local authority and other external agencies to ensure that students receive well-targeted support that ensures they make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides a very clear vision and direction for the school which is shared and understood by the staff. He is passionate and proud of the school's successes, yet still wants to find ways of doing even better. Recent work on enhancing the role of middle managers has been effective in developing a secure view of the school's performance. As a result all staff make a positive contribution to raising standards and achievement, are clear about their responsibilities and are held to account. The school is very well placed to build further on these improvements and to sustain high standards.

The school works well with a wide range of partners, including local schools and colleges, but needs to do more to improve relationships with parents. Governors have a very good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are committed to making the school even better and provide a very effective balance of support and challenge to the school. Issues relating to the last inspection have been tackled very successfully. There are robust systems in place to ensure efficient management on a day-to-day basis, despite the constraints caused by the split site. The school has an excellent capacity to improve on its already high standards.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

6 June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Fortismere School, London, N10 1NE

Thank you for the warm welcome that you extended to us during the recent inspection of your school. We very much enjoyed discussing with you the work that you were doing and looking at the progress that you were making. You talked enthusiastically about how much you gained from being students at Fortismere School. We thought you would like a summary of the inspection findings, but also hope that you and your parents will take the opportunity to read the whole report.

You attend a good school with many outstanding features and, in no small way, you help to make it such a good place to be. This is because you work hard and enjoy learning. You do very well indeed in your tests and examinations and make good progress during your time in the school. However, it is not just your academic achievements that are impressive. It is also because you have very good attitudes to all that the school offers and play a significant part in the wider life of the school and community. You are developing the skills needed to be excellent participants in higher education, the world of work and in adult life. Yours is an improving school, even though it already achieves high standards. The headteacher and staff lead the school very well indeed and take great care to check how well you are doing. Your teachers help you to develop a love of learning and work very hard to make sure that lessons challenge and motivate you.

Although your school is good it could become even better and so we have identified one main area for improvement. A significant minority of your parents have expressed some serious criticisms about the way in which the school supports students who find learning difficult and about whether the sixth form provides enough opportunities for those of you who want to study vocational courses. We do not fully agree with these criticisms as you will see if you read the whole report. However, we do think that the school needs to improve its relationship with these parents so that they understand the benefits some of the recent changes will bring to all students.

We wish you well and look forward to hearing good things about you all in the future.

Yours sincerely

Dr Lynn Bappa