

Ferryhill Business Enterprise College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114299
Local Authority	Durham
Inspection number	289868
Inspection dates	19–20 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Gill Salter-Smith

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	730
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rev Keith Lumsdon
Headteacher	Mr Philip Bowden
Date of previous school inspection	1 April 2002
School address	Merrington Road Ferryhill County Durham DL17 8RW
Telephone number	01740 651554
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school. The number of students on roll has fallen in recent years, partly due to the closure of the sixth form from autumn 2005. Students' backgrounds are predominantly White British with a very small number from different ethnic backgrounds. There are no students in the early stages of learning English. An average proportion of students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities; the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Need is also average. There is a very small number of students from Traveller backgrounds and four looked after children. The mobility of students is broadly average. The overall social and economic circumstances of the students are below average and a high proportion is eligible for free school meals.

The school has had specialist status for business and enterprise since September 2003. It has been an Extended School since January 2006. The school has gained a number of awards, which include Investors in People, Healthy Schools and an International Schools Award. The headteacher has been in post since January 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Ferryhill Business and Enterprise College is an improving school. It provides a sound quality of education and students' achievement is satisfactory. The school is gaining a good reputation in the local community and most parents appreciate the support their children receive. Standards, though still below average overall, are rising and students reach the national average in a number of indicators. In 2006, the proportion of students leaving the school with five or more A*-C grades at GCSE was broadly average with many students achieving well in vocational courses. A history of underachievement in English and mathematics is being tackled successfully by the school but this means that when English and mathematics are included in the five GCSEs, the results fall below the national average. Students' achievement in Key Stage 3 is good overall.

The school has successfully concentrated on creating a positive ethos for learning. Students have responded well to a consistent approach to managing behaviour and consequently behaviour is good. Most students feel safe and secure and enjoy school. A good curriculum, in Key Stage 4 especially, means that students follow courses that interest them and in which they are successful. The school's specialist status for business and enterprise and the extended school have helped to improve provision for all students. An effective school council reflects students' good contribution to their own community. It has been closely involved in promoting healthy lifestyles. Learning co-ordinators, in a newly developed role, work very effectively with other key staff and the learning support unit to provide good care and support for students, especially those deemed more vulnerable. Specialist teachers provide invaluable support to students when they transfer from primary to secondary school.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher, well supported by the recently strengthened senior leadership team, has brought about significant improvement in standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The school has an accurate view of its performance based on good systems to check on students' performance and provision in classrooms. These have resulted in support for, and improvement in, learning and teaching in targeted areas. However, teaching and learning are not yet consistently good and are satisfactory. Some lessons lack variety and stimulation and not all students are challenged fully. The school is aware of the need to develop a more co-ordinated approach to improving students' basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) across all subjects. There is good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics and improve students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy across subjects.
- Develop consistently good teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers make better use of assessment information to match learning to students' needs and to extend the more able
 - increasing the variety of learning activities in lessons to ensure that all students are stimulated and challenged
 - improving the guidance teachers give to students so that they understand what they need to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students' achievement is satisfactory and they make satisfactory progress from a below average starting point. By age 16, students' overall standards are below average but are approaching national average levels in some areas. Standards are rising significantly. The school ethos, a more relevant curriculum, better support for individual students and improved teaching have all helped to raise standards. Staffing difficulties in some subjects have been largely overcome.

In 2006, the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE was broadly average and the school exceeded its challenging target. Many students achieved well in vocational courses. When English and mathematics are included, results were below average and the school did not meet this target. Many students reached their personal target grades in English and mathematics but not enough students gained both qualifications. Lower attaining students did not achieve as well as they should in English. Students' weak literacy and numeracy skills hold back their overall standards. The proportion of students gaining five or more A*-G grades at GCSE was below average. The curriculum has since been adjusted to enable more students to gain at least five or more GCSE or equivalent qualifications this year and an increased proportion are on course to do so.

At Key Stage 3, standards are broadly average in mathematics and science and below average in English. Standards and students' achievement are improving steadily. In 2006, the school exceeded its challenging targets in mathematics and science but not in English.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make similar progress to other students. Girls' standards in English are generally higher than boys', following the national pattern. Differences in the achievement of girls and boys vary from year to year, following no clear pattern. Students identified as eligible for free school meals did not achieve as well as they should in 2006. A number of these students experienced significant personal and social difficulties in their final years in school which, despite the school's best efforts to support them, adversely affected their achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good. Conduct around the school and in lessons is good. Students have responded positively to a revised behaviour policy and the restructuring of the school day. Attendance is slightly below average. It is improving because of the significant amount of work done to encourage good attendance. Some absences condoned by parents continue to hold this back.

Students' commitment to the school and their own achievement is good. They appreciate rewards offered by local employers and the personal support provided by the school and other agencies. Students have positive attitudes to school. They feel safe and enjoy being there. Most students and parents consider that their concerns about a small amount of low level bullying are well managed by the school.

Students with low self esteem and those considered more vulnerable are very well supported and make good progress in their personal development and achievement. Successful strategies have been used as examples of good practice regionally and the school has contributed at a national level to the debate about maintaining the emotional health of young people.

A proactive student council helps to promote healthy lifestyles, advising, for example, on ways of encouraging healthy eating. Students take on other responsibilities, such as peer mentoring, very well indeed. Fund raising, community involvement and international links are all strong aspects of their personal development. However, students do not have a broad enough understanding of cultural diversity within this country. Workplace skills are well developed by activities promoted through the school's business and enterprise specialist status. However, the key skills of literacy and numeracy need further development across the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are examples of outstanding teaching, but the overall quality of teaching is not yet resulting in consistently good progress. A consistent approach to planning across the school means that most lessons are well structured and students are clear about what they will be doing in lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge enabling them to explain difficult concepts and recognise students' misunderstandings. Behaviour is well managed so that a positive atmosphere conducive to learning is prevalent in most lessons. Information and communication technology (ICT) is being used increasingly effectively to support learning both in class work and homework.

Assessment of students' progress is frequent and accurate but this information is not used to ensure that work in all lessons is well matched to students' different needs. Consequently, in some lessons higher attaining students are not fully challenged. Most students know what their target level or grade is. They do not always understand what they should do to improve their work because this is not always made clear to them. A few lessons are dull and lack variety with students having little direct involvement in learning activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and contributes well to meeting individual and local needs. It is regularly reviewed and modified to assure its effectiveness.

Specialist college status has helped the school to provide a broad and outstanding range of vocational and work related opportunities in which students achieve well. A very good range of routes through to further education and training beyond age 16 is provided.

Personal, social and health education and citizenship contribute well to students' personal development. The enterprise element of the curriculum provides good opportunities to develop social, personal and problem solving skills which prepare students well for the world of work. Students are particularly enthusiastic about the 'Big Learning Days' which provide more time to follow-through an aspect of the curriculum. The school is developing provision to improve students' spiritual development and their awareness of our culturally diverse society.

Students benefit from a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities, including sporting activities, and many take advantage of the very well organised additional study support. The school does much to promote healthy lifestyles. The school has begun to develop a more co-ordinated approach to improving students' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support provided by the school are good. All staff have received child protection training. Procedures for ensuring students' safety are in place and safeguarding checks more than meet current requirements. Student support services are very effective and have been strengthened as a result of specialist and extended school status. Students are especially well supported in their move from primary to secondary school. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities and those with low aspirations receive high levels of effective support. These students are identified early and effective arrangements help them improve their performance and self-confidence. Students feel confident about approaching staff if they are anxious or have a problem. Adult counsellors and trained peer mentors guide younger students in their studies and provide personal support. The recently developed role of learning co-ordinators ensures that students' academic achievement is tracked closely and underachievement is identified quickly and support is put in place to tackle the problem.

Guidance on subject choices is good at the move from Key Stage 3 into Key Stage 4 and from the school into the next stage of education or employment.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads the school very effectively. With the active support of a recently expanded senior leadership team, he has accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the school. A realistic agenda for improvement is in place, which is focused on improving the quality of provision and on raising standards. The leadership team are taking appropriate action to tackle weaknesses in provision and standards; for example, through close monitoring of the work of departments, improved curriculum opportunities, and better tracking of students' academic and personal development. These initiatives, together with significant improvements in behaviour management, have a positive impact on students' test and examination results. The school improvement plan identifies key priorities. More precise success indicators and timescales will enable the school to gauge more accurately the impact of its actions.

Subject leaders have assumed responsibility for their performance and are enthusiastic in their work to drive the school forward. Their monitoring is regular and well carried out effectively. Leaders' plans are well-founded and identify the training, support and professional development needed to strengthen performance further.

Governors are very supportive. They are aware that the school needs to improve and have a secure appreciation of their role in checking on the school's performance. They know the school well through active links to subject areas and they provide effective support for the headteacher, students, and staff. They presided over the school's successful application for specialist status. Legal responsibilities are met apart from ensuring that all students experience a daily act of collective worship.

Day to day management is good. Financial management is astute and value for money is satisfactory. Progress since the last inspection has been very good; although more needs to be done to raise standards in literacy and numeracy. The school is well placed to improve further.

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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
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
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	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

23 April 2007

Dear Students

Ferryhill Business Enterprise College, County Durham, DL17 8RW

Thank you for making the inspection team welcome in your school. We enjoyed meeting and talking to many of you and seeing you at work in lessons.

Your school is improving, enabling most of you to achieve the standards of which you are capable in many subjects. GCSE results and Key Stage 3 test results have improved significantly in recent years and many of you do well in vocational courses. You have responded well to a more consistent approach to managing behaviour. There is an atmosphere that is conducive to learning in classrooms and your behaviour is generally good. The vast majority of you are developing into mature and responsible young people. It was good to see the peer counsellors at work with younger students and hear about the important work done by the school council.

Your headteacher, well supported by the staff, has worked hard to make improvements and the school's specialist status has helped. You now have a good choice of courses to follow at age 14 that will help you to move into relevant education and training at age 16. You are all well supported by the learning co-ordinators particularly at the time of moving from primary to secondary school.

We have asked the school to continue to improve in some important areas.

- To raise standards in English and mathematics at GCSE.
- To improve your literacy, numeracy and ICT skills through work in all subjects.
- To make teaching consistently good by ensuring that you are all challenged in lessons and stimulated to do your best.
- To make sure that you know exactly what you must do to improve in all your subjects.

I hope that you continue to enjoy the rest of your time at Ferryhill and I wish you all good luck for your futures.

Yours sincerely

Gillian Salter-Smith (Mrs)

Lead Inspector