



William De Ferrers School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 115343
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 290212
Inspection dates 23–24 January 2007
Reporting inspector Barbara Hilton

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Trinity Square
School category	Foundation		South Woodham Ferrers, South Woodham Ferrers Chelmsford, Essex CM3 5JU
Age range of pupils	11–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01245 326326
Number on roll (school)	1836	Fax number	01245 321996
Number on roll (6th form)	275		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr A J Graham
		Headteacher	Mr D Parry
Date of previous school inspection	15 April 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	23–24 January 2007	290212

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

William de Ferrers is a very large and popular school which gained specialist sports college status in 2004. Students come mainly from local primary schools, with a significant and growing minority travelling from the surrounding area. Nearly all students are white British, with small proportions from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. All speak English fluently and, for a few, this is in addition to the language spoken at home. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is much lower than the national average. The proportions with learning difficulties and disabilities, and those with more pronounced levels of needs, are much lower than in most schools. The attainment of students starting in Year 7 is above average in most years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

William de Ferrers School is a good school. Its overall effectiveness is good, as judged by the school. Leadership and management are strong and engender a sense of purpose and respect for others so that all feel valued. Students enjoy their education greatly. The central location in South Woodham Ferrers is a distinctive feature. Links with the community contribute exceptionally well to students' personal development, which is good. The care, support and guidance provided are good, especially pastoral support. In the words of a parent, 'Pastoral care is excellent. I am indebted to the key staff who have guided, encouraged and rewarded my children to become the independent, rounded and fun young people they are today.'

Teaching and learning are good. Students of all backgrounds progress well and those who are vulnerable or have learning difficulties and disabilities are known well and helped to keep up with the rest. The school values achievement in a broad range of subjects up to GCSE and its success is evident in the high proportion of pupils who gain five or more good passes including English and mathematics. Students achieve well. Overall results are consistently and significantly higher than national averages and improved in 2006, although the proportion of the very highest grades (A* /A) was just average. Teachers build effectively on students' understanding. In the best lessons, activities provide extra challenge to capture the interest of higher ability students and move them on in their learning, but this practice is not consistent across the school.

The curriculum is good. It is broad and balanced across Years 7–9 including choice of two languages out of French, German and Spanish and, as a club activity, Chinese. In part this variety is possible because of the size of the school. However, the subjects offered are mostly traditional and academic in older years with few opportunities for students to follow vocational courses. Those offered in the sixth form are successful. Extra activities, in addition to lessons, are extensive and popular.

Sports college status has significantly strengthened the curriculum and the participation of students of all abilities and interests in physical activities. The needs of students with behavioural, medical or physical needs are well met, including participation by a significant proportion in out-of-school activities. Sports college initiatives develop many links with community education. Teaching in physical education is good. Although most sports college targets have been met, the impact of specialist status on standards across the school is not marked, and is an area for further development.

The school evaluates its work thoroughly. Areas for improvement identified at the last inspection have been tackled effectively. The value for money it provides and capacity for further improvement are good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form and its curriculum are satisfactory, and improving. It offers a wide range of mainly academic AS and A2-level subjects in which results and achievement are

average, overall. In 2006, results and achievement on the small number of advanced-level vocational courses were above average.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. A particular strength is the way in which teachers encourage and promote students' independence in learning. Students' personal development is good; they mature into responsible young adults. Virtually all stay for the full length of their courses. Arrangements for their care, guidance and support are good. Leadership and management and value for money in the sixth form are satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the standards and results of higher ability students by providing more challenging work which accelerates their learning.
- Strengthen the impact of specialist sports college status on standards across the curriculum.
- Broaden the range of courses for students in Years 10 and above.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Standards are high and achievement is good up to the end of Year 11. In lessons, students of all abilities and backgrounds progress well, including those who are vulnerable or have learning difficulties and disabilities. Standards generally match or exceed expectations.

Students achieve consistently well up to the end of Year 9. Their results in national tests in English, mathematics and science are high. Emphasis placed by the school on standards and achievement in these key subjects is reflected in results for GCSE 5A*-C grades including English and mathematics, which are considerably better than the average nationally. Generally high results are also achieved in art, design and technology subjects and the humanities, including religious education. All students take a certificated course in physical education in Years 10 and 11; their GCSE full course physical education results are broadly average. In 2006, results were low in small groups taking business studies, economics and electronics because of staffing difficulties, now resolved.

The school makes effective use of challenging targets to help raise student's standards, as shown in the improvement by boys in 2006, compared with 2005. Virtually every student achieves at least one pass at GCSE, which reflects well on the achievement of the least able. In 2006, the proportion of the very highest grades (A*/A) just matched the national average and there is scope for increasing these by setting more challenging work for the most able.

In the sixth form, virtually all students pass their AS and A2-level subjects. In 2006, just over half the grades were at the highest grades (A and B). Students achieved particularly well in art, history and psychology. Results for advanced-level vocational

courses in child care and travel and tourism were also very good. Generally girls' results are better than boys'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development is good. They clearly enjoy school and have very good attitudes to learning. Behaviour in lessons is very good and individuals are courteous and friendly to visitors. They move purposefully through the extensive buildings, resulting at times in congestion in corridors, and lapse in consideration for others. Students say that the school deals effectively with the little bullying that occurs, and they can always find someone to help with any problems. Attendance is satisfactory and improving. The school is endeavouring to change perceptions about holidays in term time among the relatively few families who interrupt their children's education for this reason.

Students' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Their cultural development is very good, as shown in outstanding displays of art. The programme of personal, social and health education, which includes citizenship, helps them to stay safe and healthy, prepare for adult life and understand how they can contribute in the wider world. They eat healthily and exercise well, although support for physical activity is curtailed in the sixth form where there is no programme of physical education lessons for all.

Relationships are very good among students of all backgrounds and abilities. They are proud of their school and its cohesion with the local community. They readily take responsibility. Sixth-formers are supportive of younger students. Students work well with others through, for example, the sports leadership programme and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

A small number of students feel their views are not always taken seriously enough by the school council and it is not clear to them how their views matter to the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teaching and learning are good. No inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection. This confirms the school's self-evaluation. The school's track record of good teaching is underpinned by good relationships, students' enjoyment of learning, their positive attitudes to work and their good conduct. In order to raise further the quality of teaching and learning the school acknowledges that more rigour and consistency in assessment and its use in planning lessons is required. Systems are

developing to secure this. All students know how well they are doing. They know their targets, levels and grades and their progress is regularly checked.

Teachers have high expectations and students are willing to take risks, to experiment and to think for themselves. Teachers build effectively on what most students know, understand and can do because their subject knowledge is good. Students respond enthusiastically to activities such as role-play and become deeply involved in discussion and practical activities. The most effective teachers challenge and extend students' understanding through skilful and probing questioning, and show how much they value students' responses. Many teachers use new technology effectively to enhance learning. Teaching assistants provide good support for students who are vulnerable or have learning difficulties or disabilities, and monitor their progress carefully. Teaching in the sixth form is good. A particular strength is the way in which teachers encourage and support students' independent learning.

Teaching observed was particularly strong where activities were modified carefully so that all students were challenged to achieve their potential. However, this practice is inconsistent across the school and teachers do not plan sufficiently well to stretch higher attaining students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum in the main school is good. It is broad, balanced and successfully meets the needs and aspirations of students and their parents. A good range of subjects is provided in Years 7–9, including opportunity to study two modern foreign languages, take separate lessons in drama and in information and communication technology. Students in Years 10 and 11 select from a range of both academic and some vocational options. Participation and enjoyment in sports is cultivated through a good range of sports courses. Alternative opportunities, planned in partnership with other institutions, meet the needs of a small group of less academic students and those who benefit from a more practical approach to learning.

Many students gain confidence and new skills through involvement in an extensive range of extra-curricular activities. Preparation for the next stage in their life is good. Older students appreciate their work experience in Year 11 as well as a range of business and enterprise activities, and opportunities to visit universities.

The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory. It meets well the needs of those students who stay on. Provision is mainly academic and at an advanced level. It is limited, bearing in mind the comprehensive intake of the school. Structured provision for all students in religious education and physical education is inadequate, although they have opportunities to participate in conferences and a good range of extra-curricular initiatives.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The care, guidance and support provided are good. Teachers are committed to helping and supporting students, led well by very strong pastoral teams. Both students and parents understand the system of academic monitoring. In addition, individual departments use a range of systems to track students' progress. However, the separate systems are not yet consistent enough to provide an overview of each student's progress. Students receive good guidance on making choices about their futures.

Arrangements to identify and support vulnerable students are effective and involve outside agencies where appropriate. Students with additional learning and behavioural needs are identified prior to joining the school. Procedures for the protection of students are properly in place. Systems to ensure their health and safety are good. The school works effectively with other organisations to promote their well-being.

The use of time at morning and afternoon registration is too variable, with little evidence of a common programme across each year group. Academic tutor groups, newly introduced into the sixth form, have strengthened arrangements at this stage.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school is strongly led by the headteacher and deputy, well supported by the senior team. The school values achievement in a broad range of subjects up to GCSE and is successful in this, which prepares students well for their future lives.

Departments monitor and track the progress of students but in this large school they differ in the rigour of their systems. In preparation for GCSE the focus has been on helping students reach at least grade C with relatively less emphasis on the very highest grades. The monitoring of results is well established and used effectively in setting targets for improvement. Senior staff and heads of departments evaluate work in their areas effectively. Through consultative arrangements, all staff contribute to planning developments.

The sixth form is managed satisfactorily as part of the school overall but the subjects offered are mainly traditional and academic. Relationships with other institutions are good and the school is contributing to local discussions about strengthening the 14–19 curriculum. Leadership of the school's specialism as a sports college is satisfactory, a strength being the richness of opportunities provided. The school is placing emphasis on the impact of specialist status on standards across the school.

Governance is good. Governors work harmoniously with the school and helpfully challenge it in planning developments. They support the school in maintaining its positive climate and ethos of equal opportunities. They ensure the school uses its

resources and budget wisely to obtain good value for money. Buildings are well maintained with good access for the physically handicapped but in places are very cramped, including the base for supportive learning and the dining area. Stable staffing and a town-centre location foster unusually close working links and shared resources with the community.

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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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	2	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	1	
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	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

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?	2	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
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	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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

29 January 2007

Dear Students

The School Council, William de Ferrers School, Trinity Square, South Woodham Ferrers, Chelmsford, Essex. CM3 6LY

Thank you for your friendly and helpful approach during our recent inspection of your school. You were excellent guides around the buildings. We appreciated our discussions with you. I am writing to let you know what we thought about your school.

We found your school to be good, and the sixth form satisfactory. The location, central to South Woodham Ferrers, is distinctive. Many community links enrich the curriculum and out-of-school activities and benefit your personal development. The quality of care, guidance and support is good. You enjoy school greatly. Emphasis placed on achievement across a broad range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science, helps you to achieve well up to GCSE. Results are high. Your learning is good because teaching and the curriculum are good. In the sixth form, while the curriculum is well suited to those who stay on, it is restricted bearing in mind the full range of interests of students in the main school. The school's initiatives as a specialist sports college have enriched greatly the range of sporting activities. These strengths are possible because leadership and management are good, and overall direction by Mr Parry and his senior colleagues is particularly good.

Even in a good school there are aspects which can be better. We have asked the school to plan more carefully activities to help those of you who are ready to learn faster. We have also asked that the school builds on experience as a specialist college to raise standards across the school. Lastly, we have asked that a wider range of courses is provided for older students. You can help teachers to raise standards further by always concentrating in lessons, and working hard to reach your targets.

I and my colleague inspectors hope you continue to enjoy school so much and wish you all the best in the future.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Hilton

Lead Inspector