



# Sir Frederic Osborn School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 117525  
**Local Authority** HERTFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 290862  
**Inspection dates** 17–18 January 2007  
**Reporting inspector** Philippa Francis HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Herns Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community		Welwyn Garden City
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Hertfordshire AL7 2AF
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0844 477 2515
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	976	<b>Fax number</b>	0844 477 2526
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	98		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Mary Calvert
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Susan Lewis
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 January 2003		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	17–18 January 2007	290862

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Sir Frederic Osborn is a middle-sized school with a small but growing sixth form. The school recruits from a wide catchment area which includes Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average and their socio-economic backgrounds are generally favourable, although over a quarter of students come from the most deprived wards in the area. The majority of students are of White British heritage and the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is very small. The numbers who are eligible for free school meals are lower than average, as are the numbers with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 3**

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory and improving, in line with the school's own evaluation. It has moved from a position of serious underachievement to a far stronger position with an increasingly good reputation because of good leadership and management. The headteacher has successfully refocused the school and considerably strengthened and clarified its direction towards raising achievement. Much has been done to create a positive and inclusive learning environment, despite the many shortcomings of the school's buildings and site. Students' achievements are now satisfactory because, in the current year, they are making much better progress and are in line to meet their targets. Standards have risen significantly, especially at Key Stage 4, but results at GCSE are still exceptionally low. Almost all of the weak teaching that contributed to the slow progress made by students in recent years has been eradicated and teaching is now satisfactory with some very good teaching, especially in the school's specialist areas of sports and drama. However, students are still underperforming in science because provision is not yet strong in this core area.

Students develop good personal and social skills and behave well. They have much more productive relationships with their peers and teachers. The school is working hard to raise levels of self-esteem and to promote high aspirations for its students; evidence in lessons and around the school shows that this work is starting to bear fruit. The care, guidance and support for students is good, especially because systems for identifying and supporting students at risk of underachieving are now fully effective. The curriculum is satisfactory and meets the needs of students; it is good in the sixth form, where work with a local consortium has provided a very full range of study opportunities for students. However, provision in citizenship is underdeveloped.

The school demonstrates good capacity to improve through its track record of successful actions to improve provision and raise standards, albeit from a very low base. Self-evaluation is very self-critical and makes good use of performance data. The resulting school improvement plan is skilfully focussed on what needs to be done. Self-evaluation of the sixth form, especially of achievement and standards, is less effective. Financial management is sound and the school provides satisfactory value for money.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form is an increasingly popular choice and almost a third of Year 11 students progressed in 2006. A high percentage of students come from backgrounds with little experience of higher education and their aspirations are often low. Standards have improved, but results remain well below average, especially at the higher grades. Students make satisfactory progress and most reach or exceed their target grades. The care, support and guidance provided for them, including in making the transition from the main school, is good. Teaching is satisfactory and most helps students to

gain independent learning skills. They enjoy the sixth form, especially learning in a mature environment. They provide good role models for younger students.

The curriculum, offered through a local consortium which includes a further education college, matches students' interests well and offers a broad range of vocational and academic options. The recent revision of entry requirements and the introduction of intermediate level courses mean that, in contrast to previous years, students are always placed on appropriate courses in relation to their prior attainment and have opportunities to progress. Both retention and attendance rates are very high and an increasing number of students progress to higher education.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Raise standards and improve the progress made by all students through improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Strengthen the provision in science and citizenship.
- Improve self-evaluation in the sixth form.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

The overall level of achievement in the main school is satisfactory, although the standards reached at the end of Key Stage 4 remain exceptionally low in relation to students' prior attainment. This judgement matches the school's own evaluation of this aspect. However, considerable improvement has taken place in nearly all results in 2006. The percentage of students gaining more than five GCSEs at grades A\* to C improved from 30% to 43% and significantly more students gained at least one qualification. Standards reached at Key Stage 3 are in line with the national average and have also generally improved over recent years.

Between Years 7 and 9, students make satisfactory progress. However, the progress made by students who completed Key Stage 4 in 2006 was well below average, despite considerable improvement compared with 2005, and a significant number of students underachieved, particularly girls of middle ability. The small number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also underachieved significantly, especially those identified for school action. The progress being made by students in the current academic year is generally satisfactory, as demonstrated by the learning that takes place in lessons and the school's records of progress against targets. Evidence from mock examinations and school assessments shows that targets set for Key Stage 4 external examinations in 2007 are well within reach and effective extra support is being effectively provided where needed.

## Personal development and well-being

### Grade: 2

#### Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development is good. They show loyalty and affection for their school and most have very positive attitudes to their work. The majority behave well, although a few can be challenging or misbehave in lessons that lack interest. These students are well managed and sensitive structures are in place to promote their involvement in their learning and help their social integration. As a result, exclusions have decreased. Students value their roles within the school, especially the work of the school council, which is greatly respected. Peer mentors work well to resolve conflicts and problems between students at an early stage. Students feel they have a valuable role to play in how their school works and their views are wanted. Attendance has improved and is satisfactory and reflects the strong emphasis placed on regular and punctual attendance.

Students are aware of the value of healthy living and what needs to be done to enjoy a healthy life style. Spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is good, leading to a strong community ethos in the school and encouragement of respect for others. Roles and responsibilities in school contribute to students' maturity and equip them soundly for life after school. However, their communication and numerical skills are not yet strong enough, an area that the school has recognised and is working hard to improve.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

#### Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership across the school knows the strengths and weaknesses of teaching. Weak teaching has been improved effectively although not completely eradicated and the amount of good or better teaching is increasing. In most lessons, students now make at least satisfactory progress. There remains, however, a legacy of underachievement brought about by weak teaching in the past. Consequently, students have not made the progress that they should, nor attained the standards of which they are capable.

Most teachers have consistently high expectations of students and have successfully developed a positive climate for learning, rigour in their teaching and good relationships with students. This allows them to use a variety of approaches, often practical in nature, to involve students in their learning. Students anticipate a good experience when they enter these teachers' classrooms and work diligently. A minority of teachers still tend to 'deliver' lessons to students, who become passive recipients and struggle to maintain their concentration. Low-level behavioural issues then tend to arise which impede learning.

Good professional development, support and challenge work well in developing a culture in which teachers share skills or are challenged to improve. Further work is needed to ensure that teachers are addressing the wide range of students' needs, particularly the higher attaining students. Learning is not always extended through sharply focused questioning. Assessment is effective but homework is not yet set consistently. Improved use of assessment data means that teachers now have good information about where students are and the progress that they should make.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum provides a broad range of courses and meets statutory requirements. Courses have a clear progression into post-16 opportunities. Many students have low academic and personal self-esteem. A strength of the school's provision is that it provides a good range of opportunities for students to achieve a sense of success, particularly but not exclusively in the performing arts and sports. The school is attempting to minimise disaffection amongst older students by freeing up the option system to ensure that courses match their needs and aspirations and provide a range of vocational and academic pathways. There are good enrichment opportunities. Currently the curriculum allows students to make satisfactory progress, but the provision for higher attaining students needs strengthening and the aspirations of girls raising still further. Health education is good as are the work-related opportunities. The school parliament and year councils are effective but the planning of citizenship lessons needs to be improved.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

The school provides a secure and supportive environment in which students are well known and valued as individuals. They are encouraged to behave in a sensible way and follow safety guidelines and the majority do this well. Child protection arrangements are good and medical care for those unwell is well organised. A number of well-staffed specialist support facilities, such as counselling, provide a very good additional layer of care and guidance which is sensibly used by students. The personal, social and health education programme is well planned to meet the needs of different year groups. Students receive good guidance on their option choices and on career plans. Monitoring of progress and academic support have improved and are good. A range of data is increasingly well used to set clear targets for students and they are very clear about what they need to do to improve their work. The intervention programme is especially valuable and now identifies quickly and supports students at risk of underperformance well.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

#### Grade for sixth form: 2

Since her appointment two years ago, the headteacher has provided the much needed strategic vision and drive to improve the school. Well supported by a developing senior leadership team and good governing body, she has helped to create a positive and supportive school ethos and provided a much clearer focus on raising standards and improving teaching and learning, assessment and subject leadership. Actions put in place are now leading to real improvements in students' achievement, although there is still more to be done to ensure students reach their full potential. Staff morale is high and the views of all stakeholders are taken very seriously.

Staffing in the school is now far more stable. The school no longer relies on considerable numbers of temporary or less effective teachers. Subject leaders value their greater participation in the leadership of the school and readily accept their responsibility to improve standards and provision. This has resulted in steadily improving practice and more careful monitoring of staff and student performance across the different subject departments. Furthermore, the expansion of the senior leadership team is now helping strengthen strategic planning and development, with more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of provision across the school including very effective implementation of performance management. However staffing in science is not yet sufficient and is preventing improved achievement. Much of the school improvement has been supported by an effective programme of staff development that has included middle leadership training, coaching to improve classroom practice, assessment and child protection.

Following the last inspection, the governors recognised the need to improve their organisation and performance and now play a key role in the monitoring and development of the school. Governors successfully appointed a headteacher who, in their words, 'knew what high standards were and how to get there'. They are now closely involved in the strategic development of the school including its proposal to become a specialist sports college. Governors also have strong links with particular subjects and resource areas through their regular visits.

Financial management is good. The headteacher and governors worked together successfully to overcome a substantial school deficit aided by the local authority. More recently, they have established a clear, equitable and cost effective staffing structure that has enabled the school to work within its budget. The school follows good practice in seeking best value in its contracting and uses its resources effectively. However, the lack of covered walkways and poor condition of some buildings and pathways hinder efforts to provide the best possible learning environment.



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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	3
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	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	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	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

22 January 2007

Dear Students,

Sir Frederic Osborn School, Hens Lane, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL7 2AF

As you know, your school was recently inspected and this letter is to tell you about the findings of the inspection team. Firstly, however, I would like to thank you all for the cooperation and courtesy inspectors received during their time at your school. We enjoyed meeting you and found your comments and feedback most helpful.

We found the overall effectiveness of your school to be satisfactory because you are well cared for and receive good support and your achievements are satisfactory and improving rapidly. Your school is well led by the headteacher and managers and the governors are very effective in their role. They know how important it is to continue to improve the progress you make in school, which has been too slow in recent years, and the results you achieve in examinations, which, although improved, are still far too low at Key Stage 4. You all need to work hard and help your teachers in their efforts to support you to do better.

The lessons you have are satisfactory and many are better than this, especially in sport and drama. You told us how much you enjoy these lessons. We have asked your school to improve all lessons, and especially in science and citizenship, to match the quality of the best. Your teachers are already starting to share good practice and develop their teaching skills still further. Your behaviour is good, although just a very few of you still disrupt lessons and spoil things for yourselves and others. Attendance has improved but still needs to be better. The few of you who have poor attendance must resolve this and attend regularly to give yourselves the best chance to succeed.

The sixth form is becoming more popular and is satisfactory. Standards reached are still below average, especially for higher grades, but you make satisfactory progress in meeting targets. You develop well in terms of personal and social skills and are prepared well for higher education or other progression. We have asked your school to make a more detailed self-evaluation of the sixth form to make sure that areas for improvement are effectively identified.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Francis HMI

Lead inspector