



The Ferrers Specialist Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 122090
Local Authority Northamptonshire
Inspection number 292314
Inspection dates 7–8 March 2007
Reporting inspector Anne Taylor HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Queensway
School category	Community		Higham Ferrers
Age range of pupils	11–18		Rushden NN10 8LF
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01933 313411
Number on roll (school)	1071	Fax number	01933 410755
Number on roll (6th form)	147		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Chris Kirk
		Headteacher	Rosemary Litawski
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2002		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–18	7–8 March 2007	292314

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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

The Ferrers Specialist Arts College is an oversubscribed school with specialist status in the performing arts. It is an international school with links across continents and a Training School and teacher training provider for graduate teachers. Attainment on entry to the school is around national average, very few students are of minority ethnic heritage and the proportion with learning difficulties and disabilities is around the national average. The proportion of learners in receipt of free school meals is below the national average although a high proportion of sixth form students are in receipt of an education maintenance allowance.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school is good with outstanding features. National test results at the end of Year 9 are now above average. The proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades at GCSE has risen to around the national average and those achieving five A* to C grades including mathematics and English is above the national average. However, pass rates in art and information and communication technology (ICT) are below the national average. Students make the progress expected of them in Years 9 and 11 based on their starting points when they joined the school.

Leadership and management are good. The principal provides clear direction and effective management at all levels and has brought about steady improvement, although there is underperformance in some curriculum areas, especially Art and ICT. Other managers feel empowered to take decisions and are accountable for performance in their areas of responsibility. The school's commitment to the continuing professional development of all staff is outstanding. The school has outstanding partnership arrangements. Performing arts college, training school and international school status have been particularly effective in developing classroom practice and extending the curriculum and opportunities for personal development. The school provides good value for money and has good capacity to improve.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers plan lessons carefully to develop continuity in learning. Students apply themselves to their work well, although occasional instances of inappropriate behaviour detract from learning in some lessons. Insufficient challenge results in more able students not achieving their full potential in some subjects, especially in Years 7 to 9. The quality of the curriculum is good and provision for extended learning and activities out of hours is outstanding. Broad and balanced programmes in all years are enhanced through cultural opportunities related to the performing arts. All students take a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11 and a GCSE course in philosophy and ethics in Year 10, reflecting the international links and strong humanities provision of the school. At all levels, the current lack of availability of ICT resources within subject areas constrains the curriculum and too little use of ICT hinders the development of students' independent learning.

The students' personal development and well-being are good, with outstanding features. Students know how to live healthily. The school has held the Healthy Schools Award for several years. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding and this is reflected by a recent citizenship award. Students are encouraged, for example, to act as peer advocates, take part in 'student voice' discussion groups and take on responsibilities for events such as parents' evenings and staff interviews. They feel the school provides a supportive environment for learning and that they have a trusted adult they can turn to should they feel vulnerable. Care, guidance and support are good. Experienced staff in charge of year groups, teachers and tutors know the students' personal circumstances and difficulties very well. The support of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is good.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form is good with outstanding aspects. The strong sixth form consortium provides for a wide range of courses to meet students' needs and aspirations including some vocational courses. Consortium arrangements enable the specialist staff and resources of each school to be used. Sixth form provision at the school is well managed by the head of sixth form. Staff who teach the same subjects across the consortium work together to share good practice. There are good links between managers and governors across the consortium to monitor quality.

Achievement is good and standards are above average. The majority of sixth form students achieve challenging targets in academic subjects and their average points score at GCSE A level is above the national average. Achievement in vocational subjects is around the national average. Students' personal development and well-being are good with outstanding features. Some students participate in a sixth form committee which arranges fund raising events. The well established community leadership programme results in all sixth form students engaging in activity to develop social awareness and responsibility. There is a relevant and appropriate programme of personal, social and health education. Students act as role models for younger students. Year 7 students speak very positively of Year 12 'Buddies' who they find very supportive and approachable. Teaching in the sixth form is good. Strong relationships and planning encourage students to reflect on their learning, leading to a good climate for learning. However, in some subjects students do not take enough responsibility for their own learning.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding in the sixth form. Excellent communication is in place between the schools in the consortium to track progress in individual subjects. The personal tutor conducts detailed reviews with each student every half term and there is effective tracking against minimum target grades. Students are offered a high level of academic and pastoral guidance through regular tutorials. Students feel very well guided and supported. The Careermark Gold Award reflects the positive impact of sixth form induction activities, preparation for university applications and workplace support.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the focus on information and communication technology across the school to ensure students develop the skills and gain the qualifications necessary for their future economic well-being.
- Ensure that more able students are sufficiently challenged and achieve to their full potential.
- Address the inappropriate behaviour of a minority of students which hinders the progress of others.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average overall. The attainment of students on entry is broadly average. Test results have improved in English and mathematics at the end of Year 9 and are now above the national average. Results for science are around the national average. At GCSE the proportion achieving five A* to C grades has risen significantly in 2006 to around the national average and the proportion of students achieving five A* to C grades in mathematics and English is above the national average because of significant improvements in the pass rates in both mathematics and English GCSE. Very few students leave Year 11 with no qualifications and the school goes to great lengths to support some learners who are at risk of not achieving. The progress of students is broadly in line with expectations in Year 9. However, more needs to be done to raise the achievement of higher attaining students especially in mathematics and science. Students make good progress in Years 10 and 11, which is an improving situation. Whilst results in specialist subjects have improved, the school has not yet met all its specialist school targets, but is on course to do so in 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good with outstanding features. Students enjoy coming to school and demonstrate their commitment by positive attitudes and good levels of attendance. Behaviour in lessons is predominantly good. However, a minority of students and parents expressed concern over inappropriate behaviour which slows the progress of others. Most students feel safe and report that there are good procedures in place to deal with bullying.

The school has worked hard to develop a wide range of support strategies, including working with outside agencies. Students know how to make healthy lifestyle choices relating to sexual health, smoking, and alcohol and drug abuse. They participate enthusiastically in sport and support the schools' healthy eating policy. The school provides a very wide range of opportunities for the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, enhanced by its international school status. Students are encouraged to develop into mature and confident young adults with a sense of responsibility and concern for others. They work hard for charities, both locally and abroad, and participate in local community activities such as Remembrance Day and Holocaust Day activities. The school responds quickly to any student concerns and most feel their views are valued. The school council is very effective and acts as a catalyst for improvement.

Students are prepared effectively for the world of work, by developing valuable skills, gaining sound examination results and receiving excellent guidance on future options

as reflected in the Careermark Gold Award. Student's skills in numeracy and literacy are well developed but their skills in ICT are not sufficiently secure.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good as a result of effective monitoring by school leaders and a successful programme of staff training. The school has a very clear picture of the quality of its teaching and learning. Teachers communicate well to students and create an environment of mutual respect in which learning can thrive. However the needs of the full range of students are not addressed in all lessons. Initiatives from the school's performing arts team have led to improved assessment practice to support learning, encouraging students to comment constructively on how to improve their own and others' work. Some marking is of a very high standard with clear indications of what students need to do to improve. However, practice varies and homework is not always consistently set. Teaching assistants provide effective support in lessons for learners with learning difficulties.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good and provision for extended learning and activities out of hours is outstanding. The school's specialist status means all students in Years 7 to 9 take dance, drama, art and music. In Years 10 and 11 all students take an expressive arts subject. Provision for citizenship, personal development and work-related learning is very good and there is extensive provision of modern foreign languages. However, the school has only recently begun to provide sufficient vocational courses to meet students' needs. There is insufficient focus on the development of students' skills in ICT. Over three quarters of all students participate in the very wide range of clubs and activities that the school offers. The arts and sports are particular strengths, and the range of trips and visiting speakers contributes strongly to bringing learning and the community spirit of the school to life. 'Twilight' courses, using time at the beginning and end of days, extend substantially the range of academic courses offered.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for all students are good, and outstanding for sixth form students. Well established systems are used to help students settle

quickly into Year 7. Child protection requirements and health and safety procedures are rigorously adhered to and understood by staff. The involvement of parents and carers is actively encouraged. Students' achievements are celebrated and students' emotional well-being is strongly supported. Good use is made of external services to support the students' personal development and to offer guidance. Arrangements for monitoring the academic and pastoral progress of students are good and overseen by the student progress leaders. Most teachers are aware of how well students are doing and quick to take action if there are problems, but not all teachers give informative feedback to students regularly on how they can improve their work. The students receive excellent guidance on careers which enables them to make informed choices about their future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good. The principal provides clear direction and a drive for continual improvement. She is well supported by a strong leadership team. Self-evaluation procedures are thorough and accurate. Faculty reviews influence whole-school improvement priorities and staff and governors know the school's strengths and areas for development well. An impressive range of opportunities is available to staff to develop their professional expertise at all stages of their careers and is a clear reflection of the ethos that 'we are all learning all of the time'. The school is effectively improving the quality of teaching through lesson observations and the sharing of good practice. Governance is satisfactory. The governors are well informed and provide support for the school's strategic direction and are involved in monitoring how well it is doing. The school communicates with parents through a variety of means. However a minority of parents believe more account could be taken of their views. The school has made progress on all of the issues identified at the last inspection.

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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	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	2
The attendance of learners	2	
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	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	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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.

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	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	3	
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

Thank you for the very friendly and helpful way in which you made us welcome when we came to inspect your school. We enjoyed meeting you and listening to the very positive views you have about the school, especially your comments about the friendly and supportive staff.

The Ferrers is a good and improving school. This is what your school does well.

- The school is very well led by the principal.
- Staff care, guide and support you well and prepare you well for your future.
- You feel safe and secure in school.
- Most of you have good attitudes to school work and you are taught well.
- Most of you achieve well in your studies.
- There are many opportunities for you to take part in enrichment activities, both within the school and in the community in a wide range of subject areas.

This is what we have asked the school to do to improve things further.

- To focus more on ICT because this is so important for your future.
- Ensure that all students in class can achieve everything they are capable of, including the very brightest in the class.
- Help a few students improve their behaviour so that they do not hold back the progress of all students.

We believe you make a real difference to your own chances of success by behaving well, continuing to attend school regularly and contributing fully to the life and work of The Ferrers.

We wish you well for the future and hope you are successful in whatever you want to do.