



Forest School, The

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126065
Local Authority West Sussex
Inspection number 293454
Inspection dates 30 November –1 December 2006
Reporting inspector Keith Simmonds

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Type of school | Secondary | School address | Comptons Lane |
| School category | Community | | Horsham |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 | | RH13 5NW |
| Gender of pupils | Boys | Telephone number | 01403 261086 |
| Number on roll (school) | 1035 | Fax number | 01403 217150 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | C Purvis |
| | | Headteacher | J Godly |
| Date of previous school inspection | 18 March 2002 | | |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Forest School serves the town of Horsham and surrounding community in the north east of West Sussex. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average, as is the proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties. Very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds or speak English as an additional language. The school has specialist status for engineering and business and enterprise.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Forest School is a satisfactory school. It has recently been through a period of considerable tension and change in its senior leadership but the staff and pupils have worked hard to maintain above average standards and satisfactory progress. The interim headteacher is providing a good lead and, with key staff and new leadership of the governing body, is helping the school to challenge its existing practices and move forward in a determined way. Pupils say that the school has improved, and Year 11 pupils in particular feel that their views are now more valued.

The attainment of most pupils when they enter the school is above average. Standards throughout the school are above average and have been steadily rising. The pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory and pupils who enter the school with attainment below the expectation for their age make good progress. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A* to C in GCSE examinations has improved since the last inspection and is above the national average. In 2005 and 2006, all Year 11 pupils gained at least five grades in their GCSE examinations. However, some pupils are capable of achieving more by the end of Year 11.

Pupils' personal development and well-being and the quality of the care and the support they receive are satisfactory. Pupils usually work hard in lessons and their behaviour is good. Attendance is satisfactory and most pupils say they enjoy coming to school. Pupils feel safe and secure in the school and state that any aspects of bullying are dealt with in an exemplary manner. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There are some significant elements of good practice which support the pupils' enjoyment of their lessons and the satisfactory progress they make. The school's own self-evaluation of teaching and learning is effective. Assessment and its use to help pupils improve is a weakness, which is acknowledged by the school.

The curriculum is inadequate. The school's own evaluations identify the need to provide a range of courses which reflect more effectively its specialist status and meet the needs of all pupils. Opportunity for spiritual reflection in assembly and lessons is limited and pupils' cultural awareness is underdeveloped. Parents, although expressing positive views, have not always been able to engage with the school. Many comment that 'this is a good school but they do not welcome our views'. However, the recent change is being recognised, with one parent stating: 'since September, I feel for the first time welcomed in the school'.

The quality of leadership and management in the school is satisfactory overall. Although the quality and processes of self-evaluation are in the early stages of development, where they exist they are robust, rigorous and accurate. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in improving standards, aspects of its provision and the recent rapid development of some effective processes of self-evaluation. The new leadership and management team have satisfactory capacity to improve the school further.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve the quality of teaching and the use of assessment to raise standards and pupils' progress
- implement an effective curriculum, which emphasises the school's specialist status and is matched to the learning needs of all pupils
- engage parents and carers in a more informed understanding of the school's work and encourage a more active involvement in their sons' learning and achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and standards are above average. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards that are above average. Progress is satisfactory overall and by Year 11, standards are above average. Results in Year 9 and Year 11 have risen steadily. Different groups of pupils, such as those with learning difficulties or disabilities and lower-attaining pupils, make good progress.

A significant proportion of pupils attain the expected Level 5 or above by the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science. Pupils make better progress in English than in mathematics and science. Provisional results for 2006 show the proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations is above the national average. All pupils continue to gain five or more grades A* to G, which reflects the continuing good progress made by lower-attaining pupils. Pupils' achievement in science and design and technology is particularly high.

The school's own evaluation of its assessment practice and subject analysis acknowledges that for some pupils, their progress can be improved further. In particular, target setting and the regular use of data are not consistent across the subjects or always effective in improving pupils' progress and achievement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Attendance is in line with the national average. Pupils enjoy school and approach all aspects of school life with enthusiasm. They feel extremely safe in school as a result of the staff's robust and effective attitude to bullying. One pupil stated that if there was any evidence of intimidation, 'the school is right on the case'. Behaviour is good in lessons, assembly and around the school. For example, even though the dining hall is small and some boys have to wait a while in the queue, they do so sensibly and with good humour. Pupils are aware of what it means to live a healthy life. They are also developing the necessary skills to enable them to progress on to the next stage in their lives. Pupils make a satisfactory contribution to both the school and outside community. The school council, after a period of being less effective, is now becoming more actively involved in the life of the school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. However, there is not a strong spiritual element to lessons or assemblies where the themes tend to be more on social and moral development. Pupils are encouraged to respect others and this is evident in the good relationships that exist amongst the boys. Cultural development is a weakness, however, as there are limited opportunities to celebrate multicultural society.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Behaviour in lessons is good and pupils develop positive relationships with their teachers. Effective monitoring by senior leaders is used to identify areas for improvement, such as assessment and the development of personalised learning. Staff value the system of peer coaching and it is successful in improving the quality of their practice.

In the more effective lessons, pupils are enthused by their learning and make good progress. The pace of these lessons is brisk and purposeful. The teachers' detailed knowledge of the pupils' strengths, weaknesses and prior learning informs the activities and questioning. The tasks are challenging and encourage the pupils to be independent and to evaluate their own achievements. However, where the quality of teaching and learning is only satisfactory, pupils are less engaged and too passive in their work. Teaching can be too directive and assessment is not always effectively used to support the pupils' learning. Teaching assistants are effective and give good support to individual pupils.

The school has made some progress in improving assessment, but assessment information and marking are not consistently used to support learning on a continuous basis. A Year 7 pupil said, 'At primary school I knew my levels, at Forest I have levels, grades, half grades and it is confusing'. There are examples of good practice but overall it is patchy across subjects. Much remains to be done to make assessment an integral part of all teaching and learning. The school has rightly acknowledged assessment for learning as a current priority for development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The school's curriculum is acknowledged as inadequate and is currently under review. In Years 7 to 9, statutory requirements are not fully met in citizenship. In addition, the quality of curricular provision in ICT remains weak, despite improvements in resources, because there is no evident impact on achievement since the last inspection. Pupils in Year 10 choose from a range of academic GCSE courses although there is little indication of the school's dual specialist status. Good use is made of the business centre, and a successful vocational education engineering course is well established

with the local partner college. There are insufficient accredited vocational options and work-related learning opportunities available to meet the needs of all pupils.

In Years 10 and 11, the timetable is adjusted to provide pupils with a planned weekly programme of enrichment experiences ranging from photography and sports courses to youth work and support in the local community. The curriculum is enriched further by a programme of activity days in the main school and work experience in Year 10. However, the number of national and international school trips, local off-site excursions and annual events is limited. After school, a range of extra-curricular activities focus principally on sport but a questionnaire wishing to promote additional clubs and interest groups has recently been circulated amongst the pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school provides satisfactory care, guidance and support overall. The care and support for pupils who have specific learning, behaviour or social needs are good. Several parents commented on, and were grateful for, this support. Where necessary, outside agencies, such as social services and counsellors are brought in to support pupils. The number of exclusions has dropped recently, as pupils who may have been excluded in the past are now given more support in school. The school takes all the appropriate steps to safeguard pupils.

At present, the academic support and guidance that pupils receive is patchy and not always as effective as it could be. For example, although targets are used, they are not always specific enough for pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. Marking does not consistently support and guide pupils enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The acting headteacher is providing clear direction for the school during a period of significant change. She has moved quickly to introduce a number of initiatives to develop wider opportunities to raise achievement. The restructured leadership teams are working effectively and enthusiastically together towards the united aim of improving educational provision. Realistic procedures are in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the school and a good beginning has been made to formalising school self-review, but this has not yet had time to result in a full school self-evaluation to raise achievement. The school has correctly identified a number of important weaknesses and is taking steps to remedy them. An intensive programme of professional development is improving management capacity and upgrading the professional skills of classroom teachers. Staffing is adequate but the school still faces some difficulties in appointing appropriately experienced staff. This is limiting the pace of developments and is reflected in the unevenness of pupils' performance. The governing body has satisfactory procedures in place to hold the school to account and understands the strengths of the school and those areas requiring further development. Resources have been managed effectively to develop facilities, for example using the opportunities

provided by the business and enterprise specialist status to upgrade information and communication technology. Pupils comment positively on the recent improvements. Parents feel less informed about developments within the school and some think that their views are not taken into account sufficiently. The school is aware of this but has yet to find more effective ways of involving them in the school's developments.

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Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| 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? | 3 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| 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

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |
| 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 | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 3 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 |
| 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? | 4 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 |

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 |
| 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 | 3 |
| 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

Thank you for making us welcome when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed our visit and your views were very important to us in helping us to make our judgements. Your school is providing you with a satisfactory standard of education. Here are some of our conclusions about the work of the school:

- you achieve really well in some subjects and make at least satisfactory progress. The standards you achieve at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are steadily rising
- some good teaching helps you make the most progress but sometimes you are not actively involved in your lessons, and the marking and assessment of your work does not give you enough information on how to improve
- the curriculum you have is not wholly suitable for all your needs and does not sufficiently reflect your school's specialist engineering and business enterprise status. The range of trips and after-school activities to support the curriculum is insufficient
- most of you enjoy your time at school and attend regularly
- you are encouraged to live healthily and develop well as people
- you feel very safe in school, behave well and support each other
- your school has recently tackled some difficult issues, but you recognise that it is improving and a better place to be
- you and your parents would like to know more about what is happening and have a bigger voice in the school's future.

One of the main reasons for the recent changes is that your school has a highly committed staff who want the very best for you and to see the school improve. To help the school improve further we have asked the staff to do a number of things, for example:

- improve the quality of teaching and the assessment of your work to help you learn better
- change the curriculum so that it is suitable for all of you
- listen to your views and involve your parents and carers even more.

Finally, we would like to wish you well and hope that you continue to enjoy school and make the most of the opportunities offered to you.