



Fordwater School, Chichester

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126163
Local Authority West Sussex
Inspection number 293481
Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007
Reporting inspector Michael Megee

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Summersdale Road
School category	Community special		Chichester
Age range of pupils	2–19		PO19 6PP
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01243 782475
Number on roll (school)	75	Fax number	01243 539210
Number on roll (6th form)	30		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Rosemary Riddell
		Headteacher	Robert Rendall
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2002		

Age group 2–19	Inspection dates 6–7 February 2007	Inspection number 293481
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Fordwater School provides education for pupils with moderate, severe, profound or complex learning difficulties. A small number of pupils have life-limiting medical conditions or complex health needs in addition to their learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Fordwater takes pupils from Chichester and the surrounding area. There is a small number of pupils below the age of five who are taught in the Reception class alongside pupils in Year 1. Almost all pupils are from White British backgrounds.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Fordwater is a happy school which provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. A parent wrote, 'My son is remarkably happy at Fordwater. Despite his numerous problems, he thoroughly enjoys the education he receives. He is stimulated, challenged and cared for with compassion and sensitivity.' The school judges its overall effectiveness to be good but the inspection shows that most aspects of the school, including pupils' achievement, are satisfactory rather than good, and this has determined the judgement about its overall performance.

Pupils enter and leave the school with exceptionally low standards, because of their severe and often complex learning difficulties. Nevertheless, their achievements are satisfactory, and this results from satisfactory teaching and learning. Teachers care for and know the pupils very well and make lessons enjoyable, but they do not always link pupils' individual targets closely enough to their lesson planning or provide sufficient challenge, especially to higher attaining pupils. This means that these pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Pupils' progress is strongest in Reception and in the specialist classes for pupils with more complex needs such as autism or multi-sensory difficulties, who receive good, well focused teaching and support.

One of the strengths of the school is the close bond it forms with parents and carers. Many families live a long way from school and very few parents bring their children into school. Consequently there are few opportunities for them to pop into school or meet staff at the school gate. However, the school's leadership and management have worked very hard and effectively to promote and preserve a strong link. One parent said, 'The school adopts a team-around-the-child approach so that everything is tailor-made for my daughter, which is a fantastic help.' Parents are very appreciative of the good personal development which the school successfully promotes. The children love coming to school because of the warm personal relationships they have with members of staff, who put the pupils' welfare at the top of their priorities.

Pupils are provided with a satisfactory range of activities and experiences which lead to satisfactory achievement. Although all pupils are well cared for and supported, there is inconsistency in the quality of their personal targets which means that individual guidance is not as accurately focused as it could be. As a consequence, care, guidance and support, taken as a whole, are satisfactory.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, although information about pupils' progress is not sufficiently detailed to allow the school to quickly identify any pockets of underachievement. This has slowed the school's work in raising achievement.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students in the post-16 department make satisfactory progress overall, because of the satisfactory teaching and curriculum they are offered. Within this picture there are some good features. For example, students have the opportunity to take part in

the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, undertaking such projects as environmental work in an area of woodland at Dell Quay. One student has just achieved his Bronze Award, is beginning his Silver and the school is ensuring that he will be able to achieve his Gold Award when he moves on to college next year. However, the activities provided are not always as challenging as they could be, especially for higher attaining students. These students justifiably feel that they could be allowed an even greater degree of independence. One or two said, 'Sometimes the staff treat us more like older children rather than adults'. Nevertheless, all the students said that they like the school and what it offers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that information about pupils' progress has sufficient detail to allow school improvement to be clearly focused on raising standards.
- Improve teaching and learning by strengthening the way teachers plan, using well focused individual targets to help pupils make faster progress.
- Ensure that more challenging activities are provided, especially for higher attaining pupils and those aged 16 or above.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils arrive at the school with very low standards. When compared to national averages, attainment remains exceptionally low throughout their time at the school. This is not surprising given their moderate, severe or profound learning difficulties. Once at the school, however, pupils' achievement is satisfactory, although there is some variation. They get off to a flying start in the Reception class, where achievement is good. Pupils who are taught in the specialist classes for profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and for autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) make good progress right through their time at the school. This is because of the expert assistance they receive from well trained and very experienced staff.

Elsewhere pupils in the main school and post-16 students achieve satisfactorily in all subjects and against their individual targets. There are some inconsistencies in the quality of the individual targets set and in the challenge provided in some lessons. This slows down achievement, particularly for the higher attaining pupils.

Parents are very pleased with the positive effect which the school has on the pupils. One parent said, 'My son has exceeded my expectations of what he could achieve. I've just been to see him doing work experience. I never thought he'd be able to do that in a million years.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

One parent wrote, 'My son has been at the school since he was three. Fordwater has greatly helped my son develop into the fine young man he is today despite his disability'. Pupils attend regularly and their behaviour is good. Pupils say how much they enjoy coming to the school and have made good friends at the school. Pupils feel safe and act in responsible ways. This is because, with the low numbers and high staffing levels, staff are offering them continual advice, guidance and vigilance. Pupils say that they feel able to talk to adults if they feel sad or worried. There is very little bullying.

Pupils make healthy choices in what they eat and are keen to undertake regular physical exercise and to keep fit and healthy. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, although the pupils' knowledge of life in multi-cultural Britain is not as good as the other aspects. Pupils contribute satisfactorily to their own and to the local communities by, for example, fundraising for local charities and taking care of the environment. They feel they can articulate their needs as individuals and as a group through the school council.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teachers and teaching assistants know the pupils well and work effectively together in classrooms. This results in good relationships between adults and pupils and consequently there is a calm and productive atmosphere throughout lessons. Teaching is effective in the Reception classes, and in the specialist classes, where staff make good use of their expert knowledge and experience to ensure that the activities provided are exciting and imaginative and fully engage all the pupils. This enables them to learn quickly. Elsewhere, teaching is satisfactory but not so effective. This is because teachers do not always carefully plan how to support pupils in achieving their individual targets in lessons. Teachers sometimes do not offer pupils activities which will stretch them and maximise their achievement. This is particularly the case for higher attaining pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The range of subjects which Fordwater offers adequately meets the needs of the pupils and post-16 students. The curriculum is adapted well for pupils with more complex

medical and communication needs and as a consequence they make good progress. It is supplemented well by educational visits, artistic events and extra-curricular activities, including an annual residential opportunity, which help pupils to gain independence more quickly. There are a limited number of after-school clubs because of the transport difficulties. The school offers very few opportunities to learn alongside pupils of the same age in a mainstream school. There are good links with the Connexions service so that pupils and their families are provided with good information about the next stage of learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The staff have a good insight into the needs of each pupil and have their well-being at heart, which allows pupils to make good progress in their personal development. From the start, the school establishes a good partnership with parents and this relationship is a key factor in promoting pupils' welfare and care. One parent spoke of how there had been a bereavement in the family and the school had provided her with specialist literature on how to help her son with autism come to terms with the loss. 'Whatever help you need, the staff bend over backwards to assist you', said one parent. The parents are particularly pleased with the daily home-school diary and frequent telephone calls. They find this information both helpful and reassuring.

The school has a thorough approach to child protection, security checks on staff, health and safety procedures and risk assessment. However, the quality of guidance given to pupils to help to stretch them academically is less effective because assessment information and individual targets are often not sufficiently precise. Pupils are not sufficiently involved in setting their own personal targets alongside teachers. Some, even higher attaining pupils and post-16 students, are not entirely certain what their targets are. This means that they do not develop as independent learners as quickly as they could.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The headteacher has maintained and satisfactorily built upon the school's overall effectiveness since the last inspection. As a result, the school is satisfactorily placed to improve further. Together with the governors and the senior management team, the headteacher is committed to supporting every pupil and their families in trying to overcome the severe and often complex difficulties that affect their personal development and achievement. All staff share this commitment. The school has been particularly successful in promoting strong bonds with the pupils' families and encouraging them to work as a team alongside the school staff.

The school development plan has appropriately identified key aspects for improvement, on the basis of a reasonably accurate picture of most aspects of its work. It has quite a lot of information on the performance of pupils. However, the information often lacks crucial detail and the analysis of the achievements of pupils is not yet as focused as it could be. Consequently the school finds it difficult to identify easily where progress is not so good and so establish very precise priorities for development. The school has recognised that it could be more effective in this area, and has introduced a new assessment scheme to assist the process.

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ 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	3

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	2
The behaviour of learners	2	2
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	3

The quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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 making us so welcome at your school and for talking to us about what you do. You were very polite and friendly. Your school is providing you with a satisfactory education. This means that there are some good things in the school but also some things that need improving.

Some of the things we found out about your school:

- You make steady progress in your studies.
- You are happy with your school, you don't miss many days unless you have to and your behaviour is very good.
- Teachers and support staff get on well with you and do a satisfactory job.
- You are given a suitable range of things to do.
- All adults in school make sure you are well looked after and you trust them to listen to your problems if you have any.
- Your headteacher and governors make sure that the school is a happy place in which to come and learn.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- Make sure that the senior staff obtain really good information on your progress.
- Make sure that the teaching is even better by working out with each of you your own targets which are easy to understand.
- Make sure that teachers always give everyone work that is hard enough.

We really enjoyed our time in your school and we wish you all the very best for the future. We hope you carry on helping your teachers by always trying your best.