

Fernwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122838
Local Authority	CITY OF NOTTINGHAM
Inspection number	302333
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	David Martin HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	993
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Andrews
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Witheford
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Goodwood Road Wollaton Nottingham NG8 2FT
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Age group	11–16
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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

Fernwood is an average sized secondary school on the edge of Nottingham city. It is an oversubscribed school that has both Specialist Technology and Leading Edge status. The school was identified as a Centre for Excellence for German teaching in 2005 by the British German Association and intends to apply at re-designation for a second specialism in languages. The school serves a mixed catchment area with broadly average levels of socio-economic advantage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with statements of need is below the national average. The school has a rich cultural mix of students, with around a third coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of students whose first language is not English is more than twice the national average. A large proportion of students have been identified as gifted and talented, and many are members of the National Academy for Gifted and Talented Use.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Fernwood is a good school with many outstanding features. All aspects of its work are at least good, but leadership and management, the care, guidance and support of students and their resulting personal development are outstanding. The school's own thorough evaluation of its performance is very close to that of the inspection team. The school provides good value for money.

The headteacher provides an inspiring vision which she pursues with great energy and commitment. With the skilled and dedicated support of the senior leadership team, working in partnership with an equally dedicated and able governing body, this vision is turned into impressive school improvement. There is an unswerving focus on enriching the learning environment to the benefit of all students. This can be seen in the development of the site to provide first class facilities across many areas of the school, with a commitment to further improvements. The headteacher's flair for accessing additional funding and the benefits brought about by specialist Technology and Leading Edge status has transformed the site and many classrooms. For example, students speak glowingly of Arts and Sporting facilities and the on-going refurbishment of teaching areas to facilitate more use of information and communication technology (ICT). Another indication of the values that underpin the leadership of the school can be seen in the recent expansion. The school embraced the opportunity to work in partnership with the local authority to expand its intake to widen opportunities for more students within the city.

The school has achieved this expansion whilst maintaining and developing its outstanding care for the individual. The Inclusion Centre has been a great success in fully including those students with more urgent learning needs into the life of the school. The support shown by all staff, both formally through the curriculum and informally through everyday contact, is exceptional. The excellent academic guidance that students receive further enhances this aspect of school life. As a result, students are proud of the school and readily celebrate their own and other students' achievements. They are self-confident, mature and responsible young people who are extremely well prepared for the next stage of their education and future lives.

A good curriculum is undergoing a period of innovation and development to match even more closely the individual needs and aspirations of students. Teaching and learning are good and are continuing to develop through carefully focused training, support and the sharing of best practice. However, curriculum change and growing teaching expertise have yet to have a full impact on achievement. Although standards are good and rising and students' progress is generally good, there is some inconsistency in practice that was also noted by parents in the survey responses. The school is aware of this and is confident that when planned developments are embedded it will fully meet and exceed the very challenging targets that it sets itself. Through even more consistent monitoring of practice and embedding specialist school initiatives across the whole curriculum there is the potential for achievement also to become exceptional.

The improvement since the last inspection is very good and there is a particularly strong capacity and desire for further improvement. Links with other organisations for the benefit of learners are outstanding and have played an important part in this improvement. The leadership of the school is determined in its ambition for its young people and all those who work in the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that curriculum innovation and monitoring and evaluation processes are focused on raising students' achievement still further.
- Embed specialist school initiatives so that they impact across the whole curriculum.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

On entry to the school, students' standards span the full range and are broadly average overall. They achieve well and reach above average standards throughout the school.

Students from all social and ethnic backgrounds make good progress to gain above average results in the Year 9 national tests. In 2006, results in English and mathematics were particularly strong. Boys achieve especially well in Years 7 to 9.

In Years 10 and 11, students continue to make good progress and gain results significantly above the national average in GCSE examinations. There has been a consistently rising trend in performance since the last inspection. In 2006, 71% of candidates achieved five or more GCSE grades A* to C, the school's highest ever performance. GCSE examination results in French and German are impressive. Almost all students gain GCSE grades. Evidence of current performance is positive, and progress in lessons is good.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and most gain GCSE qualifications. The many students who are at an early stage in learning English make good progress with the language and gain above average results in GCSE examinations. Overall, students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve in line with the majority of White British students in the school, although there is some unevenness in the performance of different groups. The school works actively to help all individual students achieve their potential.

The school sets itself challenging targets. In 2006, specialist school subject targets were reached in Key Stage 3 and were almost reached at Key Stage 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development, is outstanding. The number of excluded students, though average, is reducing because of good response to the school's code of conduct and to improving curriculum provision. Attitudes to learning are good, attendance is good and rising and substantial gains are made in personal development. Students find the school friendly, secure and their needs are well supported. As some students put it, 'it is like being in one big family'.

Students behave very well in lessons and around the school. They are polite, courteous and relate well to visitors. Students enjoy learning and respond enthusiastically to practical and engaging lessons. They make significant gains in self-confidence and in personal relationships.

Students appreciate the importance of adopting safe and healthy lifestyles. They are offered a range of healthy food and most are actively involved in a wide variety of excellent sporting activities. Students are extremely well engaged in the community, such as through the Christmas party for senior citizens and support for the Pakistan earthquake disaster. There are many opportunities to prepare for their future well-being. Strong links with the business community

and local support services raise awareness of career opportunities and prepare them really well for adult life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good with some outstanding features. Senior and middle leaders monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching and learning systematically. The quality of lessons seen during this inspection confirmed the school's assessment that most teaching is good. Some outstanding and inspirational teaching was seen in many areas of the school and none was inadequate.

The school's recent professional development and the Teaching and Learning Group have made a clear impact on developing teaching and learning. Lessons have a number of strengths. Relationships between staff and students are positive and encourage good attitudes and active engagement in learning. The quality and use made of support staff in lessons to support students with learning difficulties and students for whom English is an additional language are exemplary. Lesson planning is good, and ICT is often used very well. Assessment opportunities are identified and opportunities taken to give constructive feedback and reinforce learning, often through effective self and peer assessment.

Where lessons are not as successful, it is due to a lack of appropriate challenge for groups of students, such as the gifted and talented. The school has used information from its own monitoring and evaluation to inform the professional development plans for the school, for example to implement a new coaching model to further improve teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a curriculum that is good with a number of outstanding features. It is broad and balanced, meeting statutory requirements for all groups of students. The curriculum is enriched by a wide range of extension courses and opportunities, especially in performing arts and sports, and these have a high take-up and are valued by the students. There is outstanding provision for those who are identified as gifted and talented in any specific field or subject, with opportunities for enrichment and extension activities, for example early entry for Spanish, the teaching of which takes place out of school hours.

There are effective arrangements for the transition of students from primary schools, and for those preparing to move on to college. Specialist status is having a positive impact on some areas of the curriculum, for example the development of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Curriculum provision for work-related learning and economic well-being is strong.

The curriculum is designed to provide personalised pathways for each child, although it has yet to make a full impact on achievement. There are advanced plans to introduce specialised diplomas at Key Stage 4, with functional key skills, to further improve the personalised approach within the school. The school is also involved in an innovative project with the central government's Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) to review and plan for changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for all its students. A very wide range of internal and external professionals provide a comprehensive level of support for vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties. The school addresses learning needs through individualised learning support programmes; for example, students in Years 10 and 11 follow a 'Key skills' course to improve their communication skills whilst at the same time building self-confidence and self-esteem. The growing number of students for whom English is an additional language are also well supported.

There are excellent systems for monitoring all aspects of personal development and academic progress of students and it leads to the setting and regular review of learning targets. The process involves teachers, learning support staff and external agents and ensures that all students have the support they need. The school works hard to involve parents, through regular reporting and seeking their views.

Child protection procedures are clear and followed rigorously so that students feel safe and well supported. Health and safety and risk assessments are robust so that the many off-site activities are carefully planned for.

There is high quality guidance enabling students to make informed choices about courses in Years 10 and 11. There is excellent provision to support students' workplace and life skills through work experience, visits and careers guidance and this contributes well to understanding and self-confidence.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher brings a strong ambition and sense of direction to the work of the school, underpinned by very clear values. She is ably supported by a highly effective deputy headteacher and senior team in leading and managing the school. Managers at all levels show a very high level of commitment to the school and its students. They play a full part in planning for improvement and ensuring that the priorities are effectively implemented, monitored and evaluated. The school's leadership has yet to have a full impact on pupils' achievement. The provision for students is very good and improving and the school is showing innovative approaches to the curriculum and to the inclusion of all students. Standards are good, the school has a good track record of improvement and is very well placed to progress even further.

The school has been entrepreneurial in seeking additional funding opportunities to provide first rate facilities for students and this has had a substantial impact on teaching and learning. Specialist and Leading Edge status has made a real difference to the learning experience of all students. The links with other providers and agencies is a particular strength of the school and make a major contribution to students' personal development and growth.

Governors know the school particularly well and act as critical, supportive friends to the leadership team. They bring a good range of expertise and have played a major part, alongside school staff, in ensuring that important projects are brought to a successful conclusion. Financial control is secure and school development planning is very thorough. The school is almost reaching the very challenging targets that it sets for the achievement of students.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	1

The quality of provision

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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	1
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

18 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Fernwood School, Wollaton, Nottingham, NG8 2FT

I am writing to tell you what we found when your school was visited recently. Although we were unable to see many of the older students at work we were very grateful to those who offered to give up their valuable time during examinations to speak to inspectors. What all the students that we met told us in these meetings, in class and discussions around the school, was very helpful and informative.

We found that your school is a good school and that many aspects of its work are outstanding. These include:

- the very committed and caring leadership of the headteacher, governors and all the adults who have a responsibility for your care and education. This has led to many opportunities to enjoy excellent facilities and experiences in lessons and a wealth of extra opportunities beyond the normal school day.
- the support and guidance that you are given. This includes personal help, support with your learning and academic progress, as really well as preparation for the next stages of your education and later life.
- your very positive response to the many and varied opportunities to develop as caring, involved, enthusiastic and responsible members of the school and wider community. Your maturity and sense of pride in your achievements impressed us greatly.

Even the very best of schools can improve. Although the standards that you achieve and the progress that you make are good, inspectors feel that there is even more potential for academic success. We have asked the headteacher to make sure that:

- the specialist facilities (including ICT) and excellent teaching are even more consistent across all subjects and classrooms.
- teaching staff monitor the quality of your lessons and the progress that you make even more carefully to make sure that you achieve your potential.

You can play your part by continuing to participate with the enthusiasm and enjoyment that we saw on our visit, always trying to do your very best. Thank you once again, on behalf of the inspection team for a most enjoyable two days.

David Martin

Her Majesty's Inspector