

Falinge Park High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105837
Local Authority	Rochdale
Inspection number	308968
Inspection dates	9–10 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Alan Brine 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	1172
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Glynis Foster
Headteacher	Mr R Lonsdale
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2004
School address	Falinge Road Rochdale Lancashire OL12 6LD
Telephone number	01706 631246
Fax number	01706 646538

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Falinge Park High was designated as a specialist performing arts college in 2006. It is a larger than average secondary school, which serves a disadvantaged area of Rochdale. A well above average proportion of students are entitled to free school meals. The percentage of students from minority ethnic backgrounds and who speak English as an additional language is high compared with the national average. The proportion of students who have special educational needs is broadly average. The school has received Sportsmark and Artsmark awards and achieved Healthy Schools status in 2007. The school also has Extended School and Investors in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Falinge Park is a good and improving school with a good capacity for further improvement. It is popular with parents: as one parent said, 'At Falinge Park my child has thrived and gone from strength to strength.'

The headteacher and his staff and governors have been successful in creating a harmonious community which celebrates diversity and actively encourages social cohesion: this is strongly reflected in the orderly and friendly atmosphere and in the confident participation of all groups of students in lessons and the wider life of the school. The school has a strong commitment to inclusion through its extensive work to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language.

The school has successfully tackled most of the issues identified at the time of the previous inspection. As a result standards in the school, while still below the national average, have risen steadily in recent years and the students' achievement is good. GCSE results have improved significantly in the past three years and in 2007 half of the students achieved five A* to C grades, with an increased proportion getting good grades in both English and mathematics. In 2007, the achievement of students in English tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was particularly impressive. The evidence about the progress of students in the current Years 9 and 11 indicates the school should reach or exceed its targets in 2008. The school is aware that it needs to ensure greater consistency in performance across all subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4.

The schools' specialist status as a performing arts college, acquired in 2006, together with the work it is undertaking as an extended school, is having a very positive impact both on the students' performance and the involvement of the wider community. Results in the performing arts are particularly good and the focus on this area of learning has helped develop the confidence and engagement of students from the different ethnic and cultural traditions represented in the school.

The school makes a particularly positive contribution to the promotion of students' wider personal development. Students' behaviour is good despite the pressures created by the very cramped accommodation. Relationships between students and different ethnic groups in the school are very positive. Where opportunities are provided for students to exercise responsibility, they do this with enthusiasm.

The school has succeeded in securing a high level of consistency in the quality of teaching and some lessons are outstanding. In all the lessons observed, classes were well managed.

Occasionally, weaknesses in the way learning is structured mean that students do not make as much progress as they should. The curriculum is broad and balanced: provision for information and communication technology (ICT) has improved significantly since the last inspection. The school is working effectively in partnership with other schools and further education providers to secure a more comprehensive range of vocational and academic choices at Key Stage 4.

The arrangements for the care, support and guidance of the students are also good, although there is a need to make sure information about pupils' progress is used more systematically to target underachievement.

The headteacher brings vision and energy to his leadership of the school. Many of the heads of subject manage their departments effectively and the access and achievement team is particularly well led. However, the roles of other senior leaders, specifically their work in

monitoring, evaluating and securing a clear focus on raising achievement, is not exercised systematically enough. Whole school self-evaluation and improvement planning is satisfactory. The governors support the school well but are not rigorous enough in holding the school to account. The issue of the accommodation, highlighted at the time of the previous inspection, has not yet been adequately addressed. While there are plans for a rebuild of the school, this is some way off. The staff and governors work hard to reduce any negative impact of the cramped buildings but the strain on the workload of senior staff, in particular, is considerable.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure the senior leadership team make more effective use of data, monitoring and evaluation to set challenging targets, address specific areas of underachievement, and raise standards further.
- Ensure the governing body are enabled to play a more effective role as a 'critical friend' of the school.
- Seek mechanisms to improve the accommodation as soon as possible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students arrive in school with a pattern of prior attainment which is below the national average. Standards in the school are rising quickly and overall achievement is good. Students make particularly good progress at Key Stage 3 and results have been improving across the school.

Results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2007 were approaching the national average, and, in the case of English, the proportion of students reaching Level 6 was above the national average. This represented good progress by the students and outstanding achievement in the case of English. Results at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2007 were below the national average, but the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C passes rose from 30% in 2005 to 50% in 2007. This impressive rate of improvement is also reflected in the proportion achieving at least five good passes including English and mathematics: this has doubled since 2005. The information about the progress of students in the current Years 9 and 11 indicates that the school is on track to meet its targets for 2008. Significantly, there has been an improvement in the achievement of Year 11 students in science, which had been an underperforming subject at GCSE in 2007.

There is still some inconsistency in the pattern of achievement across subjects, particularly at Key Stage 4, but the school is taking action to reduce this variability. The school made a late start with the process of collating and analysing data about students' performance and is not yet using this systematically and consistently enough to target specific areas of underachievement, especially at Key Stage 4.

The school's specialist status in performing arts is reflected positively in the pattern of good achievement in, for example, drama and dance. In lessons, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those receiving support with acquisition of English as an additional language make good progress, particularly in developing their confidence as learners.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students enjoy school. They feel safe and secure and know who to turn to in times of need. Vulnerable students and those from minority ethnic groups are integrated well into the school

and they receive good support, particularly from their mentors. There are rare incidents of bullying and racism, but these are dealt with effectively by the school.

Students show a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. Many of them enjoy taking part in sports and other activities to make them fitter and say that they are eating more healthily because of improvements in school meals.

A recently revised behaviour code, written in agreement with students, has contributed to the positive standards of behaviour in class and around school. In particular, students move around the very narrow and crowded corridors with good sense and thought for others. Students take active responsibility for their own behaviour.

The school has committed significant resources to improving attendance and this is now close to the national average. However, a number of students take extended holidays during term time. This disrupts their learning and limits their academic progress.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. Relationships within school are generally positive. The generous donations to a range of charities are an indicator of students' concerns for others. The good quality of students' work in subjects such as art, music and drama reflects their wide cultural awareness.

Students enjoy making a contribution to the community. For instance, school council members played a part in improving the quality of meals. Well-trained peer mediators are on hand to support individuals needing guidance and support. Participation in school events and performances is generally good. Asian heritage students and their parents are increasing their participation, as a result of the school working in partnership with Asian performance artists and arranging activities such as the annual multicultural show.

The focus on raising standards in English, mathematics and ICT, together with the focus on promoting work-related learning, means students leave the school with the skills they require for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. The majority of lessons are planned effectively and actively engage students in a variety of well structured activities which promote their self-confidence. Teachers manage classes well and students are cooperative, behave appropriately and have a positive attitude to learning. Teachers make effective use of questioning to engage students and prompt their thinking. Where teaching is at its best, the students are really excited by the enthusiasm and pace of an imaginative lesson. Much of the marking is effective and provides feedback which tells students how to improve, but this good practice is not consistent across the whole school. A small amount of teaching is not well planned and lessons are unchallenging and uninteresting to students. Although they continue to behave well, they make limited progress.

The teaching and learning group in the school has established a whole-school approach to the management and structuring of lessons. However, there are still inconsistencies in the planning frameworks used by different subjects and this contributes to the variations in teaching quality. The strong culture of professional development has encouraged teachers to develop their skills

and the arts team plays a leading role in professional development and working across subject boundaries.

Assessment information is available to teachers to inform their planning and track progress. However, this is not yet precise enough to enable all staff to provide early identification of underachieving students in order to improve their progress. This is particularly the case for students at Key Stage 4.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and successfully promotes achievement and personal development. All students benefit from the specialist arts curriculum which provides high quality learning in school. Provision for ICT has improved significantly since the last inspection.

The school has reviewed the Key Stage 4 curriculum to identify where students achieve less well and appropriate changes have been made. Further education providers are enabling the school to extend the range of vocational and academic choices for Key Stage 4 in September 2008. However, some students have been let down this year by some problems with vocational provisions elsewhere. Good provision for enterprise and work-related learning prepares students well for the transition to further education or training.

An effective citizenship programme enables students to participate in the wider community. The school encourages all students to take part in a good programme of extra-curricular activities including master and revision classes. Curriculum enrichment is good, varied and improving, especially in arts and sports. Specialist school targets to increase the participation by different groups have been met. Popular themed events involving a broad range of external providers provide an opportunity for students to extend their learning.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Students say that staff are approachable and caring regarding study or personal problems. Arrangements are in place to ensure safeguarding and health and safety procedures are in place and reviewed regularly.

The pastoral support and guidance is effective throughout the school. The learning support centre is well resourced and welcoming to students. It provides good in-class support and a wide range of activities at lunchtime and after school. It is highly valued by the many students it supports. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support from teaching assistants and mentors. This is reflected in their personal development.

The significant number of students who are at an early stage of learning English receive good support which starts before they arrive in the school. A system of buddy support aids the integration of those students who join at times other than the beginning of Year 7 and who may well speak no English. The appointment of a specialist mentor has enhanced the in-class provision and improved links with parents and support agencies so that these students make good progress in lessons.

Improvements in the arrangements for supporting good behaviour are proving effective and have contributed to a drop in the number of student exclusions. A structure of rewards is in

place. However, because these are not used consistently, they are not always contributing as well as they might to celebrating students' achievements.

Students are usually aware of their learning targets but do not always have a clear view of the progress they are making. Reports to parents focus on pupils' progress and achievements but the language used in them is not always clear.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and works enthusiastically and successfully to build a socially cohesive and inclusive school. He is supported by senior leaders who play a key role in ensuring that the school is orderly and managed effectively on a day-to-day basis. The school has a strong commitment to raising achievement. However, improvements are uneven and the strategies have not yet impacted fully on achievement particularly at Key Stage 4. Departmental self-reviews, introduced since the last inspection, help to secure greater consistency and subject leaders are providing good support in the drive to ensure that students do as well as they can. Performance management procedures are in place, continuing professional development of staff has a high priority, and staff welcome opportunities to develop their skills and share good practice.

Roles of senior leaders, specifically their work in monitoring, evaluating and securing a clear focus on raising achievement, are not sufficiently rigorous. For example, while senior leaders have good access to data about students' progress, this is not being used consistently enough to identify underachievement and evaluate the educational provision systematically. Whole school self-evaluation and improvement planning is satisfactory.

The specialist arts college status although only in its second year has, together with the extended school provision, had many beneficial effects in broadening opportunities for students and improving resources. Leadership of the specialism is strong and the impact of training for all staff has resulted in a widening of students' choices and an enhancement of their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Governors play a satisfactory role in supporting the school. They have a clear committee structure and know the school well but they are only now beginning to fulfil the role of 'critical friend'. Serious problems with the current accommodation are having a significant impact on a number of aspects of school life. In particular, the need to manage students' movement around the buildings is taking the time and energy of the senior leadership team. Governors and staff work hard to overcome the limitations created by the outdated building whilst providing the best they can for the students and the school's wider community.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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	2

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?	2

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?	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
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
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 contribution you made to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed visiting your lessons and talking with many of you. We also read carefully the questionnaires completed by your parents. These were very helpful to us.

We think that Falinge Park is a good, improving school of which you are rightly proud. We were very impressed with the friendly, harmonious atmosphere in the school and by how well the different groups of students behave and get on together. You told us that on those rare occasions when there are problems, the school deals with the issues quickly and effectively. The school has good arrangements to support those of you for whom English is an additional language or who have specific learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

Your school has benefited from becoming a specialist arts college and this is helping to raise standards, to build stronger relationships with the local community, and to develop your own self-confidence. The examination and tests results have been improving rapidly in recent years. We were particularly impressed by last year's English results at the end of Key Stage 3. We were also impressed by much of the teaching, which we think is good overall. You can help the school by continuing to ensure you all attend regularly and do not take extended breaks during term-time.

Mr Lonsdale provides energetic and clear leadership and this has helped to make sure the school continues to get better. In order to improve your school further, we have asked him to work with the staff and governors to make sure that they use the information they have available about your progress and the quality of your education more effectively. We think they should get better at monitoring and evaluating what is happening in your school so they can tackle any underachievement and raise standards even further. We also think the issue of the cramped accommodation should be addressed as quickly as possible.

Thank you again for welcoming us to your school. We wish you well in the future.