

Fort Hill Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116444
Local Authority	Hampshire
Inspection number	312314
Inspection dates	11–12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Alison Storey HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	692
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Richard Osbourne
Headteacher	Mrs Lesley Lawson
Date of previous school inspection	25 April 2005
School address	Kenilworth Road Winklebury Basingstoke RG23 8JQ
Telephone number	01256 354311
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Fort Hill is a smaller than average community school for students aged 11 to 16. The socio-economic make-up of the area it serves is broadly average. Most students are from a White British background; the background of one in 20 students is not known or they prefer not to say. Very few students speak English as an additional language; almost all those who do are not at an early stage of learning English.

The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The most commonly identified are behaviour, emotional and social needs and specific learning difficulties (dyslexia); the school has a 20 place unit for students with specific learning difficulties. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is about the same as seen nationally.

The school has the Healthy School award; the International School award and Active Humanitarian status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. It has high expectations and aspirations for all students. Students enjoy their education, appreciate the way lessons make learning interesting and that staff know them well and work hard to help them to improve. Students talk about a peaceful atmosphere and think that behaviour is good; they recognise the importance of strict yet fair discipline systems. Students particularly value the opportunities they have to play an important and influential role in decision-making. As one said, 'I don't feel there is any better school we could have gone to'.

Inspectors generally agree with students' views of the school and the majority of the parents who returned the questionnaire were positive. Students' personal development and well-being are good. The staff's good knowledge of individual students and the careful monitoring of their progress pastorally and academically are key features of the school. Students are challenged to reach aspirational targets and effective systems are in place to quickly pick up and deal with under performance. Teaching and learning are good overall. Most lessons are planned well to meet students' needs and to actively involve them in learning. The curriculum is appropriate for the majority of the students, although there are not enough courses leading to vocational qualifications to meet the needs of some students. The focus on improving basic skills is paying dividends in improving progress, so that all students achieve well, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Every student leaves school with at least one GCSE and almost all gain at least five passes. Although in 2007 standards in English, mathematics and science were generally below those seen nationally at Key Stage 3 and at the higher levels at GCSE, the school's monitoring of students' progress indicates that standards at both key stages will be higher in 2008.

Attendance is now satisfactory overall which is a significant improvement since the last inspection. The majority of students are aware of the need to attend regularly to make good progress in their learning; however despite the school's best efforts, regular non-attenders mean that attendance in Years 10 and 11 is still below average.

There have been a lot of changes and improvements since the last inspection, driven by the vision and commitment of the headteacher who, as governors describe her 'leads from the front'. There have been challenges to overcome to get to this point, not least in that at times it has been difficult to recruit staff, which has impacted on teaching and learning and hence on standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Nevertheless, the headteacher has maintained her determination to appoint good quality staff at all levels and this is now bearing fruit in improving progress and standards. She is well supported by her senior leadership team and all staff are enthusiastic, genuinely enjoy working at the school and want the very best for the students. The school is well placed to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science by ensuring teaching and learning is consistently at the standard of the best.
- Ensure the curriculum fully meets the range of learners' needs and capabilities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good. Overall students make good progress although sometimes this has varied between subjects or groups as a result of the staffing difficulties.

Students generally enter the school with standards below average for their age, particularly in reading and writing, although in recent years attainment on entry has improved. Overall, standards at KS3 have risen since the last inspection because students are making faster progress, helped by improved teaching and learning and a well-targeted programme of intervention strategies which are improving their basic skills. Overall standards were still below average in 2007; they were broadly average in science but remained below average in English and mathematics. The proportion of students gaining GCSE qualifications is above that seen nationally; year on year all students gain at least one GCSE and almost all gain five or more. The proportion of students gaining five or more higher grades has been below national average, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, the school's data indicates that standards at both key stages will improve in 2008.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make the same good rate of progress. Those with specific learning difficulties achieve well because their needs are well met in the specialist unit and through support in class. Students with behavioural, social and emotional needs make good progress because they respond well to a range of strategies which raise their expectations of themselves. In contrast to the national picture, boys make better progress because teaching is well matched to their needs.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good and well supported by the personal, social and health education programme delivered through tutor times. Students have a good awareness of how to live a healthy life because of the quality of provision, including a good range of sports provision and healthy options for school lunches. They make a positive contribution to the school and wider community, for example, raising funds for the local youth centre to increase activities for young people in the local area. The school council and subject panels are important and influential in a range of ways, including departmental improvement.

Students say they feel safe around the school and there are many staff and trained students they can go to. Overall, behaviour in lessons and around the school and its grounds is good. There are occasions when some students' behaviour is challenging but the school deals with this effectively. The number of learning days lost through exclusions has been significantly reduced this year because of the improvement to the way in which the school manages challenging students. A few parents raised concerns about bullying, but students told inspectors it is rare and that when it has occurred it has been dealt with effectively.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are able to relate well to each other and those who live in other countries. The school has worked hard to encourage students to become aware of societies beyond their school and local community. This has been effective, although students' appreciation of the mix of their own school community and their understanding of living in a multicultural and multifaith society is not as well developed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Overall, teaching and learning are good. The majority of teachers have good subject knowledge and plan a variety of activities that fully engage students and make learning enjoyable. In the best lessons, teachers maintain a brisk pace by setting challenging time limits on activities which are well matched to students' abilities. Students make good progress when teachers share their enthusiasm for their subject, make students think deeply by asking probing questions and allow them to express their ideas in class discussion. Teaching assistants are well trained and managed and frequently involved in lesson planning to ensure that students who need additional help with their learning are well supported. As a result, these students achieve as well as their peers. Homework is set regularly and good systems are in place to ensure it is completed.

Teaching is less effective and progress slower when too much time is spent on whole class teaching as this prevents students from being actively engaged in their learning. Although the inter-active whiteboard is a regular feature in many lessons, it is not always used in an effective and imaginative way to raise student motivation.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school provides a satisfactory curriculum which meets the needs of the majority of its students. There is a strong emphasis on the core subjects, especially in Key Stage 3 where the school focuses on providing literacy support to the large number of students entering the school with lower than average reading and writing skills. Provision in years 10 and 11 has improved with the introduction of a greater variety of vocational options, such as Hospitality and Catering, Leisure and Tourism and Media Studies which respond more closely to the interests and aspirations of some students. However, as the school is aware, all options whether the more traditional subjects or vocational routes lead to a GCSE accreditation which does not always meet the needs of all learners.

There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, arts and drama opportunities in which students are keen to participate. Students speak highly of visits to China and Berlin and an exchange visit to France. They are proud of their fund raising activities for a partner school in Africa. This link has heightened their awareness of global issues and the needs of people who are less fortunate than themselves.

The school has had difficulties meeting the statutory requirement to offer religious education to all students as a distinct subject due to the difficulty in recruiting specialist staff. It has creatively incorporated aspects of religious education in the humanities and English and art curriculum, but students' understanding of other faiths and cultures is less developed, for example, their knowledge of different religious festivals and how different religions practice their faith.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides good support for its students. Staff are committed to supporting students' personal and academic development and know their students well. They set aspirational targets to challenge students to achieve their best. Most students are aware of their targets and the established routine of regularly assessing and tracking students' progress is used well to plan lessons and any additional support students need. There are many good examples of marking which inform students how to improve, although this is not consistent across subjects. Overall, support and guidance are effective and the school's information suggests that many students are on course to meet their targets.

The school works hard to identify the particular needs and support required by different groups of students. As a result, students with learning difficulties and/or difficulties, those speaking English as an additional language and students with gifts and talents all make good progress over their time in the school. The unit for students with specific learning difficulties supports its students well. Consequently, their level of independence and confidence grows and they are able to successfully join many mainstream school lessons.

The quality of care is good. Vulnerable students are well looked after and supported because of the effective work of the school with other agencies. There are secure systems for safeguarding students. Effective procedures promote students' health and safety.

Good careers guidance and work experience, alongside the progress students make in developing their literacy, numeracy and information communication technology skills prepares them well for future learning and the world of work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. There is a clear sense of purpose and a relentless focus on raising standards which starts with the headteacher and her senior leadership team and permeates throughout the school. The middle leaders, well supported by the senior team, are growing in strength and taking greater responsibility for monitoring, review and action planning. Staff at all levels really value the culture of professional development and teamwork. Governors are well-informed; they bring a good business perspective to the school and effectively challenge and support the school to bring about improvement. However, they do need to address a few issues to ensure they fully meet all their statutory responsibilities.

The school's high aspirations lead to challenging target setting at both school and student level. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and identifies pertinent priorities for further improvement; if anything it is sometimes too modest as a result of the high expectations the school has for itself and its students. There are effective systems for monitoring teaching and learning and students' progress so that the school knows what improvement has taken place and where further development is needed. The size of the school, good teamwork and the recording systems in place mean that staff know all the individual students well and respond to their needs. However, the systems do not currently provide the ready overview of the progress of different groups over time, for example higher attainers, that would enable the school to focus intervention even more effectively.

The improvements since the last inspection, together with more recent impact of newly appointed staff at senior and middle management levels is evidence that there is good capacity to improve further.

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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?	3
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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	2
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

24 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Fort Hill Community School, Basingstoke, RG23 8JQ

Thank you for the welcome you gave us to your school. We enjoyed meeting you and the discussions we had in meetings, lessons and around the school.

We know that you think your school is a good school and we agree with you. You are well cared for; the teachers know you all very well and in particular they know how well you are doing in your learning and support and challenge you to do even better. Your behaviour in lessons and around school is generally good and we know that you think the systems in place to make sure behaviour is good are strict but fair. We know that you enjoy your lessons and agree with you that teachers are good at making lessons interesting so that you learn well. All in all, you are making good progress while you are at Fort Hill.

As with any school, there are some improvements that can be made and we discussed two with your headteacher and the deputy headteachers and governors before we left. One is about raising standards, particularly in English, mathematics and science by making sure that all teaching is as good as it can be. The second is to make sure there are more vocational options and qualifications in the curriculum for those of you who think that is best for you and what you want to do in the future.

I am also going to ask you to help in making these improvements. One way you can do this is by continuing to work hard and behave well to get the most out of your time at school. The second, and very important one is to make sure that you attend school regularly. Although most of you do there are still too many students who do not and this affects your learning and possibly restricts your choices when you leave school.

Yours sincerely

Alison Storey

Her Majesty's Inspector