

# Fernhill School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	116447
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hampshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	312316
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 February 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Peter Gale HMI

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	913
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Richard Walker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Clive Gilbert
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	15 March 2004
<b>School address</b>	Neville Duke Road Farnborough GU14 9BY
<b>Telephone number</b>	01276 702540
<b>Fax number</b>	01276 702541

---

<b>Age group</b>	11-16
<b>Inspection dates</b>	27–28 February 2008
<b>Inspection number</b>	312316

---

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## Introduction

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

## Description of the school

Fernhill School is an average sized comprehensive school. It is a designated languages college and holds the healthy schools award. Its students come from the neighbouring residential area to the west of Farnborough. Their attainment on entry is broadly average. The vast majority of students are of white British ethnic origin, with a few from a wide range of other ethnic groups. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average as is the proportion eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities, including those with statements of special educational need, is below the national average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Fernhill provides a good education for students that is firmly based upon support and care of the individual. The majority of parents endorse this view and are highly supportive. As one wrote, 'My son has had exceptional care shown to him during his time at the school.' The school benefits from strong leadership by the experienced senior team who are eager to develop the school further. In this they are aided by a supportive and well informed governing body which takes an active interest in the school and its students.

Achievement is now good, after being satisfactory last year. Standards on entry are close to the national average. In 2007, standards at the end of Year 9 and results in the GCSE examinations were also close to national average. This represented satisfactory progress across the school. Progress had been hampered by staffing difficulties in the core subjects of English and science since the last inspection. The school has worked hard to address these and evidence from lesson observations and the school's tracking of progress shows that students now make good progress overall, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. The school's commitment to raising standards through enhanced teaching and learning is evident in weekly timetabled departmental meetings to share the best practice. This has led to good teaching and learning, with some leading departments consistently delivering outstanding learning opportunities. In some classes, however, the quality of feedback to students, the management of behaviour and the setting of homework have weaknesses. This leads to slower progress.

Personal development and well-being are good. Expectations of behaviour across the school have been raised through a focus on rights and responsibilities. As a result, behaviour is good though a minority of parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire expressed concerns about this important area. Students feel safe and well cared for because of the good, highly regarded care and support provided. The school sets challenging targets for students. However, these are not consistently shared with students or their parents, and they are not always shown how they can reach them. Students who know how to work towards their targets generally make faster progress. Students understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and make a very strong contribution to the school and wider communities. They are well prepared for the next stage of their lives after Fernhill and almost all remain in education, employment or training.

The influence of the specialist languages status is beginning to have impact through improved partnerships with primary schools and local businesses and as a method of raising cultural awareness amongst students. The curriculum is under constant review and provides well for all learners in the school.

Leadership at all levels sets clear direction for improvement. Self-evaluation is good. The whole-school improvement plan has identified appropriate priorities, and resources are aligned well. Departmental development planning, however, does not always reflect whole-school priorities. In planning at all levels, the actions outlined lack precise criteria to easily measure their effectiveness. The school has successfully addressed the issues from the last inspection. This coupled with an expanded leadership team that is receptive to new ideas and an enthusiastic, hardworking staff demonstrates a good capacity to improve.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure, by the use of precise success criteria, that whole-school priorities are reflected in development planning at all levels to bring about a more consistent experience for students.

- Ensure that students and their parents are aware of targets and how best to work towards them.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good and standards are broadly average. Students' progress has accelerated in the last year, but this has not had time to make a full impact on standards. By the end of Year 11, standards are average overall, and above average in mathematics. For the past two years, the school's pass rate at 5 A\* -C, including English and Mathematics has slightly exceeded the national average. At the end of Year 9, students reach average standards. Standards in Key Stage 3 were higher in the past two years than in 2005 and the percentage reaching the expected Level 5 exceeded the national figure in 2007 in English and Mathematics and matched it in science. Inspection evidence shows that standards are currently rising.

A period of difficulties in English and science has been overcome and achievement has improved significantly. Students are on track to meet challenging targets in Key Stage 4 and progress overall is now good throughout the school. No identifiable groups, including ethnic minorities and students with English as an additional language, are underachieving. Appropriate and effective steps have been taken to tackle and prevent an emerging pattern of underachievement by higher ability girls. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. Students make particularly good progress in art, drama, history and religious education. The school is working towards ambitious targets associated with its specialist status, and results in modern foreign languages are improving.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They gain a good awareness of different religions and cultures in religious education and citizenship lessons, and through the school's international dimension. Students show their good social development in the positive relations they have with one another and with their teachers. They demonstrate their appreciation for healthy lifestyles through the take-up of balanced options in the dining hall, and their participation in the wide range of sporting activities available to them. Students say they feel safe in school, that bullying is not a major concern and, that when it does occur, it is dealt with effectively. They say, and parents confirm, that they enjoy coming to school, and this is borne out by their above average attendance. One student said 'This school is full of exciting and unusual ideas. It helps you get a flavour of life.' In general, behaviour around the school is good. Students are lively and speak confidently to visitors. They confirm that the school has raised its expectations in terms of behaviour, and is prepared to take firm action when these are not met. Consequently, behaviour has improved. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. In school, this is through the school council and 'buddying' schemes. They say that their voice is listened to, and can give examples of changes the school has made in response to this, for example, in relation to uniform. They also contribute very well to the outside community through charity fund-raising and their participation in the universal community service programme. Students are positive about the advice and guidance they receive about their options for the future from school staff as well as from local colleges and the Connexions service.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are the key focus for the school in raising standards. This focus, developed through weekly departmental meetings, has led to a large majority of lessons being good or better. A key characteristic of the most successful lessons is detailed planning, the use of a variety of teaching styles and well-chosen activities to engage and extend all groups of students. Teachers make effective and imaginative use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to raise motivation and support students' learning. In an outstanding ICT lesson, the teacher made regular reference to the examination assessment criteria, which enabled students to assess their work more accurately and to employ strategies on how to improve. Teachers frequently check learning through probing questions and give students the opportunity to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. Students with learning difficulties or those at an early stage of learning English, feel confident and well supported in class. 'In the majority of lessons I feel I have learnt something new,' is how a Year 11 student expressed her satisfaction with the school. In a few lessons that are satisfactory, too much time is spent on whole class teaching at the expense of more inter-active tasks. Occasionally, teachers do not make it explicit what they want students to learn and activities are not sufficiently adapted to students' different levels of ability. In small minority of lessons, lower expectations and lack of imaginative tasks lead to passiveness or low level disruption, restricting progress for all students in the group.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum that responds well to the needs of students. There is good provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT at Key Stage 3. Students entering the school with low literacy skills follow a modified curriculum, which provides smaller teaching groups. The school is increasingly effective in matching students' needs and aspirations at Key Stage 4 by providing combinations of vocational courses and work-related college courses, alongside a range of more traditional academic subjects. Careers guidance, work experience and enterprise learning, supported by strong links with local business, help students to prepare confidently for the world of work. A good range of extra-curricular activities, trips and visits organised by different departments enriches the curriculum. Language specialist status is starting to have an impact. It has enabled teachers to forge closer links with neighbouring primary schools and local business by providing language lessons to students and staff. The school is endeavouring to develop more extensively the international element linked to specialist language status in order to widen students' cultural experience and linguistic scope through exchange visits abroad and this is starting to have an impact.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Staff at all levels in the school show a very high level of commitment to caring for students as individuals and to promoting their well-being. Arrangements for safeguarding children and young people are secure. The pastoral and academic support that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive is outstanding, owing to the regular and thorough monitoring of their progress and welfare, and the productive relations the school has established with a wide range of external agencies. These include the local hearing impaired and

communication and language units. Guidance for students in making subject choices at Key Stage 4 and beyond is good due to effective career guidance and enhanced links with the local sixth form college and employers. The tracking of progress and target-setting procedures for some younger students is less effective. They do not always know what targets they should be aiming for or what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. The quality of marking of homework is inconsistent across departments in this respect. Students are appreciative of the strong support they receive from their teachers and other members of staff. They commend their approachability, and their willingness to give them extra help when they ask for it, for example through the provision of out-of-school revision classes. Tutors establish a positive atmosphere in their meetings with students, who show good maturity in their willingness to express their opinions and their willingness to listen to those of others.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The headteacher and his senior team have developed a strong emphasis on teaching and learning to raise students' achievement within a caring community. Support for the individual student is the ethos at the heart of everything the school does, and is shared by staff at all levels. Through the specialist status, the leadership team are striving successfully to develop better cultural understanding among the student body. This is enhancing cohesion within and beyond the school community. The autonomy granted to departments to implement the headteacher's vision empowers middle leaders but, at present, there is a lack of consistency in their approach to whole school developments. The headteacher and senior team have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and develop suitable strategies to tackle issues. However, occasionally these are not reflected with sufficient precision in planning and subsequent implementation. Challenging targets set by the school are shared well and reviewed thoroughly through the school's management structures. Accountability for progress, through whole-school and student targets, is a strong feature of the line management systems. Effective monitoring by the senior team makes this a rigorous process. Governance of the school is good and firmly supports the headteacher and leadership team in all that they do, whilst providing appropriate challenge to their work.

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk).**

## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

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

### 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 <sup>1</sup> 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	2
The behaviour of learners	2
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	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

<sup>1</sup> 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**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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

11 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Fernhill School, Farnborough, GU14 9BY

I take great pleasure in having this opportunity to thank you for the pleasant and enthusiastic manner in which you welcomed the team of inspectors to your school. We greatly appreciate the contributions you made in discussions and during lessons. You demonstrate a pride in your school and this is fully justified. You play an important part in making Fernhill a good school that continues to improve, by working hard and behaving well in the vast majority of lessons.

In discussions with you it was apparent that you appreciate the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff. You are aware that they will offer any support and guidance you need to enable you to improve and they have high expectations of you. This is helping your personal development to be good. We found that although standards are currently satisfactory, due to good teaching and a suitable curriculum your achievement is now good and standards are rising. It was also pleasing to note that the vast majority of parents and carers share this positive view of your school.

The leadership team of your school is good and enthusiastic to make further improvements; this is matched by the support of experienced governors. They are fully aware of what further changes are needed to ensure you leave Fernhill having achieved your very best.

We have asked the school to ensure that:

- it plans effectively to deliver a consistently good experience for you from subject to subject
- you and your parents know your targets in all subject areas and how best to work towards them. You can help by acting quickly on advice and working hard.

There is a lot to be proud of in your school. I hope you will continue to work with your teachers to bring about further improvements for Fernhill.

Yours faithfully

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector