

Forest School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110061
Local Authority	Wokingham Borough Council
Inspection number	325092
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Gale 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	1106
Sixth form	157
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nigel Carter
Headteacher	Mr Keith Quine
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
School address	Robin Hood Lane Winnersh Wokingham RG41 5NE
Telephone number	01189 781 626
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Forest School is a large comprehensive school for boys and has an average sized sixth form. The vast majority of students are White British, with small but increasing numbers from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly Asian. In 2003, Forest was designated a Business and Enterprise College, and re-designated in 2007. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below the national average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is part of a federation with other Wokingham schools to develop 14-19 provision. Forest is an extended school and holds Sportsmark and the Healthy School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Forest School provides its students with a good standard of education. Care is a real strength of the school. This is reflected in the comments of one parent, supported by many others, that 'I am always amazed at their care and concern for the boys and the relationships they build. Well done, Forest.' Relationships throughout the school are very positive, and are developed strongly through curricular and extra-curricular sport, where many of the school's teams excel. This aspect also contributes to good adoption of healthy lifestyles among the boys. Most students enjoy their education a great deal, as demonstrated by excellent rates of attendance.

Standards have risen and the school achieved its best ever results for GCSE examinations in 2008. However, this masked underachievement in a small number of subjects in Key Stage 4. When taken as a whole, achievement last year was satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and good in Key Stage 3. The school has worked hard to improve teaching and learning in underperforming subjects. This, and effective tracking and intervention, means that students are now making at least satisfactory and often better progress in all GCSE subjects. Current school data, including GCSE module tests, show that all groups of students are making good progress in the school.

The school accurately monitors its teaching and learning, and its records, coupled with inspection evidence, show that the quality is good overall. In the few cases where teaching is less effective, it fails to completely meet the needs of all individuals in the class. This is usually because teachers' planning in these lessons focuses too strongly on task completion and does not build in enough pace and challenge to motivate all students. Some parents reported concerns about low-level disruption in classes, and inspectors found this to be the case where teaching was less effective. Most teaching in the school is effective due to strong subject knowledge, well-developed relationships, and the engagement of students in active learning through varied interesting tasks. The curriculum is good and evolving. The school's specialist status is building strong external links with businesses and universities, and work-related learning is well established. The federation of local secondary schools is facilitating the launch of diplomas in September to further enhance student choice.

Pastoral care is very good, with the support of vulnerable students extremely effective. Students report feeling safe, and know who to turn to if they need advice or guidance. Transition arrangements into Year 7 and to post-16 education are good. The work-related curriculum, and the qualifications that students achieve, prepare them well for the next stages of education or employment. Academic guidance is effective in providing students with information about their targets and current attainment. However, there are inconsistencies across the curriculum in the quality of written feedback about how to improve. Behaviour is generally good, and most students enjoy engaging in community activities in the school and beyond.

A parental comment that 'Forest school is well led' is an accurate assessment. Most parents are very supportive of the school's current work and future plans. A few, however, comment on the poor state of parts of the learning environment, and inspectors would agree. There is a clear sense of shared direction and purpose among the staff, and they share with their students a pride in the school. The school has an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and collects extensive evidence through careful monitoring of its work. Improvement planning is embedded as a concept across middle leadership, and many have used the self-review and improvement cycle to quickly drive up standards. However, inconsistency in middle leadership has resulted in uneven development, with some curriculum areas delivering faster progress and

higher standards than others. This is because some middle leaders are more able to plan for and focus on developing student learning than others. The use of challenging targets, careful tracking and whole-school intervention has led to a trend of rising standards across the school. Improvements in teaching and learning since the last inspection have contributed to this trend. With many other developments successfully implemented, and a caring committed staff, including governors, there is good capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Effective steps have been taken to raise overall achievement and standards, and these are evident in the school's own data for 2008. Given their starting points, students make good progress and reach standards that are above the national average. Teaching and learning are good. Students are given detailed information on performance and what they need to do better. Students' attitudes are very positive and their personal development is good. Students enjoy school. Relationships between students and staff are strong, and almost all students complete the courses they begin. Students willingly accept responsibility in the school and the wider community. They are an integral part of school life: mentoring younger students, contributing to the community as prefects, and helping it be cohesive. They lead healthy lifestyles, and enjoy a range of sporting and cultural activities and school visits, which enrich their lives and help them to mature into sociable and articulate adults. Students can choose from a good range of subjects, which meet most of their needs. Almost all students progress on to university from the sixth form, with small numbers choosing to take gap years or move directly into the world of work. Very good links have been established with higher education, and this helps students to make appropriate choices for their futures. Very few leave the sixth form without going into further education, employment or training. The sixth form is well led and managed. Systems for assessing and monitoring students' work are effective and have improved since the previous inspection, so that students are well guided and supported to improve. Recent improvements in provision, for example in assessment and tracking progress, have resulted in rising standards. These demonstrate that the sixth form has good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all teachers plan for and deliver engaging activities, for the full range of learners, that are based on development of prior knowledge and understanding.
- Improve the consistency of middle leadership by increasing the ability of some to focus their departments on accelerating progress.
- Explore all possibilities for improving the learning environment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter Forest School with standards that are above the national average. The results for the cohort completing their GCSE examinations in 2008 were the best that the school has had, with 79% attaining five A* to C grades. When English and mathematics are included, 69% of students met the benchmark. Overall, achievement for this year group was good, with lower-attaining students making the fastest progress due to very effective support and an appropriate curriculum. Middle attaining students made slower, but still satisfactory, progress. Students in this year group made very good progress during Key Stage 3, followed by satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. Good overall achievement masked underachievement in a small number

of subject areas in Key Stage 4. The school has worked hard to address this underachievement, and progress in these subjects is now satisfactory due to improving teaching and learning. School data demonstrate that through rigorous tracking and intervention, rates of progress are being either maintained or accelerated across the curriculum. Current students are making good progress regardless of ability or ethnicity. Key Stage 3 progress has been outstanding over several years for all subjects, and particularly in mathematics. Predictions for current students in Year 9 show that they are making good progress in Key Stage 3 towards their challenging targets.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, when taken as a whole, make good progress during their time in the school. Excellent individual support and very effective tracking ensure that individuals make good, and sometimes outstanding, gains in knowledge and understanding. The developing support for students with English as an additional language means that they are making faster progress than in the past, and it is now in line with that of their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students say that they enjoy being at this school, and almost all parents agree. They respect their teachers, and their behaviour can be excellent when they go to assemblies or when they find a lesson stimulating and are practically involved. There can be some minor disruption when the pace and challenge of lessons sag, and a few parents raised concerns about this. The great majority of boys' attitudes to school and learning are good. Consequently, levels of attendance are excellent. Few boys have been temporarily excluded, and total exclusion is rare. Curricular opportunities and the large numbers participating in extra-curricular activities help to cement boys' moral and social education, and their cultural development. They encounter spiritual components in their learning, but these are not planned systematically across the day. Students have good awareness of safe practices and healthy lifestyles developed through Sportsmark and the Healthy School Award. Almost all students take part in sport during the week. They have taken an active part in encouraging healthy food, and appreciate its value. Students make a good contribution to the school and the community beyond. They participate in community activities, including organising their own disco for charity and a senior citizens' party. Sports leaders help in junior schools, and others share their skills with groups of older 'silver surfers'. The school council was instrumental in achieving better provision of games equipment in the grounds. While students make good progress in literacy and numeracy, which prepares them well for the future, improvements in access to information technology equipment have taken place only recently, meaning that development of high-level skills is not yet fully embedded.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has clear priorities for improving teaching and learning that are based on a secure monitoring system and consequent training, acknowledging that the quality of lessons varies between subjects. This has led to the quality of teaching being good in most subjects and satisfactory in a few. When teaching is most effective, teachers use assessments of students' prior knowledge and understanding to enable them to learn well. For instance, in a Year 11 history lesson, planning based on the detailed analysis of previous work enabled all students

to improve their skills in relation to interpretation of historical information, and, as one said, 'to get the best possible grade'. Good relationships, management of behaviour, and use of resources - for example, involving students in lessons through interactive whiteboards - ensure that students enjoy and learn well in many lessons. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and course requirements, and most plan varied and interesting activities to support learning. Students enjoy lessons when they are actively involved in learning. In some lessons, weaker planning results in a lack of challenge and too great a focus on tasks to be completed, rather than concentrating on the learning taking place. In such lessons, students have too few opportunities to really engage with their work or develop their ideas, for example because of weak questioning skills. This can lead to a small minority of students engaging in off task low-level disruption. Most students feel they get supportive feedback, particularly oral, on how they can improve their work. This is well facilitated by positive relationships with teachers, but marking is not consistently effective across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is carefully planned and reviewed, and meets most students' needs. While students can make a range of choices between different options in Years 10 and 11, the school plans to develop its vocational provision further. Strong links have been established with a number of other schools and colleges, especially in developing enterprise opportunities in relation to the school's specialism, and also in career guidance, for example raising students' aspirations to careers in medicine with Manchester and Sheffield Universities. Provision for, and participation in, extra-curricular activities are good, especially in the areas of competitive sport, music and drama. Parents commented very positively on how these activities make a strong contribution to their children's enjoyment of school, and support their personal development. Teaching sets, organised to reflect students' current attainment, are used in many subjects with the intention of matching work to the needs of students. Planning in these sets does not always take account of the full range of abilities, meaning that the work set can be too difficult or too easy. The impact of this is most evident in provision for middle-attaining students. The programme for promoting students' personal, social and health education is good, but there are limited opportunities provided for spiritual reflection. Courses designed to enhance practical knowledge and skills successfully engage less-academic learners, and are relevant to their future needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The most vulnerable students are given considerable support where and when it is needed. Those with specific learning or physical difficulties, or English as an additional language, are rapidly assessed and given extra help - as individuals, in small groups, or supported within the class. As a result, these learners make similar progress to the rest of the school from a range of starting points. A parent wrote, 'His support programmes have been put together without him feeling he is being treated differently...we have been impressed by how this has been managed.' Although students with special gifts or talents have been identified and participate in special challenges, their needs are not planned for systematically in everyday lessons. Child protection procedures are secure. Students say that they know who they would turn to if they needed personal advice or help. Arrangements for safeguarding students are secure, and risk assessments are in place. Governors and staff check to make sure that this difficult site is safe.

Health and counselling services are good, with a drop-in medical advice provision, a counsellor two days a week, and large numbers of older boys trained as mentors for younger ones. The pastoral system is well established, with form tutors and year directors providing well-informed guidance. Students know their targets, and the pastoral team can quickly identify and arrange appropriate support for those who are experiencing difficulties.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Clear direction from the headteacher has led to increasing accountability spreading across leadership at all levels. Most leaders are involved in effective self-evaluation that forms the basis of clearly structured plans for improvement, which have resulted in rising standards. However, a small number of leaders are not as sharply focused, even though expectations have been clearly communicated at a senior level. School targets have been adjusted to be more challenging in recent years, and a comprehensive whole-school tracking system has been developed. Intervention work in cases where tracking demonstrates underachievement is under constant review. After significant success in 2008, a larger cohort of students has been identified for staff mentoring and support in the current Year 11. Very effective monitoring work by the school leadership has accurately identified the school's strengths and its areas for development. For example, the school's records of teaching and learning closely matched inspection findings. Improvements in teaching and learning have taken place across the curriculum, through line management support and continuing professional development opportunities. However, these have been uneven due to the varying strength of middle leadership. The school is an inclusive one, and promotes equality strongly through good policies and procedures. Planning for the development of community cohesion has taken place, and audits of the effectiveness of actions are helping the school know that its work is effective. The governing body strongly supports the work of the school, providing good challenge that helps school staff to reflect on priorities for improvement. Safeguarding and other statutory requirements are met. The school provides good value for money, with standards rising and provision improving. However, the accommodation is in need of attention.

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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	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?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
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 learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

24 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Forest School, Wokingham, RG41 5NE

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when it visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you, and were particularly impressed by the pride you take in your school.

These are the main findings of our inspection.

- Forest School provides you with a good standard of education.
- Standards are rising and you are making good or better progress in most subjects.
- The headteacher and other leaders know the school well. They have worked effectively to improve it, and know what still needs to be done.
- We agree with the headteacher and senior team that most lessons are good.
- The school works well with its partners to improve your personal development and well-being, with the result that they are now good.
- The school provides you with a good curriculum, and effective care, guidance and support.
- Most of you enjoy school, particularly the range of sporting activities, and your attendance is excellent.
- The sixth form is improving rapidly and students are making good progress in their studies.

The inspection team and the headteacher agree that you could achieve even higher standards in some subjects, and we have asked that:

- all teachers plan for lessons that challenge and support your learning, so that you always make good progress
- the leaders of all subjects are as sharply focused on raising your attainment as the best in the school, so that you make progress more rapidly in the small number of subjects where progress is slower
- the school investigates ways to improve the accommodation in which you learn.

You can do your part to help by ensuring that you always behave well in lessons and work hard. The team joins me in sending you best wishes for your studies, and we hope that you all do very well in the future.

Yours faithfully

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector