

Falmouth School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112047
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	325518
Inspection dates	28–29 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Daniel Burton 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	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1131
Sixth form	198
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Matthew Boyling
Headteacher	Sandra Critchley
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Trescobeas Road Falmouth TR11 4LH
Telephone number	01326 372386
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Age group	11–18
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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

Falmouth School is an average-sized comprehensive school. The sixth form has grown significantly since the last inspection. The vast majority of students are of White British heritage and very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies from year to year but is broadly average. The range includes those who have emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The school is a specialist business and enterprise school. The Falmouth School Under Fives Centre is also on the school site but this is not managed by the school's governing body.

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 which is having a growing impact on students' achievement and personal development. Care, guidance and support are outstanding and the headteacher and her team work with an extraordinary range of external partners to ensure that even the most vulnerable students succeed. One parent, typifying the experiences of others, wrote, 'The school did everything to give my son a chance and never gave up on him.' Although the benefits of this provision have yet to be fully realised in all examination results, there is a clear and consistent upward trend. Leadership and management are excellent at all levels and, as a result, the school has outstanding capacity to improve. The school's sixth form has improved since the last inspection and provides good value for money.

The curriculum has improved significantly since the last inspection and it is now outstanding. Provision is finely tuned so that it meets the needs of all learners. This, combined with excellent guidance, means that students undertake courses that suit their needs and aspirations. The school's specialism in business and enterprise has played a key role in increasing the range of provision, and plans are in place to develop the 14–19 curriculum further from September. Partnerships with local training providers, such as Riviera Lodge, are having a clear impact in raising the achievement of students who learn better in more vocational settings. Business and enterprise are increasingly at the heart of the school's work and a good range of enterprise activity days are supported by skills-based learning in the classroom. The transition to a three-lesson day provides further opportunities for students to engage in independent learning and problem-solving activities, though these are not fully exploited in all subjects.

The school has developed excellent partnerships within the local community, and has used its status as a Microsoft Academy to provide bespoke training for a local business. Work with primary schools to improve provision is outstanding and the school provides extra support through its teachers and students to enhance the learning and personal development of younger children in partner schools. The school makes every effort to place its students at the heart of this outreach work. This is seen in the use of sixth formers to provide information and communication technology (ICT) training for local businesses. Similarly, salon services students deliver a special manicure event for Year 5 and 6 girls and their mothers. Less strong, though satisfactory, are opportunities to develop understanding of the wider UK community and global communities.

As a result of excellent curriculum provision and good teaching, standards in the school rose significantly at Key Stage 4 in 2008 and more students than seen nationally achieved five or more grades A* to C including English and mathematics. Recent developments in extending the school's provision have not had time for the full impact to be seen, but the school's nationally recognised tracking system provides compelling evidence that standards are set to rise again in 2009. School leaders know that not enough students achieve the very highest grades in their GCSE examinations, and a range of strategies are in place to address this at departmental level.

A number of parents expressed concerns about behaviour in lessons but inspectors' observed that behaviour has improved and is now good. This was confirmed in interviews with students, who were unanimous in their view that behaviour has improved as a result of actions taken by school leaders. Conduct at break and lunchtimes is excellent. In the small number of lessons where students are less focused, teaching lacks pace and variety and students have too few opportunities to learn independently. The school has worked tirelessly to improve attendance

and its actions have had a clear impact in this, a tourist area where families sometimes take holidays during term time because of seasonal patterns of work. However, attendance figures still remain slightly below the national average.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in the sixth form and standards have improved. This is because students benefit from excellent care and guidance and a curriculum which serves their needs well. The range of courses on offer has been extended significantly since the last inspection and offers good preparation for life beyond school. Teaching and learning are good. Most teachers use the assessment of students' progress very effectively and this promotes students' learning and motivation. The school has very good systems for tracking the progress, attendance and well-being of students, although these have yet to have the impact on standards that the school is aiming for, as this information is not fully utilised by all departments. Personal development is outstanding and students are well-prepared for life beyond school. They throw themselves into the life of the school and are proud to support and represent it in a range of activities in the local community. They develop mature attitudes and are enthusiastic about their studies because excellent support is in place to guide them onto the right courses. Sixth form managers set a clear direction for improvement. Links with local schools, colleges and businesses are very strong and effectively designed to improve the life chances and opportunities for the students as well as promoting community cohesion. There is a rigorous system for monitoring and evaluating the work of the faculties that helps with planning the subject curriculum. Although some A level classes are small, the school is fulfilling a local need that is not easily met elsewhere.

What the school should do to improve further

- Give more opportunities in lessons to encourage all students to become independent learners.
- Improve students' understanding of the UK and global communities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students start at the school with standards which are broadly average, although standards in boys' writing are below average. Students make good progress in Key Stage 3 so that standards are above average, although they dipped slightly in the 2008 national tests. The school's work to support learners who find writing more difficult has had a clear impact in improving achievement.

In 2008, standards at Key Stage 4 rose significantly. 52% of students achieved five or more GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics, which is above the national average. Girls made particularly good progress, with the large majority meeting challenging targets in almost all subjects. Over time, the achievement of boys has been more variable, and whilst a higher proportion of boys than girls achieved 5 or more GCSE grades A&-C including maths and English in 2008, a small number made less progress than they should. However, the school has taken action to better meet their needs. As a result, in 2008, every student achieved at least one qualification, and the gap between boys' and girls' achievement narrowed. The achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with that of their peers. The school's specialist status is beginning to play a significant role in raising standards

and, in 2008, the school exceeded its targets in mathematics, business studies and ICT at GCSE. School data, based on rigorous tracking, show that standards are set to rise again in 2009.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The vast majority of students enjoy their learning. Students say they feel very safe in school and know who to turn to if they need help or advice. Racial intolerance and bullying are rare, and any incidents dealt with effectively. Behaviour is good. This is a result of good relationships between teachers and students, underpinned by an effective behaviour for learning policy which has reduced the exclusion rate significantly since the last inspection. Attendance is below average in spite of the work being done by school leaders and support staff, who spare no effort in supporting students with poor attendance. Students from all year groups are involved at all levels in the school's development and the school council does a good job in representing their views to the headteacher and her team. Preparation for future economic well-being is good. Older students benefit from the work they do to support younger students, for example in the extracurricular dance classes, and from work experience in Year 10. However, opportunities to develop the skills to work independently and in teams are not always fully exploited in lessons. Although students benefit from excellent links with the local community, they have a weaker grasp of the wider UK community and global communities. Nonetheless, students' moral, spiritual, cultural and social development are good. Students are well aware of the need to follow a healthy lifestyle and many of them take part in the terrific range of sporting activities that the school provides. The support given to students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities enables them to make good progress in their personal development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good progress that the students make is the result of good teaching that motivates them to work hard and do their best. Relationships are good and teachers use their expertise well to prepare them thoroughly for examinations. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities receive good support which helps them to make similarly good progress to the others. In most lessons, challenging tasks and probing questioning deepen students' knowledge and understanding. Teachers plan with the full range of abilities in mind, and provide work which meets the needs of all learners, including the most able. Often, students are expected to think for themselves and to develop and justify their own ideas and opinions, although this is not the case in all lessons. Assessment is used skilfully to check and extend students' progress, and students thoughtfully appraise their own and one another's work in order to learn how to improve further. Marking provides detailed comments showing students clearly how to make progress. In a small proportion of lessons, learning is inhibited by too much teacher talk. This, combined with less helpful marking and feedback sometimes causes students to lose focus.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

An excellent range of pathways, including vocational and academic routes, is having an increasing impact on student progress in Years 10 and 11 and on improved behaviour and engagement. The school makes outstanding efforts to ensure suitable provision for those for whom the

conventional curriculum is not appropriate. This is done through flexible and personalised arrangements in collaboration with various external organisations. The school has a strong partnership with a local independent training provider, and further enhancement of the vocational opportunities is planned from September 2009. In September 2008, the school introduced a new three-period day and this provides good opportunities for students to learn in greater depth. The school's specialist status provides a wide range of activities designed to develop personal skills to equip students well for the future, such as those of leadership and teamworking. Personal, social and health education makes a good contribution to students' understanding of how to lead safe, healthy lives. Students' opportunities to use ICT across the curriculum are good. The curriculum is enhanced by an impressive range of extra-curricular activities and trips, with very high take-up rates. There is also an excellent range of activities to meet the needs of gifted and talented students, such as opportunities to gain additional qualifications in performing arts and develop leadership skills in sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school makes outstanding provision for the care, guidance and support of learners. Staff know the students extremely well and, consequently, pastoral support is highly personalised. Provision for the most vulnerable students is exemplary and the school's relentless work to support all learners is recognised by the local authority as a model of good practice and shared with other schools. The school works tirelessly with external partners to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable students are met. Effective action has been taken, and specialist staff employed, to secure improvement in attendance. Targeted support for a group of Year 7 pupils with low literacy has enabled most of them to move back into mainstream classes with markedly improved reading skills. Academic monitoring and long-term guidance are excellent. Students know their targets and how to improve. They are also well prepared for working life through a highly effective personal development programme and access to Connexions. At each stage of their school career, students are advised and supported in making informed and relevant choices. The school fully meets current safeguarding requirements and has appropriate procedures in place to secure the health and safety of students.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher and leadership staff have skills which complement and support each other, and together they form a strong and respected team. They are passionate about their school and have a clear strategic vision which is shared by the rest of the staff. Since the last inspection, middle managers have developed into a dynamic and highly motivated team who monitor their departments closely. They know their strengths and weaknesses and are now setting targets for achievement and standards which are aspirational. Management tools are good, effective and accurate in evaluating performance. The system for recording teacher assessment and tracking students' progress is a strength of the school which has received national recognition. The contribution of governors to the school is outstanding. They have a wide range of skills and use effective systems to monitor the performance of the school. They clearly understand their role in holding the headteacher to account. The school's specialist status is well managed and has started to have an impact on raising standards. The school effectively promotes

community cohesion, with its work to promote cohesion in the local community a particular strength.

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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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
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	1
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	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 learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	2
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 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	1	
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	1	
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**

30 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Falmouth School, Falmouth TR11 4LH

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we recently visited your school. We learned a lot about the school from watching you work in lessons and from talking to you informally and in small discussion groups. The inspection team gathered a very wide range of evidence about all aspects of your school. Our findings can be seen in full in the inspection report, which I hope you will read. Our main conclusions were that Falmouth is a good school. It provides outstanding care, guidance and support for all students and spares no effort in ensuring that you all have the best chance of succeeding. The choice of subjects offered has continued to broaden and, as a result, your curriculum is now excellent. The school is extremely imaginative in using its specialist status as a business and enterprise college to provide further opportunities for your personal development.

As a result of these changes, you are achieving better standards in your work and this can be seen through the improvement in examination results at the end of Year 11. Teaching is good and most lessons are benefiting from the new three-lesson day. We would like to see you have more opportunities, however, to develop your skills as independent learners. It was good to hear so many of you report that behaviour has improved and is now good in most lessons. You told us you feel very safe around the school and are confident that there are adults to support you if ever you need help or advice. Inspectors found that your sixth form is good and provides excellent opportunities to prepare you for higher education and the world of work.

Your headteacher and her staff know that there are some things in need of improvement. Whilst the school's work to promote cohesion in the local community is outstanding, inspectors judge that more can be done to further your understanding of the wider UK community and global communities. Your school is doing everything it can to improve attendance but there are small number of you whose attendance is not good enough. You can all really help your school, and improve your job prospects, by making sure that you come to school every day.

Thank you again making us feel so welcome when we visited your school. We wish you and your school every success in the future.

With very best wishes.

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools