

The Forest School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126065
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	340910
Inspection dates	9–10 December 2009
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White 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	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	1062
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr C Purvis
Headteacher	Ms S Denning
Date of previous school inspection	0 November 2009
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Introduction

Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 31 lessons on the first day of the inspection and observed a range of enrichment activities that all students were involved in on the second day. Meetings were held with staff, students, governors and members of the parents' forum. In addition, the lead inspector had telephone conversations with the chair of governors and the School Improvement Partner. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence including assessment information, key policies and practices, the school improvement plan and the questionnaires completed by the students, staff and 103 parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well teaching challenges students and accelerates their progress
- the effectiveness of strategies to eliminate in-school variation in student performance
- the capacity of leaders and managers to drive and sustain improvement
- how well the curriculum meets the needs of students.

Information about the school

The Forest School serves an area that is relatively advantaged. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is well below national averages. A small minority of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Few speak English as an additional language. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is just above the national average. The school has specialist status for engineering and business and enterprise.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school has come through a period of considerable change in the last two years, including the appointment of the headteacher in April 2007. A fundamental restructuring of teaching and support staff has been successfully achieved and a major training programme to develop leadership at senior and middle levels is ongoing. The senior leadership team has grown into a confident and cohesive group with a shared vision for improvement. The headteacher is driving through good improvements in systems and practices with determination, but they are not yet making a full impact in all areas of the school's performance. There is highly effective leadership practice but some middle leaders are inexperienced in evaluating the work of their teams and still require support. Senior leaders have demonstrated good capacity for sustained improvement. For example, since the previous inspection, the curriculum has been transformed from inadequate to good, governance has been effectively restructured and student attendance is above average and improving. The school's specialist status makes an important contribution to students' personal development and has been instrumental in increasing the choice of courses now available to students.

Students join the school with above average attainment. Most are now making satisfactory progress to reach above average standards at the end of Year 11. However, there is variation between subjects. For example, while a strong trend of improvement in the percentage of students gaining five higher-grade GCSEs including English and mathematics has been established, students make better progress in English than they do in mathematics.

Students are well cared for and supported, and most enjoy coming to school. Procedures for safeguarding are outstanding. Generally, students feel the change to mixed-age tutor groups within four learning communities has been beneficial. They particularly value the support of the community leaders. Indeed, one student passing an inspector in the corridor volunteered cheerfully, 'Community leaders are the best thing that's happened to this school!' There are good opportunities for students of all abilities to develop their leadership skills by becoming prefects, lead learners, peer mentors, sport or community representatives. Although many students behave well, behaviour is judged satisfactory because where teaching does not offer sufficient challenge to students there is low-level disruption that is not dealt with consistently.

The improvement of teaching and learning is already a priority and ground is being gained. There is good practice in a number of subject areas. Some teachers plan well-structured lessons that challenge and engage the students. They deliver these lessons at a lively pace, with plenary sessions at the end where students evaluate their progress together. These skills are not shared by all teachers and consequently the

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quality of teaching overall is satisfactory.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching and learning are more consistently good through:
 - using assessment information to set learning objectives that challenge students appropriately, especially the most able
 - evaluating students' progress in lessons and giving them clear feedback about their next learning steps
 - improving the quality of marking
 - developing teachers' skills in questioning to increase engagement and stimulate higher order thinking
 - increasing opportunities for students to apply learning independently
 - helping students to develop the skills of self-assessment through regular opportunities to evaluate their work in lessons
 - higher expectations for the presentation of work.
- Reduce variation in students' performance by:
 - ensuring all leaders can evaluate the work of their teams effectively, especially subject teams
 - increasing the reliability of teacher assessment through moderation and analysis of assessment information in all subjects
 - setting subject specific targets that are meaningful to both students and parents.
- Eradicate low-level disruption in lessons through:
 - well-targeted staff development in classroom management techniques
 - implementing behaviour management systems consistently.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students' achievement is satisfactory. In the recent past there has been evidence of significant underachievement in some subjects, but current assessment data show that students are now making better progress. Information from the greatly improved tracking system shows that students in Key Stage 3 are making at least the expected rates of progress and those in Year 11 are on course to achieve appropriately challenging targets. Teachers have more information to help them tailor provision to students' needs and the more regular review of students' progress is identifying groups who may need additional support. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities continue to make satisfactory progress.

There are good opportunities for students to develop workplace skills. The school's specialist status has a positive impact in this respect. The development of business and financial skills is strongly supported across the curriculum. Students benefit from their

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contact with business professionals, for example through the music enterprise days, Young Enterprise days and British Airways workshops.

In the majority of lessons observed, students were making satisfactory progress. The quality of students' behaviour in the lessons was usually related to the effectiveness of teaching. Where teaching was at its best, so was students' behaviour. Where teaching was insufficiently challenging and teachers' implementation of behaviour management systems was inconsistent, learning was disrupted and students' progress slowed. The large majority of students work productively in lessons and have positive attitudes to learning, as demonstrated by their improving attendance. Many of them present work well in their books, but more sloppy presentation is not always challenged.

Along with the staff, students have experienced many changes in recent months. They believe things are improving and value the positive relationships they have with most staff. Most feel safe and have the confidence to take any problems to staff to get them sorted out. They also know how to keep themselves safe and avoid situations that would put them at risk.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The school has developed a significant amount of good teaching, but has not yet fully raised the quality in all subjects. In the best lessons teachers use assessment information to plan a close match between learning objectives and students' needs, and use skilful questioning to evaluate the learning of individual students during lessons. As a result, gaps in understanding are quickly filled or challenge increased, and students are given quick feedback. In others, planning does not give enough attention to individual needs, and in lessons questioning is less focused and opportunities for students to work independently, extend their thinking and take responsibility for their learning are missed. In addition, marking is of variable quality. Many comments fail to highlight how students can improve and are not related to subject-specific targets. Consequently, most students know what level they are working at but too many do not know how to improve their subject skills.

An innovative approach to curriculum design gives students access to a broad range of options at Key Stage 4. There is a good variety of vocational courses available including engineering, hospitality and catering, and business studies. The school has a wide range of effective partnerships with other local providers and has taken the lead locally in delivering an engineering diploma at levels 1 and 2.

Students are well supported by a good range of additional provision including a popular programme of enrichment activities. The use of enrichment days to extend learning opportunities has been successful, particularly in developing work-based learning and students' social skills. The breadth of the curriculum is helping to motivate students and sustain their engagement with learning. Several students who might otherwise have been vulnerable to exclusion have responded positively to the choices available and flourished.

Levels of support and care for students are well targeted. The school works effectively with other agencies to coordinate services to meet students' needs. Transition arrangements provide very good support to students joining the school. Students benefit from careers guidance that helps them to make appropriate choices about the next stage of education, employment or training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders and staff are ambitious for students and for the school. Systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning are rigorous and the school is well

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aware of where strengths may be built on and where weaknesses remain. Planning is effective. The use of target setting to raise achievement is strengthening. Whole-school targets are appropriately challenging and are broken down into subject targets. Performance management is making individual staff more accountable for students' progress. In the last two years some subject teachers' assessments have been inaccurate and this has resulted in significant underachievement. However, training has improved teachers' understanding of National Curriculum levels and the regular moderation of students' work is increasing the accuracy of assessment.

Governors are very committed to the school and passionate about its continuous improvement. They work closely with the senior leadership team and support and challenge the work of the school effectively. Senior leaders and governors share a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are resolute in tackling underachievement. Equality of opportunity is promoted well through the curriculum and pastoral system. Incidents of racism are rare and any discrimination is tackled forcefully.

Governors are very knowledgeable and effective in fulfilling their duties to safeguard students. High quality training for both staff and governors underpins safeguarding procedures that are robust and meticulously maintained. Risk assessment is well-established and thorough. The school has made appropriate checks on all adults who work with the students and ensures its single central record of such checks is updated at the recommended intervals.

The school knows its context well and makes a valuable contribution to community cohesion. The appointment of a community and enterprise development officer in March 2008 has allowed the school to be more proactive and evaluative in working with community and business partners. The school is increasingly influential within the locality, working together with a group of schools and agencies to provide extended services that are of benefit to local people. It works hard to maintain good partnerships with parents, and within the school cohesion is strong.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1

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The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire felt their sons were happy, safe and well taught at school. They also thought they were kept informed about their sons' progress. However, some parents express concerns about discipline, bullying, academic progress and the leadership and management of the school. Some also feel very strongly that they are not listened to. Other questionnaires conducted by the school and based on a much bigger sample of parents are far more positive. The lead inspector selected a number of parents from those who are members of the parents' forum and requested a meeting with them. These parents were very clear that communications had improved 'dramatically' and shared the view of the inspectors that the school is now far more responsive to the views of parents and that the partnership with parents is now good. They were also very satisfied with the education that their sons were receiving at the school. The inspection judged progress and discipline to be satisfactory, but the report identifies ways in which both should be improved.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

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Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	21	59	57	22	21	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	30	29	61	59	8	7	3	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	23	22	59	57	15	15	4	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	18	48	47	29	28	3	4
The teaching is good at this school	12	12	56	54	27	26	1	6
The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	16	45	43	29	28	6	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	8	7	68	66	18	17	3	5
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	20	47	46	19	18	2	14
The school meets my child's particular needs	14	15	58	56	20	19	5	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	15	15	52	50	20	19	9	6
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	12	39	41	24	25	9	13
The school is led and managed effectively	20	21	40	39	23	22	10	6
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	20	19	50	49	23	22	5	4

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of

completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 December 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Forest School, Horsham RH13 5NW

Thank you so much for helping us when we came to inspect your school last week. We were impressed with how welcoming and polite most of you were. You enjoy school life and this is evident in your improving attendance. The school works hard to make sure you are safe, well supported and cared for. You particularly value the support you receive from the community leaders. Most of you think the vertical tutor groups are a change for the better and older students are certainly rising to the challenge of leading activities in tutor time.

You appreciate the enrichment activities available and the good choice of courses in Key Stage 4. Your academic achievement is satisfactory and you have demonstrated real strengths in some subjects. In the majority of lessons observed, you were making satisfactory progress. In the most effective lessons, you made good progress. Your behaviour is generally satisfactory but some of you become involved in disruptive behaviour in lessons, especially when teachers do not stretch you enough or follow the school's behaviour management system properly. The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory.

After lots of changes, most of you believe that things are settling down and getting better. Senior leaders know what needs to be done to improve the school, and have already started to do this. We have prioritised the following:

- ensuring there is consistency in the quality of teaching across subjects
- reducing the variation in your performance across subjects
- eradicating low-level disruption in lessons.

You can help the school to move forward by working hard in all your lessons. Some of you could also take more responsibility for your learning and not allow yourselves to be distracted.

Good luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White

Her Majesty's Inspector

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