

# Ferndown Upper School

**Address:** Cherry Grove, Ferndown, Dorset, BH22 9EY

**Unique reference number (URN):** 113854

## Inspection report: 3 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	● ● ● ● ●
Expected standard	● ●
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

### ✔ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

#### **How we evaluate safeguarding**

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

## Strong standard ●

### Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils make remarkable progress from their starting points. This is particularly the case for disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment is typically above that of other disadvantaged pupils nationally. Overall attainment is either in line with or above national averages. Students in the sixth form achieve highly, particularly in vocational qualifications. Leaders are taking effective action to further increase students' achievements in A levels.

Pupils in both key stages talk with confidence about their learning and this depth of understanding is reflected in the quality of their written work. Alongside impressive academic achievement, leaders ensure that pupils are very well prepared for their next steps. This is reflected in the high number of pupils who progress to ambitious next steps in education, employment or training.

### Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, demonstrate strong levels of attendance. As pupils join the school in Year 9, published attendance data does not fully capture how positively their attendance compares with that of older pupils nationally. Leaders accurately identify any barriers to attendance that pupils may face. Leaders have established rigorous systems to tackle poor attendance. As a result, the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved over time, often demonstrably so. In some cases, pupils with significant challenges have successfully reintegrated back into full-time education, or are in the process of doing so. This includes some pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, who may not have attended school at all previously.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Social times are calm and orderly. Low-level disruption to lessons is extremely rare because pupils have highly positive attitudes to their learning. Lessons are purposeful and pupils are keen to do well. Staff apply the school's approach to managing pupils' behaviour with consistency. This helps pupils know what to expect. When incidents do occur, leaders take effective action. Rates of suspensions are low and decreasing over time. Pupils respect staff and have positive relationships with them. Bullying is very rare. When it does happen, staff take it seriously and take fair and appropriate action to resolve it. This includes very rare incidents of discriminatory or derogatory language.

### Inclusion

Strong standard ●

Leaders have established an inclusive culture, where pupils' individual needs are identified quickly and accurately. Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from reasonable adjustments to learn successfully and achieve highly. This includes suitable arrangements to support pupils sitting end-of-key-stage examinations. Leaders meticulously evaluate the impact of the support that pupils receive and make changes when needed.

Pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND thrive. Expert support ensures that they attend regularly and work towards appropriate and aspirational qualifications. This is a significant strength of the school.

Leaders work extensively with local partners, and parents and carers to shape support plans for pupils with SEND. Staff understand their role in monitoring pupils' progress and referring any concerns to leaders.

Leaders make effective use of additional funding for disadvantaged pupils. Highly effective pastoral support, access to resources and enrichment activities have a positive impact on these pupils, who attend well and make remarkable progress from their starting points.

Leaders collaborate effectively with the virtual school to support children in care. Personal education plans are regularly reviewed and implemented as intended. These pupils benefit fully from the extensive range of enrichment activities on offer.

Leaders make judicious use of alternative provision and maintain rigorous oversight of the progress and wellbeing of the pupils who attend.

## **Leadership and governance**

**Strong standard** ●

Staff are overwhelmingly supportive of the leadership team. They are happy and proud to work at the school. They appreciate leaders' careful consideration of their workload and wellbeing. A real sense of community and collective endeavour permeates the school, underpinned by exceptionally positive relationships between staff and pupils.

Leaders have a detailed understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. For example, they have rightly taken robust action to ensure that teaching is consistently high quality, and to raise students' achievements in the sixth form. Leaders have prioritised pupils' wellbeing, ensuring that strengthened pastoral teams have the capacity to support pupils when needed.

Staff, including those new to teaching, benefit from a high-quality professional learning programme. This has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and pastoral care. Leaders closely monitor the impact of their actions and seek external scrutiny, including from the local authority and other schools.

Governors know the school very well. They challenge leaders effectively when needed and ensure that decisions are always made in the best interests of pupils. Governors are actively involved in the school, working with leaders to ensure that the most vulnerable pupils receive the support they need to succeed. For example, since the previous inspection, the school has opened a specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This provision is highly effective and provides a nurturing but ambitious curriculum for the pupils who attend.

## **Personal development and wellbeing**

**Strong standard** ●

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, benefit from high quality pastoral care and a wealth of wider opportunities alongside their academic learning. The curriculum for personal,

social, health and economic (PSHE) education is comprehensive. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including online. They learn about important topics, such as healthy relationships and substance misuse. Leaders are highly responsive to issues that may arise within the school community, such as challenges associated with the misuse of social media, or artificial intelligence.

The PSHE curriculum is supplemented with assemblies and visiting speakers. For example, pupils deepen their understanding of religion by meeting representatives of different faiths. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, benefit from welcoming a high number of overseas students into the school each term. These activities help pupils to develop their understanding of fundamental British values, such as tolerance and respect. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for life in modern Britain.

The school's extra-curricular offer is extensive and includes a range of clubs and trips, at home and abroad. For example, pupils in Year 9 attend a residential trip. Many pupils participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils relish these opportunities to develop new interests and build their confidence and resilience.

Student leadership is a strength. Sixth-form students take an active role in developing the school, for example they presented plans to improve the school library to governors. Some pupils organise events that raise money for charity. These experiences develop pupils' social awareness and encourage them to be positive citizens. The school's participation in a university-led project has had a demonstrably positive impact on pupils, effectively supporting boys to develop personally and engage positively with school life.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, benefit from comprehensive careers information and guidance. This includes work experience and the opportunity to meet with employers and education providers. As a result, pupils are incredibly well informed about their next steps in education, employment or training.

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## Expected standard ●

### Curriculum and teaching

### Expected standard ●

Leaders have an accurate understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching. The well-designed curriculum is broad and ambitious. Leaders work closely with local middle schools to understand what pupils have learned previously. Leaders ensure that, when pupils join the school in Year 9, any gaps in their knowledge, including in reading and mathematics, are identified and addressed.

The quality of teaching is typically high, including in the sixth form. Staff have appropriate subject expertise, including a thorough understanding of GCSE and A-level assessment criteria. This supports them when preparing pupils for national examinations. Staff deepen pupils' understanding, for example, through effective questioning. Most of the time, staff skilfully check pupils' understanding and address misconceptions as they arise. Typically, resources and activities are carefully chosen. This ensures that pupils have opportunities to build on what they have learned and to apply their knowledge in new contexts.

Staff typically understand pupils' needs and any barriers to their learning. However, staff do not consistently adapt teaching appropriately. This sometimes hinders pupils' progress through the curriculum and their ability to produce high-quality work. Closing gaps in pupils' knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics remains a priority. However, on occasions, this is not consistently reinforced in lessons. That said, pupils who have fallen behind in reading receive appropriate additional support.

## Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Leaders have designed broad and ambitious programmes of study in the sixth form. Students can achieve a wide range of qualifications, including T levels. Students' achievement in vocational subjects is higher than national averages. Any students with barriers to their learning or wellbeing are supported effectively. Leaders have a detailed understanding of the strengths and areas for development. They have taken effective action to further strengthen the provision, but where there are a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching across the school, this is having an impact on the progress that some A-level students make from their starting points.

Students benefit from effective pastoral support and an extensive range of activities and trips that complement their academic studies. Many take student leadership roles, helping to shape improvements to the school. Others act as 'buddies' to overseas students. Charity and community events are central to life in the sixth form. For instance, students took part in the 'Cardboard Campout' to raise money for a local charity. Students learn about a range of relevant topics to prepare them for life after school, including personal finance. They receive suitable careers information, advice and guidance and participate in work experience in Year 12. This prepares students well for their next steps in higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

## What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are happy and safe at Ferndown Upper School. This is reflected in their regular attendance. Pupils value the positive relationships they have with staff. Pupils have trusted adults they can talk to if they have any worries. Bullying is rare. When unkind behaviour does occur, staff deal with it quickly and effectively.

Pupils behave exceedingly well. Leaders' approach to promoting positive behaviour means that classrooms are calm and purposeful. Pupils respond promptly to staff instructions and focus intently on their learning. Around the school, pupils are friendly and respectful. They cooperate well with each other and show pride in their school community. Students in the sixth form are excellent role models to younger pupils.

Pupils enjoy their learning and achieve highly, particularly in national examinations at the end of key stage 4 and in vocational subjects in the post-16 provision. Teaching is effective and helps pupils to develop secure knowledge and understanding across subjects. Pupils value opportunities to discuss ideas and ask questions. These help to build their confidence. Disadvantaged pupils and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are

supported expertly to overcome any barriers to their learning. They make impressive progress from their starting points.

Pupils benefit from a comprehensive range of opportunities that extend beyond the classroom. These include music and drama performances, visits to theatres and museums, academic clubs and sporting activities. Pupils also take part in visits to places of worship, which help them to deepen their understanding of different faiths and cultures. Enrichment opportunities are central to life in the sixth form. Students engage in activities both locally and nationally, leading events and raising money for selected charities. These experiences help to ensure that pupils are incredibly well prepared for life in modern Britain.

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## Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff adapt their delivery of the curriculum consistently well for pupils with any barriers to their learning, so that these pupils benefit from high-quality support to learn successfully in all subjects.
  - Leaders should build on their improvements in the sixth form, including ensuring teaching is consistently effective, so that students taking A levels make consistently strong progress from their starting points.
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## About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Clive Dedman.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator and groups of staff. The lead inspector met with the chair of the governing body.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school includes provision for SLCN - Speech, language and Communication for 10 pupils.

The school uses one registered alternative provision and one unregistered alternative provision.

### **Lead inspector:**

Victoria Griffin, His Majesty's Inspector

### **Team inspectors:**

Sarah Favager-Dalton, His Majesty's Inspector


Jonty Archibald, Ofsted Inspector

Javinia Harris, Ofsted Inspector

Andrew Raistrick, Ofsted Inspector

## **Facts and figures used on inspection**

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 3 March 2026

## **School and pupil context**

### **Total pupils**

**1,169**

Close to average

### **What does this mean?**

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

### **School capacity**

**1,309**

Close to average

### **What does this mean?**

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

### **Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)**

**22.55%**

Close to average

#### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

### **Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan**

**3.51%**

Close to average

#### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

### **Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support**

**12.66%**

Close to average

#### **What does this mean?**

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

### **Location deprivation**

**Below average**

#### **What does this mean?**

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

## Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

### Resourced provision

#### What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

#### Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

### SLCN - Speech, language and Communication

#### What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

### All pupils' performance

#### English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	45.4%	45.4%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	50.4%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	48.4%	45.3%	Close to average

#### Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	45.7	46.0	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	48.3	45.9	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	49.3	46.3	Close to average

## Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.34	-0.03	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.72	-0.03	Above

## Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

### Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	32.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	34.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.9%	25.2%	Above

### Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	39.3	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	45.2	34.6	Above
2022/23 (final)	43.1	35.0	Above

## Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	0.25	-0.57	Above
2022/23 (final)	0.51	-0.57	Above

## Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

## Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	32.7%	53.1%	-20.5 pp
2023/24 (final)	34.7%	53.1%	-18.4 pp
2022/23 (final)	34.9%	52.4%	-17.5 pp

## Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	39.3	50.4	-11.1

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	45.2	50.0	-4.8
2022/23 (final)	43.1	50.3	-7.2

### Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	0.25	0.16	0.09
2022/23 (final)	0.51	0.17	0.34

### Destinations after 16

#### Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	92%	91%	Average
2022 leavers (revised)	92%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	89%	94%	Below

### 16 to 18 performance

#### A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

<b>Year</b>	<b>This school</b>	<b>National average</b>	<b>Compared with national average</b>
<b>2024/25 (revised)</b>	33.76	34.99	Close to average
<b>2023/24 (final)</b>	31.65	34.38	Close to average
<b>2022/23 (final)</b>	29.60	34.16	Below

### **A-level value added**

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

<b>Year</b>	<b>This school</b>	<b>National average</b>	<b>Compared with national average</b>
<b>2024/25 (revised)</b>	-0.1	0.0	Close to average
<b>2023/24 (revised)</b>	0.1	0.0	Close to average

## **Absence**

### **Overall absence**

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

<b>Year</b>	<b>This school</b>	<b>National average</b>	<b>Compared with national average</b>
<b>2024/25 (2 term)</b>	8.0%	8.1%	Close to average
<b>2023/24 (3 term)</b>	7.8%	8.9%	Close to average
<b>2022/23 (3 term)</b>	8.1%	9.0%	Close to average

### **Persistent absence**

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

<b>Year</b>	<b>This school</b>	<b>National average</b>	<b>Compared with national average</b>
<b>2024/25 (2 term)</b>	19.9%	21.9%	Close to average

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	22.1%	25.6%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	22.2%	26.5%	Close to average

## Our grades explained

### Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

### Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

### Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

### Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

### Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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