

Ferndown Upper School

Cherry Grove, Ferndown, Dorset BH22 9EY

Inspection dates 11–12 May 2016

Overall effectiveness **Good**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The impact of the new headteacher on the performance of the school has been tremendous. His drive, ambition and focus have secured improvements across the school.
- Governors are very effective. They have a strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are increasingly challenging school leaders to bring about further improvements.
- Pupils in all year groups, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability, are making rapid progress.
- The provision for English has improved remarkably, resulting above-average attainment in the GCSE examination in 2015.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Leaders have worked hard to improve classroom practice, secure accuracy of assessment and raise pupils' achievement.
- Teachers and pupils form effective working relationships. These contribute well to creating classrooms where pupils want to learn.
- The school provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. An effective curriculum prepares pupils very well for their future role in modern Britain.
- Pupils' personal development and their pastoral care are real strengths. Staff know their pupils well and care about their well-being. As a result, pupils are very well supported.
- Pupils' behaviour is delightful. The school is a very welcoming place. Pupils' treatment of each other and the site is exemplary.
- The sixth form is good. A wide breadth of provision is well matched to learners' interests and future aspirations. Progression rates are high. However, some learners do not have work-based opportunities outside of the school setting.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- While teaching and pupils' progress are now good, some inconsistencies remain in science and for the most able pupils in some subjects.
- Pupils' literacy skills are not consistently well developed across the school. They are well developed in mathematics, humanities and arts.
- Careers education, advice and guidance is not explicit or fully impartial across all year groups.
- A small number of pupils do not attend the school regularly enough.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer has serious weaknesses.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- To further improve pupils' achievement and reduce any inconsistency in teaching across the school, including the sixth form, by:
 - raising the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in science
 - ensuring the most able pupils are consistently challenged across the curriculum
 - developing pupils' reading, writing and grammar across all subjects
 - ensuring leaders at all levels continually check the impact of teaching on pupils' progress
 - ensuring that the employability skills of learners who are studying vocational courses in the sixth form are developed through a range of relevant work-related activities.
- Ensure that pupils in each year group have access to high-quality careers education, impartial advice and guidance.
- Raise the attendance of a small number of pupils who are persistently absent.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The newly appointed headteacher leads with ambition, vision and uncompromising drive 'in the pursuit of excellence'. He has been pivotal in securing the changes needed at the school. Increasing rigour and a renewed sense of urgency have contributed to rising standards across the school. His strong commitment in delivering further improvement is shared by staff and governors.
- All leaders have a very clear understanding of the strengths and the weaknesses of the school. Improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has been a shared priority. The intense focus has improved the rate of progress for most pupils in most subject areas.
- A more clearly defined leadership structure has raised levels of accountability. Staff now understand their roles and responsibility in improving the achievement of all pupils.
- A more robust and effective system for managing the performance of teachers has been introduced. Teachers are set clear targets for pupils' progress on the principle that 'every pupil, every grade counts'. This has raised expectations of all staff. Leaders and managers have acted robustly to tackle any teaching that is not good enough.
- Leaders are working hard to improve the accuracy of assessment, particularly in English. Additional moderation of work, both within school and externally, is improving the accuracy of teachers' assessment. Leaders now have assessment data that gives them a more reliable and accurate view of pupils' achievement.
- Pupils' progress is monitored carefully by leaders. As a result, timely and effective interventions are put in place so 'no pupil can fall through the net'.
- Staff value highly the effective and personalised training they are given. Training is well matched to the school's improvement targets and closely focused on improving classroom practice and pupils' achievement. Leaders review and refine training continuously.
- The curriculum is well planned and regularly reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils. An appropriate breadth of subjects across all year groups allows pupils to make good progress in developing academic, creative and practical skills. Pupils at key stage 4 and learners in the sixth form are able to select from a range of courses that are well matched to their needs and future aspirations.
- The school provides a range of extra-curricular activities that extend pupils' learning well. Opportunities include a large number of clubs, trips and visits, all of which are valued and well attended.
- There is good planning to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn to respect and are accepting of people with different beliefs, faiths and cultures. Pupils are encouraged and aspire to take on leadership roles such as 'class ambassador'. Such experiences and high expectations are preparing pupils very well for their future role in modern Britain.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. Funding is raising pupils' achievement, particularly in mathematics and English. Leaders more carefully plan and monitor the impact of additional funding. As a consequence, disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than previously.
- Leaders' actions have not yet reduced the persistent absence of some pupils, particularly girls. However, pupils' overall attendance has improved steadily to above the national average. School leaders effectively monitor the attendance, achievement and behaviour of the small number of pupils who attend alternative provision.
- Leaders make effective use of external support. The expertise of the proposed sponsor academy has helped to develop leadership, school improvement strategies and governance. The impact of this support is clearly visible in improvements in governors' practice, sharper self-evaluation and the higher quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors are determined to improve the quality of education for all pupils. High levels of commitment and a clear vision for the future of the school run as a thread through governors' work. The quality of governance at the school is a real strength.
 - The reorganisation of the governing body since the previous inspection, including the development of a core action group, has sharpened governors' focus on pupils' achievement. Governors have redefined their roles and responsibilities well to ensure their skills and expertise are fully utilised. Any gaps in their knowledge have been swiftly addressed through training. They are now more effective in bringing about change at the school.

- Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well and provide school leaders with increasing challenge. Governors make regular contact and visit different departments in the school to increase their understanding and check the school's progress.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There is a very strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Teachers and leaders are fully aware of their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe and maintain accurate and timely record-keeping. Regular training ensures that staff are aware of the latest guidance and are vigilant.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Improvements in teaching across a wide range of subjects are securing higher achievement and helping pupils to learn well.
- Teachers use their highly developed subject knowledge to engage and enthuse pupils. Consequently, most pupils say they enjoy the majority of their lessons and are motivated to learn.
- The professional relationships between pupils and teachers are a real strength. Most teachers have high expectations for their pupils and know them well. As a result, a calm and purposeful atmosphere that is conducive to learning is seen in most lessons.
- Consistently high levels of challenge are found in humanities and across the arts, where pupils, particularly the most able, are required to think hard about their learning. They relish these opportunities and respond very well. However, such high levels of challenge are not evident in all subjects and classes.
- Teachers' use of questioning is strong. Pupils are encouraged to answer well-targeted questions and most do so confidently, showing they are not afraid to make a mistake. As a result, pupils are developing well as resilient and persistent learners.
- Most teachers have high expectations of pupils' presentation of their work, and this is reflected in the evident pride that pupils take in their work in most subjects. Some inconsistency of presentation was apparent in pupils' science books.
- Regular and appropriate homework is extending pupils' learning: pupils say they value this work and it is helping them to develop effective study skills.
- Teachers' regular and effective feedback is supporting pupils' learning. Teachers use the school's assessment process well to evaluate pupils' progress and attainment. Often, detailed and personalised feedback to pupils gives them a clear understanding about what to do to improve their work further, in line with the school's policy. Most pupils are given time to act on this feedback and improve their work. As a result, their progress over time is increasingly rapid. For a very small number of pupils, particularly those whose starting point is lower, this is not always effective because they do not get precise enough guidance on how to improve their work.
- Pupils' skills in reading, writing, speaking and numeracy are extended well in humanities, mathematics and the arts, but opportunities to develop these skills are not as well embedded in other subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The vertical tutoring system is a real strength of the school. Pupils interact and support each other well in their tutor groups. Pupils in Year 11 act successfully as mentors to younger pupils when they join the school. Pupils say this really helps them with their transition from middle school.
- Pupils are very accepting of each other and integrate well, irrespective of their faith, beliefs or culture. A great example is the successful integration of the international pupils who join the school for different periods of time. They are welcomed and mix seamlessly with others so that they quickly become part of the school's daily life. This aspect of the school's work is highly regarded by host families.
- Staff know pupils extremely well. Pastoral support for pupils' well-being is central to everyone's work, whatever their role. As a result, pupils feel extremely safe. Staff identify specific support that pupils need and act on this swiftly, so ensuring that any personal issues do not become a barrier to learning.

- Pupils show a good understanding of how to look after themselves and stay safe. They are astute and show a good awareness of different aspects of personal safety, including online safety and the dangers of extremist views. Regular and effective tutorial sessions, assemblies and physical education lessons are helping them to make effective decisions about healthy and active lifestyles.
- Bullying incidents at the school are rare. Pupils show a good understanding of the different types of bullying. They report that, if an incident does happen, they are fully aware of who to go to; and that adults deal quickly and effectively with any issues.
- Many pupils have high aspirations for themselves. Pupils in Year 11 are well informed about the different opportunities that are open to them and progression rates into further education, including into the sixth form, training and/or employment are high. Careers education, information, advice and guidance is not as well established in Years 9 and 10. Leaders acknowledge that there is further work to be done to embed careers education throughout the curriculum.
- Most pupils are proud of their work and aspire to achieve well. Mostly, they are eager to revise and improve their work, welcoming the challenge. Where pupils have lower self-esteem and aspirations, the pastoral staff work closely and effectively with them to build up their motivation and self-belief.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are pleased to be a member of the school community and wear their uniform with pride.
- There is a tangible, caring ethos around the school that is apparent to any visitor. The school is a very calm, welcoming and pleasant place to learn. Pupils look after the site and each other exceptionally well.
- Pupils are punctual and well equipped and prepared for lessons.
- Most pupils value their education and attendance is now above the national average. Despite hard work from school leaders to improve the attendance of all pupils, a very small number of girls continue to be persistently absent.
- Exclusions have reduced drastically throughout this year and very few pupils have been excluded recently. The small number of pupils who attend alternative provision behave well.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. Previously there were considerable differences in pupils' achievement across subjects. In 2015, pupils made good progress from their often low starting points. In English the proportion of pupils making the expected progress was just below that found nationally. In mathematics the proportions making and exceeding the expected progress was higher than nationally.
- Assessment information on current pupils shows that achievement continues to rise. Across a wide range of subjects, more pupils are achieving well as a result of better teaching. Improvements in English are particularly pleasing and high levels of achievement in humanities are being sustained.
- The gap between disadvantaged pupils and other pupils is closing, and increasingly so lower down the school. In Year 9, the gap in English and mathematics is minimal. Leaders are closely monitoring the progress of this group to ensure that disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as other pupils.
- The achievement of girls and boys is much closer than in the past and is in line with that seen nationally.
- The achievement of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is good. A closer focus on meeting the needs of individual pupils and additional support outside of lessons is ensuring they make secure progress.
- The small number of pupils educated in alternative provision achieve well. They are meticulously tracked and monitored by school leaders. The provision they receive is preparing them successfully for the next stage of their education, training or employment. Some pupils make rapid progress and are successfully reintegrated into mainstream school.
- Standards in modern foreign languages are improving, especially in Spanish. Previously there were considerable weaknesses in pupils' achievement in science and particularly in modern foreign languages. Despite some staffing difficulties, leaders have worked successfully to improve the quality of learning, including work with the feeder middle schools on language teaching. The progress of current pupils in science, however, is not yet improving rapidly enough.
- The most able pupils are achieving increasingly well as teaching becomes more challenging. However, in some lessons, particularly in English, the challenge for these pupils is not always high enough.

- Pupils show confidence and fluency in their reading and most speak confidently using key words and correct terminology. Pupils' weaknesses in writing and grammar are being addressed in some subjects including humanities and art. However, the development of pupils' writing skills is not a strong feature across all subject areas.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Overall levels of achievement in the sixth form have improved since the previous inspection. In a majority of subjects, learners are making good progress. Outcomes in vocational subjects, such as sport, and health and social care, have been particularly strong.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall. Across a large majority of subjects improvements in the quality of teaching, close tracking of learners' progress and improved study support are having a positive impact. Learners make rapid progress in lessons where teachers have the highest expectations and use their subject knowledge extremely well to engage and enthuse a real thirst for learning.
- The sixth form meets the requirements of the 16–19 study programmes. A broad curriculum with a range of different courses matches the needs and future plans of learners well. The level 2 course offers a successful stepping stone to level 3 courses. Progression rates from this course are high.
- All learners access a well-resourced and structured programme of independent study. Learners say they value the additional support that is regularly on hand and it is helping them to develop better study habits. As a result, learners are very motivated and better prepared for their next steps.
- Learners value the additional opportunities they are offered. For example, visits to universities, voluntary roles, work experience and leadership roles, to name a few, are contributing well to developing learners' wider employability skills.
- Learners are well prepared for the next stage of the education, training or employment. Learners say that they have very clear guidance and support and feel well informed about making decisions for their next steps. One example is the 'progression day' that learners experience to help them gain a greater insight into the world of employment and university courses. Effective supplementary advice is available from the school through a third-party provider. The number of learners progressing on to higher education, training or apprenticeship is high.
- The number of learners that stay on in Year 13 is high. Retention rates have increased as a result of closer monitoring, support and advice for learners. Applications for university this year have increased, including some to more prestigious universities, showing higher ambition.
- Success rates for learners resitting mathematics and English are high. Regular and effective provision is helping the small minority of learners who enter the sixth form without a grade C in English or mathematics to prepare and achieve well.
- Current Year 12 learners are making considerably better progress in, for example, mathematics and art than previously. This is due, in the main, to the higher expectations of senior leaders who have a clear and precise understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the provision. They have worked hard to bring about improvement and reduce subject variation, but acknowledge there is still some work to do. They recognise that learners' achievement is less strong in biology, business studies and psychology.
- Current learners following vocational courses are making good progress. These courses are closely matched to the learners who follow them. However, more work is needed to ensure each course involves high-quality and relevant work-based learning.

School details

Unique reference number	138854
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10002546

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	758
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	240
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Moss
Headteacher	Phillip Jones
Telephone number	01202 871 243
Website	www.fernup.dorset.sch.uk
Email address	school@fernup.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 January 2014

Information about this school

- Ferndown Upper School is a smaller than average upper school with provision for the sixth form.
- The newly appointed headteacher joined the school in September 2015.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium funding is below the national average. This is additional government funding to support pupils who are eligible for free school meals and those who are in the care of the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and disability is below the national average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is slightly above the national average.
- The school is working with the leaders from Thomas Hardy School as a prospective academy sponsor. This formal partnership facilitates a core action group made up of members from both schools' governing body and school leaders.
- The school receives regular support from an external consultant, commissioned by the prospective sponsor school to regularly review the school and advise the headteacher.
- The school works in partnership with headteachers from local middle and first schools.
- The school uses alternative provision for a very small number of pupils: Christchurch Learning Centre, The Forum Centre and The Virtual School.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed lessons and looked at pupils' work across a wide range of subjects and year groups. Many of the lessons were observed jointly with school leaders. Inspectors also observed tutorial sessions.
- Discussions took place with the headteacher, a representative from the local authority, an external consultant, headteachers from local schools in the partnership, other school leaders, various members of staff and four governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plan, minutes of meetings, external reviews and reports, records of leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, assessment and tracking information for current pupils, case studies and behaviour and attendance data.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, policies and procedures and spoke to the local authority designated safeguarding officer.
- Inspectors spoke to many pupils from all year groups about their experience at the school. During lessons inspectors looked carefully at the quality of pupils' work, and the accuracy of the school's assessment information.
- Inspectors took into account the 89 responses from the Parent View (Ofsted's online survey), and the 62 responses from the staff questionnaire.
- The school does not meet the requirements for the publication of information about the school's key stage 4 results on the school website. Specific information about the percentage of pupils who achieved the English Baccalaureate and the percentage of pupils who achieved at least the minimum expected levels of progress in English and mathematics between key stage 2 and key stage 4 was not available.

Inspection team

Katherine Powell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Iain Freeland	Her Majesty's Inspector
Tim Gilson	Ofsted Inspector
Margaret Faull	Ofsted Inspector

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