

# Fearnhill School

Icknield Way West, Letchworth, SG6 4BA

**Inspection dates** 16–17 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The headteacher and his senior leaders have responded to the findings of the previous inspection report with passion and commitment. As a result the quality of teaching has risen significantly, and achievement shows substantial improvement.
- Governors have a detailed understanding of the school's performance in all areas. They hold leaders at all levels effectively to account, and provide good support and challenge in equal measure.
- Middle leaders are clear about their critical role in driving forward school improvement. They work collaboratively to ensure improved progress across the curriculum.
- Sixth form provision is a strength of the school. Progress is never less than good and the good support and guidance students receive have enabled them to sustain their achievement over time.
- Overall attainment and progress showed substantial improvement in 2014, and the achievement of most students currently in the school is good.
- Teaching is good. Teachers are committed to the success of their students. They question students skilfully, and assess progress diligently. Consequently, progress is accelerating in many subjects.
- Staff throughout the school ensure that students feel safe, and that any concerns are responded to quickly and effectively.
- Students behave well around the school. They are courteous and polite, and have a clear understanding of how they can make a telling contribution to the life of the school.
- The school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is comprehensive and highly valued by students. It prepares them successfully for life in modern Britain.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Progress in mathematics was too slow in 2014. Students' current rate of progress in mathematics, though accelerating, does not match that of other subjects.
- The progress of disadvantaged students, though good, is not yet rapid enough for their attainment to match that of other students nationally.
- Teachers do not always adapt their teaching sufficiently to reflect the progress students are making in the lesson. Not all teachers make clear to students in their marking precisely how they should improve their work.
- The extension work set for the most-able students does not always raise the level of challenge but sometimes merely offers them additional tasks to complete.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students' learning in 32 lessons, including five joint observations with senior staff.
- Inspectors met with governors, staff, students, parents and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the students at work in class and at informal times, such as before school and during break and lunchtime.
- The inspection team considered 33 parent responses to Parent View, the online survey for parents provided by Ofsted, together with three emails from parents.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation including leaders' evaluation of the school's performance, the school improvement plan, information relating to the quality of teaching, data on students' attainment and progress, school policies and procedures, and the school's arrangements for safeguarding.
- Inspectors analysed 54 questionnaires completed by members of staff.
- Inspectors attended an assembly and observed the work of several tutor groups.

## Inspection team

Anthony Sharpe, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional Inspector

Adrian Reed

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- This school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students who are disabled or who have special educational needs is below average.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium is above average. This is additional government funding for students who are eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The large majority of students are White British. The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The school collaborates with The Highfield School for the provision of sixth form courses.
- A very small number of students attend alternative provision on a long-term basis at North Hertfordshire Education Support Centre.
- The school meets the current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Accelerate the progress of all students in mathematics, and the progress of disadvantaged students in all subjects, by:
  - ensuring that teachers adapt activities as necessary during the lesson, in order to maximise the progress made by all groups of students, and particularly for disadvantaged students
  - ensuring that extension work increases the level of challenge, rather than the size of the task for students, particularly the most able
  - improving teachers' marking and the subsequent guidance they give to individuals, so that all students fully understand how to improve their work.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher and his senior leaders demonstrate the necessary ambition and vision to secure further improvement for the school. They have an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, and have improved standards of behaviour since the last inspection. The ethos of the school is consequently one in which students are now motivated and keen to learn. The improvements they have simultaneously brought about in the quality of teaching have led to higher attainment and more rapid progress.
- Leaders at all levels, including in the sixth form, track the progress of students carefully and identify accurately where further intervention is required. They use this tracking very effectively to decide how best to deploy staff and resources, and this is having a positive impact on students' achievement across the school.
- Middle leaders work well together to promote the academic success of the school as a whole. Their effective leadership is ensuring that the school successfully promotes students' literacy across the curriculum. This is contributing to the rapid progress currently evident in English in all key stages.
- The curriculum has breadth and balance. Senior leaders ensure that students' interests are well catered for and that the school equips them appropriately with the knowledge and skills they need for further study. Leaders adjust the curriculum regularly in the light of the literacy and numeracy needs of students joining the school. They make good use of the funding provided to support those who arrive with lower than expected levels of literacy and numeracy through the school's 'creative pathways' programme. This has led to this group of students making increased progress in English and mathematics, and the gap between these students and their peers in school is closing.
- British values and institutions, such as the role of democracy and the rule of law, are important components of the school's humanities curriculum and the themed study days in its personal and social education programme. The school organises visits to places of historical significance in Britain and abroad to help students to evaluate Britain's position from an international standpoint, and uses events such as the Remembrance Day service to add historical context to that perspective.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural provision of the school is a strength. Students are prepared well for life in modern Britain through their work with visiting speakers, and debates on issues such as equality, abortion and euthanasia. Teachers regularly weave topical world events into discussions at tutor time, and take every opportunity to promote students' deeper understanding of other faiths and cultures. Consequently, there are good relationships between all groups and between adults and students. Students feel that they belong to a vibrant school community, and also understand how they can contribute as a community to wider society. The school promotes equal opportunities well, and leaders ensure that even the slightest hint of discrimination is challenged immediately effectively.
- Leaders and governors make effective use of pupil premium funding to accelerate progress, and analyse the impact of this funding rigorously. As a result, leaders understand which strategies are having the greatest impact on individual students and are able to target resources effectively.
- The local authority has made a significant contribution to the school's evaluation of its work. It has brokered additional support for the areas where development was required, resulting in improvements in both the leadership and management of the school.
- The school's carefully structured programme of guidance ensures that students understand the possibilities open to them, make informed choices about their futures and develop aspirations for further and higher education, and employment. Well-organised careers days allow students to explore the salaries, qualification requirements and typical tasks associated with a wide range of occupations. As a result, the proportion of students in education, employment or training is above average.
- The school carefully monitors the progress, attendance and behaviour of students who are placed in alternative provision. Leaders liaise closely with the provider and take steps to ensure that these students feel part of the wider school community.

- The school's safeguarding provision meets statutory requirements. Leaders work effectively with external agencies in order to keep students safe. Staff are trained regularly and know how to raise safeguarding concerns.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - Governors are effective, and have detailed knowledge of all aspects of the school's performance. They directly scrutinise the work of senior and middle leaders and offer effective support and challenge to the headteacher and his team.
  - Members of the governing body visit the school frequently, and talk to staff and students about their experiences in the school. The school's head boy and head girl are regular attendees at governing body meetings. As a result, governors have first-hand information to confirm the reports they receive from school leaders.
  - Governors scrutinise the arrangements for the management of teachers' performance with care. They have good knowledge of the quality of teaching across the school, and have commissioned external reports to check that the views they hold are accurate. They ensure that objectives for staff reflect the areas of the school where further improvement is required. Salary progression is closely linked to the progress that students make.
  - Governors perform their statutory duties well. Link governors effectively review key aspects of the school's work, such as safeguarding and the progress of disadvantaged students, and report back to the governing body in detail.

## **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. Low level disruption in classrooms is rare, and the recent introduction of a new 'Behaviour Ladder' system has made students more aware of the consequences of their actions. As a result there are fewer incidents of misbehaviour, and fixed term exclusions are falling.
- Attitudes to learning are positive. Students interact well with their teachers, and the good quality of relationships in the classroom is an important factor in the increased rate of academic progress seen across the school.
- Students care for their books and folders and demonstrate their pride in their school and in their learning. The school's facilities and environment are similarly well respected by students.
- Relationships between students of different ages and backgrounds are good. Students demonstrate good social skills during informal times of the school day and when undertaking extra-curricular activities.
- Students are courteous and helpful to both their peers and to the adults who teach and support them. They are effective ambassadors for their school.

### **Safety**

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. The programme of personal and social education is well-planned and structured. This has ensured that students understand how to protect themselves from the dangers of gang cultures, alcohol abuse, and other threats to their personal safety.
- The work undertaken by school staff to protect students from the dangers posed by the internet and social networking is effective. Students are articulate about the measures that they take to avoid harm, and they know how to report online issues that pose a threat to their safety.
- Bullying is rare in this school, and bullying with a homophobic or racist dimension is rarer still. School records show a decline in all forms of bullying, and students report that they are confident that school staff will react swiftly and decisively should bullying take place.
- Attendance has shown a rising trend over time, and is in line with other schools nationally. The proportion of students who are persistently absent was average in 2014, and is falling.
- The school has effective systems in place that confirm students in alternative provision are safe and behave well. Regular contact between the school and the provider ensures that school staff provide

effective support where this is required.

### **The quality of teaching** is good

- Teachers have developed good questioning techniques, which they use skilfully to draw out extended answers from students and accelerate their progress. In a Year 10 statistics lesson, the teacher used an effective sequence of questions to deepen students' grasp of the key learning points, ensuring that students used mathematical language with confidence and accuracy.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students and make sure that students understand that they are expected to achieve well. In one Year 7 science lesson, students finished their activities with a problem that was set and marked as if it were a GCSE question. A student who asked a further more searching question accepted the challenge of making a presentation to the rest of the class on the subject in the next lesson.
- Literacy, numeracy and mathematics are promoted effectively by teachers in all curriculum areas. For example, students handled data charts successfully in a Year 10 geography lesson in order to support different views on coastal erosion. Other students in a Year 10 science lesson used graphs and bar charts to present their research work well. Students in a Year 9 humanities lesson used poetry sensitively to explore the perspectives of different faiths on life after death.
- The school library is used to support the development of literacy well. Years 7 and 8 have regular reading lessons in the library, which supplement the reading undertaken during tutorial sessions and as a regular feature of lessons in English. Consequently, the use of the library as a learning resource for students has almost doubled in a four year period.
- Teaching assistants are effective. They have relevant subject expertise and ask probing questions that require students to think hard about the required response. Teaching assistants have the same high expectations as teachers, and support the progress of those who are disabled or who have special educational needs particularly effectively. In a Year 7 humanities lesson, the teaching assistant's skilful questioning helped her accurately assess the understanding of the students that she was supporting. Consequently, she was able to challenge them to explain their ideas more fully, deepening their understanding as a result.
- In some lessons teachers do not take the opportunity to increase the rate of progress for those who are successful in completing the initial activities. Extension work too often takes the form of more work of the same level, rather than work with greater challenge. Teachers do not always adapt their lesson plans during the lesson in the light of students' responses and progress. Consequently, the progress of all students in mathematics, though accelerating, does not match the levels seen in other subjects. Similarly, disadvantaged students do not make the rapid progress they need to catch up with other students nationally.
- Most teachers have responded well to the need to develop a more consistent approach to marking and assessment, as recommended in the previous inspection report. Students in all year groups and subject areas now benefit from the same assessment system, and they find this helpful in understanding where they are making good progress and where they need to increase their efforts. However, in a small number of cases, marking still does not give students all the help they need to improve their work, and the guidance given by staff during class is either not clear enough or is not heeded by the students themselves.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE qualifications at grade C and above rose in 2014, and the gap to the national average closed. Similarly, the gap between the school's average point score for the best eight subjects taken by students in Year 11 and the national average also narrowed in 2014.
- Current levels of attainment in all key stages are significantly stronger than those seen in previous years, and the quality of the work in students' books and folders indicates that it is set to rise further. The

standards currently being achieved by students are at least in line with and often exceed what would be expected, given their ages and starting points.

- The progress students made across all subjects in Year 11 in 2014 was substantially stronger than in previous years. The proportions of students achieving expected progress, and beyond expected progress, in English were above average, and current achievement shows that this remains the case.
- In 2014 the proportion of those making expected progress in mathematics fell. Although the actions senior and middle leaders have taken to accelerate progress in mathematics have largely been effective, and steady improvements in mathematics are clearly evident in the work of all current year groups, progress in mathematics still does not match the level seen in other subjects.
- Disadvantaged students were a grade behind their school and national peers in mathematics in 2014. The gap in English between disadvantaged students and their peers in school and nationally was two thirds of a grade in both cases, but is now closing rapidly. Progress in mathematics for this group is steadily improving in all year groups, and the gap between this group and their peers in school is narrowing. However, this is not happening fast enough for them to catch up with other pupils nationally.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress from their individual starting points. They make rapid progress in English, and increasingly rapid progress in mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 3.
- The attainment of the most-able students was slightly above average in 2014, and their progress was in line with the most able nationally. The current achievement of this group, both in Year 11 and across the school, is generally stronger than it was last year. However, there is scope for the most-able students to achieve even higher standards because the extension work teachers set is not always as challenging as it could be.
- Students in alternative provision make good progress from their individual starting points. Those who attend such provision are making expected progress in English, mathematics and science, as well as in a range of vocational qualifications.
- The school does not enter students early for GCSE qualifications.

### **The sixth form provision**

**is good**

- The progress of students in the sixth form is good. Students' progress in sociology and psychology and in some vocational courses is significantly higher than that expected given students' starting points. Their attainment in all other courses is in line with expectations.
- Overall attainment is broadly average. Attainment in individual A Level subjects was in line with the same subjects nationally in 2014. The attainment of students following vocational courses was significantly above their peers nationally.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form has improved in line with that found in other key stages. It is consistently good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers accurately assess students' work, and set them challenging targets for improvement. Students are constantly encouraged to develop their learning skills and to read widely and research material for themselves. In a Year 12 art lesson for example, students made rapid progress in identifying the key features needed for a personal study, displaying considerable analytical and reflective skills.
- The strong leadership and management of the sixth form have led to students sustaining good levels of achievement over time. Students value the high level of challenge, support and guidance offered by the leader with responsibility for the sixth form. The rigorous systems put in place to promote a productive work ethic in the sixth form are having a positive impact on students' attendance and achievement.

- The curriculum for sixth form students is broad despite the small number of students in each year group. Students have good opportunities to engage in additional and extra-curricular activities, develop their skills in sport and in the arts well, and regularly lead charity work. They are able to undertake certificated courses in sign language, and act as ambassadors for the National Citizenship Service.
  
- The behaviour and safety of sixth form students are both good. Students demonstrate positive attitudes to learning, and these are reinforced by the supervised study sessions which encourage students to develop sustained focus on their work outside of formal lessons. Retention rates are good. Last year almost all students went on to enter employment or continue with their education.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117504
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	465207

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	580
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	104
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Paul Vaughan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jed Whelan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 September 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01462 621200
<b>Fax number</b>	01462 621201
<b>Email address</b>	admin@fearnhill.herts.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone [0300 123 4234](tel:03001234234), or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and *inspects* to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone [0300 123 4234](tel:03001234234), or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: [0300 123 4234](tel:03001234234)  
Textphone: [0161 618 8524](tel:01616188524)  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2015

