

Inspection of Fearnhill School

Icknield Way West, Letchworth, Hertfordshire SG6 4BA

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 September 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Fearnhill School are happy and safe. Pupils describe the school as being 'like a family'. They value the positive relationships they have with staff and each other. Pupils learn important values such as tolerance and compassion. In their experience, it is fine to be different. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue. If any incidents were to occur, they feel that staff would deal with them effectively.

Pupils benefit from the high expectations that leaders have for what they can achieve. Classroom routines are well established to support all pupils to participate fully in their lessons. Pupils are engaged in their lessons and learn effective strategies for remembering new information. This helps them to achieve well.

Pupils know how to behave appropriately. They behave well in the vast majority of lessons and during social time. The school environment is calm and orderly. Pupils who sometimes struggle to manage their behaviour are supported effectively by well-trained staff.

Pupils enjoy school. They speak positively about the extra-curricular and enrichment activities that they take part in, such as sports and performing arts. Many pupils are also involved in the 'Fearnhill Flyers' programme which partners with Balliol College, Oxford. These activities build pupils' confidence.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have high ambitions for all pupils and students at Fearnhill School. They have prioritised curriculum development and high-quality staff training to ensure that all students and pupils achieve well. Leaders have put in place an ambitious and well-sequenced curriculum in all subjects. Teachers make sure that pupils and students learn the important knowledge and skills that are required to move successfully through the curriculum. Assessment is used carefully to identify any gaps in pupils' knowledge or potential misunderstandings. Teachers use this information well to plan lessons that support pupils and students to gain the knowledge they need to achieve well.

Teachers make sure that all pupils and sixth-form students are secure in their knowledge and understanding before moving on to new topics. Teachers revisit important knowledge to help pupils remember more over time. For example, in geography, pupils learn about the Greenhouse Effect in younger year groups and then revisit this in greater depth at GCSE. This helps them to build on their knowledge and deepen their understanding. Teachers adapt the curriculum well for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils with SEND achieve well alongside their peers.

Leaders prioritise reading across the school. They quickly identify pupils who are not confident readers and give them the help they need to catch up quickly. Staff have

received training so that they can help these pupils to secure their phonics knowledge and develop reading fluency.

Staff support pupils and students well in their social and cultural development. Through tutor time, assemblies, visiting speakers and lessons, leaders have focused on developing the qualities of a 'Fearnhill Student'. Many sixth-form students demonstrate the qualities of a 'Fearnhill Student' by supporting younger pupils.

Leaders ensure that pupils are taught how to keep themselves healthy and safe. Pupils also learn about different views and beliefs. They have good knowledge and understanding of equality and diversity and are well prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders are beginning to monitor pupils' attendance at extra-curricular clubs so that they have the information they need to ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND, are fully accessing the wider curricular provision on offer at the school.

All pupils, including students in the sixth form, receive independent careers advice. Leaders ensure that pupils receive relevant information about academic and technical training opportunities. The majority of sixth-form students have a good understanding of opportunities available to them once they finish school.

Leaders work closely with families and other agencies to help improve pupils' attendance, and this has had a positive impact on the attendance of many pupils. However, there is still a small number of pupils who do not attend school as regularly as they should. Leaders recognise there is further work to do to ensure all pupils attend school regularly.

The governing body is supportive of the school, and the leaders in the school. Governors are effective in ensuring that the school fulfils its statutory duties. They require further training to ensure they are equipped to hold leaders to account sufficiently robustly, to ensure the quality of education continues to improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

School leaders have created a culture in which all pupils feel safe and are safe. Staff are well trained to identify any pupil who may be at risk of harm. They liaise closely with other agencies outside the school and seek support for pupils and students in a timely manner. Leaders have appropriate systems in place to enable staff to report any concerns they have. They regularly review their procedures to ensure these are effective. Leaders are alert to any emerging safeguarding issues in the community and provide additional training where needed to help to keep pupils safe.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The attendance of some groups of pupils is not as high as it should be. This means that a small number of pupils are not accessing lessons as often as they should and may fall behind their peers. Leaders should work closely with harder-to-reach pupils to help them improve their attendance.
- Some students do not fully access the school's wide and varied extra-curricular offer. This means that they are not fully benefiting from the provision that is in place for their wider social development. Leaders should ensure they closely monitor which pupils take up wider opportunities so that they can assure themselves that all pupils access the wide set of rich experiences available.
- Governors are not all sufficiently trained in holding school leaders to account regarding the quality of education. Subsequently, some governors and not yet fully effective in supporting leaders in this area. Governors should develop the role of the governing body so that all governors make an equally strong contribution in holding leaders to account for their work.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	117504
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10241113
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	569
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	65
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Aneurin Hathway
Headteacher	Elizabeth Ellis
Website	www.fearnhill.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 and 13 February 2019

Information about this school

- There are currently four pupils at the school who make use of a registered provider for alternative provision: North Hertfordshire Educational Support Centre.
- The school collaborates with Highfield School for the provision of sixth-form courses.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher for teaching and learning, and assistant headteacher for student development and welfare.
- An inspector visited pupils who are educated off site and spoke to staff at the provision.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages, art and science. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils and students about their learning, and looked at examples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- The lead inspector met with staff responsible for the administration of the single central record. The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead and deputy safeguarding lead to discuss the arrangements that are in place to safeguard pupils. The lead inspector scrutinised the school's safeguarding records. The lead inspector spoke to the link governor responsible for safeguarding.
- Inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experience of school, including behaviour and bullying. They also met with leaders responsible for behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors reviewed 142 pupil responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. Inspectors took account of 75 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 52 free-text responses. Inspectors considered the 51 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Bessie Owen, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Shan Oswald	Ofsted Inspector
Andrew Hemmings	His Majesty's Inspector

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