

Forest Hill School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100745
Local Authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	307467
Inspection dates	18–19 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Anne Feltham 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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	1364
6th form	204
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Leslia Thauoos
Headteacher	Mr Peter Walsh
Date of previous school inspection	11 November 2002
School address	Dacres Road Forest Hill London SE23 2XN
Telephone number	020 8699 9343
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Age group	11-19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, accompanied by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Forest Hill School is a comprehensive school for boys aged 11-19. The school is oversubscribed and there are currently over 1300 pupils, with almost 200 in the sixth form. The school collaborates with two other local secondary schools to form the Hillside 14-19 Federation. In 2004 the school gained specialist performing arts college status. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average, as is the number of pupils whose first language is not English. The school has a rich ethnic mix, with over half of its pupils coming from a range of black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is higher than average. The school is nearing the end of a substantial on-site rebuilding programme, which has entailed many lessons taking place in temporary accommodation and resulted in greatly reduced recreation space for the boys.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Forest Hill School is a good school, with some outstanding features. Pupils and parents are overwhelmingly positive about their school, and they combine with staff to give a strong sense of 'our school'. One parent wrote: 'The school is lucky to have such a dedicated staff and particularly the headteacher. He taught me in 1974 and he is as passionate about the school now as he was then'. Pupils talked about their teachers being 'knowledgeable' and 'passionate', and these qualities underpin the school's success in ensuring that pupils achieve well. Good teaching predominates, and subject leaders recognise that their next challenge is to improve still further the way in which they involve all pupils in assessing and improving their own work.

Many pupils start at the school with standards that are below average, but they work hard and make good progress as they move up the school. Results by Year 9 are good and are improving year on year, and there are many aspects of successful performance at GCSE. The school sets itself challenging targets to improve these further. The school's federated sixth form enables older pupils to provide good role models for the younger boys and show them how to succeed.

The school achieved performing arts college status in 2004, and this initiative has very effectively supported the school's commitment to challenging traditional macho stereotypes. Music, art, drama and dance are promoted at all levels, during the school day and beyond. The school's strong ethos promotes harmony amongst the different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities from which its pupils are drawn; pupils say this works very well. One senior pupil described the school's zero tolerance approach to the use of racist or homophobic language and behaviour.

The school's current major rebuilding programme has challenged staff and pupils, as they go about their work in the midst of a construction site. The school has used what might be a potential threat to pupils' stability to help them understand health and safety issues, and to put them continuously to the test in terms of behaviour. Recreation space has been limited, and pupils have been forced to consider others constantly as they make their way around the site. This consideration, respect and concern for others is at the heart of what the school achieves. Pupils know that boisterous behaviour around the school is potentially dangerous, and they work well with staff to stem this. Pupils and parents agree that the school generally deals very well with the relatively few instances of inappropriate behaviour or bullying.

A new extended senior leadership team is meeting recent challenges admirably. There are good plans in place to ensure that the move later this year will address some current gaps in learning, for example restrictions on pupils' use of information and communication technology (ICT). The school is a thriving, successful community and has the capacity to become outstanding.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school works effectively with its partners in the Hillside Federation to ensure that sixth form students receive a good standard of education. The trend in examination results over the last three years has been an upward one, and this represents good achievement on the part of the students. In many cases, they do better than their earlier results would indicate, and the school helps them very well to overcome the barriers to achievement that they face. Students develop into mature and responsible young adults who enjoy their lessons and are well prepared for future study and for employment. They make a good contribution to the school community,

for example in mentoring younger students. Teaching in the sixth form is characterised by strong subject knowledge, enthusiasm and an appropriate emphasis on the skills needed to achieve academic success. One student said of his teachers, 'They make sense of what you do'. The school, through the federation, enables students to access a wide range of academic and applied courses at a range of levels, and to enjoy a good variety of extracurricular activities. Students comment extremely favourably on the care and guidance they receive, and say that their teachers are friendly and approachable, but are also prepared to challenge them to achieve the highest standards of which they are capable. The school's systems for tracking student progress have been successful in identifying problems as they arise, and in raising students' levels of attainment. Sixth form leaders and managers work effectively with the other federation schools and with other agencies. They have accurately identified areas for improvement, and have put in place measures which have resulted in their students' increasing success.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that managers of all subjects develop across their teams a more secure understanding of assessment for learning and target-setting.
- Develop all pupils' access to ICT opportunities to support learning, as a priority in the new school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Students' good progress in Years 7 to 9 is reflected in year on year improvements in the Year 9 national tests. In 2006, the results reached the national average, and were above average in English. Provisional results for 2007 indicate above average standards in English, mathematics and science. These significant improvements reflect the school's recent emphasis on systematic progress tracking and target setting. These have helped the school to exceed its challenging targets. Achievement continues to be good for the current students in Year 9, and they are attaining above average standards. Given that attainment on entry to the school is below average, students achieve well.

As they move through Years 10 and 11, students continue to make good progress. GCSE results for 2006, although below the national average overall, are close to the average when English and mathematics are included, and exceed the average for all boys nationally in their best eight subjects. Provisional results for 2007 indicate a similar pattern of attainment. Established progress-tracking and target-setting systems have recently been revised. They are beginning to make a positive impact on standards which, for the current students in Year 11, are above average and in line with the school's suitably aspirational targets. The school has identified a slower rate of progress for some pupils from specific ethnic backgrounds and is beginning to address this issue. Vulnerable pupils generally make good progress, as do pupils with English as an additional language and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Standards are broadly in line with national averages. There is some variation between subject areas; for example, performance at advanced level in history and in English has been strong, while results in the one-year religious education course have been below the national average.

Progress for the current students in the sixth form is good, and reflects the good quality of teaching and learning. Standards attained post-16 have improved over the past three years and, although below average overall in 2006, are now in line with the national average.

The school has met and exceeded the targets associated with its specialist status. Students' achievement in the performing arts is leading to improved progress and attitudes to learning in various subjects across the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They develop socially and morally as they grow through the school, and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They seize avidly opportunities to develop cultural awareness, and share the benefits of the cultural diversity of the school and the community beyond. Their spiritual development is also strong, and they are thoughtful, reflective and very keen to explore their values with their teachers and each other. Extensive sporting opportunities enable them to develop healthy lifestyles, and, despite limited choice currently in temporary canteens, they know how to choose healthy options. Their active involvement at all stages of the current building programme has enabled them to gain a first-hand understanding of health and safety issues. They also help each other to keep safe, taking opportunities to get involved in mediation and restorative justice schemes, which address the root causes of any rare cases of violence and crime. Pupils understand the need to attend school regularly and to be punctual. Their behaviour is good overall. Whilst it is often excellent in lessons, where the great majority of pupils are attentive and engaged in their learning, it is also good outside the classroom, given the large numbers of boys currently moving around the restricted site. Pupils monitor each other's behaviour, and support each other to 'do the right thing'. Older pupils are good role models; they coach and mentor younger pupils and take their responsibilities very seriously. They contribute excellently to the life and development of their school, of which they are very proud.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers are fully committed to ensuring all learners succeed and achieve well. They establish very good working relationships with pupils and know them well. When teaching is most effective, teachers select stimulating and exciting activities, using appropriate teaching methods that engage the pupils well and enhance their learning. Teachers' effective use of questioning techniques challenges the pupils' knowledge and understanding. These enable good progress to be made in the great majority of lessons.

In one of the outstanding lessons seen during the inspection, Year 10 dance pupils were learning sequences to a street dance piece. The teacher utilised his excellent knowledge and skilful approach, breaking down the activities in a clear and sequenced way. This, combined with very clear teaching points, enabled pupils to make exceptional progress.

Where teaching is not as good, lessons are over-directed by the teacher, which results in some pupils being passive, and insufficiently involved in their learning. This limits their progress made within the lesson. Whilst the recent introduction of assessment for learning strategies is improving pupils' learning overall, it is not yet consistent across departments. In English, this practice is particularly well developed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school's curriculum is good, is broad and balanced in all three key stages and generally meets learners' needs well. In Years 10 and 11, pupils can opt for a variety of courses provided to meet their learning needs. For example, there are increasing numbers of pupils who choose Level 2 in music technology and dance examination courses. The effective Hillsyde 14-19 Federation enables further depth and variety of courses. There are opportunities for early entry GCSE in both mathematics and English literature, and pupils may study all three separate sciences.

A considerable strength of the school is the extensive range of extra-curricular activities in which a large number of pupils participate. This is particularly evident in the arts and sporting opportunities where pupils demonstrate significant achievements at local and regional levels.

Literacy is well developed throughout the school and there are opportunities for students to develop their awareness of the world of work. Although provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection, with particularly good developments in mathematics, for example, not all students currently have sufficient access to the subject in Years 10 and 11. Opportunities will be significantly expanded when pupils move into the new school accommodation in the coming months. Currently there is a low take-up for modern foreign languages after age 14, and the school is planning changes to address this issue.

The school's specialist status in performing arts has made a significant impact upon the curriculum and within the community. The annual expressive arts days unite Year 8 pupils in developing a street carnival celebration; this strengthens links with the community and allows pupils to express themselves creatively.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care provided for pupils is outstanding and staff work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are happy and that they achieve. In this school, every child really does matter. Pupils enjoy coming to school; both they and their parents express overwhelmingly positive views about this. Throughout the challenges of rebuilding and changes in senior staffing over the last year, pupils' welfare has remained paramount. Teachers model respectful attitudes and pupils respond, resulting in very good relationships between pupils themselves and between them and the staff of the school. Pupils are very welcoming and polite to visitors. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place. Attendance has increased progressively in recent years and the school's procedures for securing high attendance and better punctuality have had a real impact. Pupils talk with respect about the very strict procedures for 'phoning home' if they are late for school. Following analysis of the exam performance of different pupil groups, the school is now developing useful, and valued, strategies for raising the self-esteem and motivation of some black pupils. The school is aware of the need for further refinement of the developing programme to support individual pupils' often complex identities. Another aspect of the school's inclusive approach is that bilingual pupils are encouraged to take examinations in their home or heritage language. The relatively new academic tracking systems have already made significant impact

on achievement for pupils in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form. Similar systems are now in place to raise attainment further for pupils in Years 10 and 11.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leadership and management are good overall, with some outstanding features. The headteacher continues to provide outstanding personal leadership - as reported at the time of the previous inspection - and he is very ably supported by an extended senior leadership team, which combines experience with innovation. Self-evaluation at school level is very strong, and the senior staff and governors know their school very well. For example, new senior staff have been appointed to lead on areas such as target-setting and ICT which the school has identified as priorities for development. Teaching and learning are monitored closely, and the team identify strengths very accurately, and act in a prompt and robust manner to address weaknesses. The school plans very well for improvement, with pupils' progress at the heart of all processes.

Subject leaders and middle managers are developing good practice in monitoring the work of their teams, although there remains variation in effectiveness across subjects. Similarly, there is some way to go in bringing about a consistency of practice in departmental self-evaluation and improvement planning at subject level. Nevertheless, robust systems are in place, with some good practice already emerging, and secure line management systems have the potential to make improvements happen quickly.

Governors are highly committed to the school, and supportive of its development, through major recent upheavals and in seeking continuous improvement of pupils' life chances. They are fully involved in the life of the school and constitute very challenging critical friends. Currently, the completion of the new school and the move into a much enhanced teaching and learning environment, is within reach and managers at all levels have very clear plans for how this will enhance pupils' learning, especially in the use of new technologies.

The way in which the school has continued to provide an effective education for its pupils, whilst implementing in its midst a new school for the future, points to exemplary management.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

1 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Forest Hill School, London, SE23 2XN

During our recent visit to your school, inspectors talked to many of you and listened to your opinions. We were very impressed by your confidence, honesty and maturity. A great many parents and carers also let us know how they feel about the school. Views expressed were overwhelmingly positive about all the things the school does well - including how well it is led - and there is, importantly, a strong feeling that the school is tackling better and better the things it needs to improve.

We agree that Forest Hill School is a good school, with many outstanding features. There is a strong focus on learning and achieving, and you make good progress as you move through the school. You have a clear sense of right and wrong, and we were very impressed when you explained how your teachers help you make right decisions - including when you have perhaps done something that you have later regretted. You are proud of the diversity of ethnic backgrounds, religions and languages in your school and are preparing well to be 'citizens of the world'. You look out for, and after, each other. Your work in the performing arts is stunning.

You talked to us about your teachers and how they are 'knowledgeable' and 'passionate' about their subjects. This good teaching enables you to make progress and achieve. Your school is successfully bringing in new systems to involve you more in assessing your own progress and planning next steps in learning. The inspection team has asked senior staff to make sure that these good plans are put into action in all subjects and across all year groups. This will help you get even better exam results. You also need to use information and communication technology more, and this will be easier when you move into the new accommodation later this year.

We know that you have all experienced some upheaval during the recent rebuilding of your school, but you have every right to be very proud of your role in what is being developed. We are sure you will take advantage of all the benefits of your magnificent new school, and wish you every success in the future.

Thank you again for your tremendous hospitality - you're great ambassadors for Forest Hill School!

Yours sincerely,

Anne Feltham Her Majesty's Inspector