

Fortismere School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102156
Local Authority	Haringey
Inspection number	376675
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Clare Gillies

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,643
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	430
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Claire Murdoch
Headteacher	Helen Anthony
Date of previous school inspection	18 May 2007
School address	Southwing Tetherdown Muswell Hill N10 1NE
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. They observed 55 part-lessons and, including registrations and assembly, about 60 teachers. Meetings were held with several groups of students, including members of the school council, members of the governing body, senior leaders and members of staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at lesson observation records, data about past and current achievement, exclusions, attendance and participation in extra-curricular activities, and safeguarding policies and procedures. They analysed questionnaires completed by 158 staff, 153 parents and carers, and 146 students chosen at random from all years.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The 2011 examination results, including the progress made by different groups of students, and the value added to students' achievement by the sixth form.
- Relationships with parents and carers, and the impact of the recently introduced behaviour-for-learning strategy.
- Evidence that teaching and learning have improved, particularly in the preparation of work for different abilities, and in the use of assessment to plan learning.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average with over one quarter of its students in the sixth form. It has specialisms in mathematics, computing, music and modern foreign languages. Half the students are White British, about one tenth from Other White backgrounds and a third from other minority ethnic groups. The school has lower than the national proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities but a higher than average proportion with statements of special educational needs, predominantly for autistic disorder spectrum and behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is low. There are more boys than girls, except in Year 7 and the sixth form. The school has an International School Award and Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark awards, and shares a site with a school for deaf children and a primary school reception class. The headteacher took up her post in September 2010.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school is outstandingly effective. Standards have risen since the previous inspection with a significant increase in 2011. Students made very respectable progress in the past but their present high levels of achievement are reflected in better examination grades and the greater number of students going to university. It is therefore not surprising to find that the quality of teaching has improved; it is good or better in the large majority of lessons and outstanding in the sixth form. Comments from parents and carers referred to the 'wonderful' and 'dedicated and professional' teachers. Students make outstanding progress because their hard work, consistent application, and encouragement and support for learning at home are combined with good and effective teaching.

A student described the school's ethos as 'informal but with high academic standards', an apt description for a school with no uniform and where students are assumed to be sensible and act with maturity; practically all of them do. Whatever their ethnic or cultural background, students get on very well together. This contributes to the improved behaviour and a harmonious atmosphere.

Despite the overall improvement, the percentage of A* and A grades at GCSE and A level is not so high in a small minority of subjects. Teachers have recently focused on preparing work that matches students' different capabilities and asking questions which stimulate their higher-order thinking, but this good practice does not happen in all lessons. The inspection confirmed the school's evaluation of the quality of marking, which is that teachers' comments do not always tell students exactly what they must do to improve, and that they do not always expect students to respond to feedback.

A parent wrote that her child was 'exceptionally happy' at school and the inspection confirmed that practically all students enjoy being at school and feel very safe. The school promotes good health but not quite rigorously enough. Only Key Stage 3 students have two hours of physical education lessons a week, and the department has not yet met its target of at least half the students participating in activities. Healthy lifestyles are promoted in subjects such as science and citizenship, although a few parents and carers expressed concerns about the quality of the canteen food.

Although an extremely small minority still voice their concerns, the school's relationships with parents and carers, the key issue in the previous inspection report, are much better. The headteacher has been single-minded in her successful drive to improve the school and raise levels of attainment. Senior and middle leaders, some

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of whom are new to their posts, have supported a comprehensive list of successful initiatives and have realistic plans to take them further; the school knows exactly where there is scope for improvement because data monitoring and analysis are much more accurate. For example, plans to generate more outstanding lessons are based on meticulous analysis and insight into the quality of teaching and learning. These positive factors, together with the marked improvement in students' attainment, demonstrate that the school's capacity to improve is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the percentage of A* and A grades at GCSE and A level in 2012 by:
 - insisting on lesson preparation which generates work at the right level for all students, particularly those who are gifted and talented
 - establishing a marking policy which makes it clear how often work should be marked and which sets the standard for detailed, practical comments on how students can improve
 - giving students time in lessons to reflect and respond to the written comments on their work.

- Promote students' healthy lifestyles more rigorously by:
 - increasing the number of hours of physical activity for students, especially in Years 10 to 13
 - encouraging and monitoring attendance at extra-curricular sports in all years.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

The excellent relationships between students and teachers significantly contribute to students' good learning. Students relish discussions and group work. They are attentive, work hard and contribute insightful and sophisticated thoughts and ideas, especially when teachers skilfully stretch their thinking with probing questions. In a Year 8 English lesson practising speaking skills, students used rhetorical questions and sophisticated vocabulary to argue their cases. Groups of Year 7 students in history confidently prioritised historical evidence using a wide range of different approaches.

Students enter Year 7 with above-average levels of attainment and then make outstanding progress between Years 7 and 11. In 2010, 73% of students attained five GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics; this increased to 80% in 2011 when the gap between girls' and boys' results narrowed significantly. In over half the subjects taken for GCSE, the A*-C results were 90% or higher. Looked-after children and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make outstanding progress; in the last two years, an above average percentage has attained five GCSE grades A*-C including English and mathematics. Helped by its languages specialism, the percentage of students achieving the English Baccalaureate in 2011 was well above average.

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Students feel very safe in school. After less than a term, Year 7 students were able to discuss e-safety and road safety, and they understood the importance of self-esteem. The very rare incidents of racist behaviour or bullying are tackled firmly and promptly. Students have a very mature understanding of spiritual, social, moral and cultural issues but the school does not always celebrate religious festivals and events. Since the appointment of the headteacher, students’ behaviour and attendance have both significantly improved.

The school prepares students very well for higher education and employment. By the time they leave, they have high levels of literacy, numeracy and computer skills, and have had much experience of team and group work. The origami birds made to raise funds for Japanese tsunami victims are just one example of students’ keen fundraising efforts. It is for reasons such as this that the school has received an International School Award. Year 11 students take on responsibilities inside school and help to plan the school fair; a few volunteer in the community, by working in an Oxfam shop, for example. There are fewer opportunities for younger students to be fully involved in school life.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	1
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Students’ learning was good or better in the large majority of lessons. Students observed that, ‘Teachers make learning as fun as possible’ and that ‘There’s a good mix of interactions and writing, in well-structured lessons.’ Teachers prepare helpful

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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presentations on electronic whiteboards which help students to understand the topic and steer them through lessons. In a very successful art lesson, a DVD clip of examples was played as Year 7 students mastered the mixing of skin-tone colours. In a Year 11 citizenship lesson, where students were debating bullying, the teacher praised students’ use of thinking skills and their confidence visibly increased. In a very small number of lessons, teachers talked for too long or asked questions that did not stimulate thinking.

The outstanding curriculum is constantly reviewed to match students’ interests and abilities. Highlights at present include 60 students studying GCSE Mandarin, immersion days (playing hockey in German, for example), engineering and mathematics workshops, numerous visits in London and overseas, karate, street dance and musical activities in the new, purpose-built block. Many of these attributes have been recognised through national awards. The excellent facilities for music technology and composition have strengthened music provision; students also rate the library highly. Courses leading to qualifications are now in place for the few students who have low levels of literacy and numeracy.

The new Year 7 induction arrangements are highly successful. Year 11 students are now accommodated in the same block as Year 7 and the older students enjoy helping those new to the school to settle in. The attention paid to students who need particular personal or educational support has been strengthened significantly so that no child falls through the net and, where necessary, mentors work closely with individual students. The pastoral and academic care all students receive is outstanding.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

In only a year, the headteacher and her senior team have achieved a great deal, not least by encouraging departments to work together, refusing to accept poor punctuality, attendance or behaviour, tightening up communication procedures and methodically collecting and analysing data on achievement. There is a shared understanding that the school must not be complacent but must look forward and be innovative and ambitious; staff are proud to work at the school and know what it is trying to achieve. Teachers appreciate the high-quality training and professional development on offer. Experienced teachers now support other schools and Fortismere is hosting a major teaching and learning forum for several of them. Good

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leadership of teaching and learning, based on sharp lesson observations and the identification of good practice which can be shared, is having an increasingly positive impact in the classroom.

The governing body has several recently appointed members under a determined new chair. The Chair of the Governing Body is rightly proud of the progress made in the last year, and believes that relationships with parents and carers have changed significantly for the better, while acknowledging that there is still work to do in a number of areas. The governing body has set up groups focusing on important issues, such as improving the reliability of the school’s computer systems. Governors give safeguarding and child protection a high priority, seeking expert advice when necessary. Policies and procedures are fully in place and reviewed; educational visits have stringent risk assessments.

The promotion of equality of opportunity underpins the school’s work. Examples of this include the good attainment in basic skills in Years 10 and 11, a keen focus on human rights and responsibilities in citizenship, and the realistic careers advice for students who do not meet sixth-form entry requirements or who wish to follow vocational qualifications.

Strong ties with health agencies and other external welfare organisations support students’ welfare needs. Successful partnerships with other London schools and universities offering teacher training support students’ education well and make a good contribution to the promotion of community cohesion. The latter is extended by students volunteering and sharing their work, for example in music, in the local community. International links are strong, with several related to the languages studied, but students have limited knowledge of the diverse communities in the United Kingdom outside London.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Sixth form

Students attain high grades in the sixth form and a very large majority of them move on to higher education. In 2011, well over half of the students achieved A* to B grades at A level, particularly in popular subjects such as English, mathematics, the sciences, history and psychology. Half of the Year 12 students who took AS level mathematics, a specialist subject for the school, attained A grades. Students are mature, confident and well prepared, not only for examinations, but for their future education and employment.

Students make outstanding progress because teaching by subject specialists is challenging, stimulating and lively. Students study enthusiastically, think for themselves, carry out research and learn from each other. Many of them contribute to the community, for example by running a magazine, mentoring Year 11 students, acting as senior students or community representatives, raising funds for charity or volunteering in primary schools or local hospitals; the number of students who leave to study medicine at university is high. Fewer than one in five students participates in school sports, although the Duke of Edinburgh’s award is increasingly popular.

There is little demand from students, parents or carers for courses leading to vocational qualifications. Instead, the sixth form successfully provides a curriculum comprised of a large number of academic subjects and a wide range of clubs and enrichment courses, such as critical thinking, global perspectives, university master classes, gifted and talented programmes, and participation in an engineering scheme.

The sixth form welcomes students from other schools and they settle in quickly. Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are high. In addition to effective academic guidance about higher education and careers, students receive the same outstanding pastoral care and support as in the main school. Leaders and managers successfully ensure that the sixth form operates smoothly and they have a very clear analysis of where further improvements should be made.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Fewer than 10% of parents and carers completed the inspection questionnaire, a very low return, possibly because the school had sent out a similar questionnaire two

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weeks before the inspection. Close to 100 parents and carers responded with comments, one third of which praised many different aspects of the school's provision, notably the improvements made by the headteacher, the quality of teaching, the pastoral care and the extra time and effort staff give to students. A very small number of parents and carers wrote only negative comments. Their concerns focused on the new behaviour code and its sanctions, communications, the quality of teaching, the admissions criteria and homework. Inspectors spent much time considering the full range of issues raised and concluded that evidence did not support their concerns. For example, inspectors found the behaviour policy to be effective and much evidence was seen confirming the speed of response and the quality of attention given to parents' and carers' letters and emails. The headteacher has organised several consultation evenings but attendance has not been high.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Fortismere School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 153 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1643 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	66	43	75	49	9	6	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	60	39	81	53	6	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	37	24	74	48	31	20	6	4
My child is making enough progress at this school	43	28	64	42	34	22	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	43	28	77	50	23	15	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	30	20	73	48	34	22	9	6
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	21	14	74	48	36	24	5	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	35	23	54	35	38	25	5	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	38	25	75	49	26	17	4	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	43	28	76	50	21	14	3	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	16	63	41	38	25	13	8
The school is led and managed effectively	41	27	68	44	26	17	5	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	62	41	62	41	18	12	5	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Fortismere School, Muswell Hill N10 1NE

We very much enjoyed the two days we spent in your school recently and wish we had had time to talk to more of you. Fortismere was nearly outstanding when it was inspected four years ago, and now it is! GCSE results have risen dramatically and A-level results are also better than they were. You clearly work hard and respond well to the good teaching, and many of you spoke appreciatively about the extra time teachers give you to help you do well. You receive outstanding care and support.

You admitted (some of you slightly unenthusiastically) that the recent focus on behaviour, attendance and punctuality has been welcome. Your behaviour is very good and your attendance is now well above the national average. If you continue to adhere to the high standards expected, then there is no reason why you should not achieve even better results.

The school is already focused on increasing the number of top GCSE and A-level grades; we support this by making it one of the issues for improvement. The other one relates to the limited amount of physical education in Year 10 upwards and the fact that too few of you, especially in the sixth form, join in extra-curricular sports.

Many of you will read the full report and notice other small things we mention that could be even better. We spent some time investigating the comments that your parents and carers sent us and realise that home/school relationships are not yet perfect!

Enjoy the festive season when it arrives and we hope you all have successful and enjoyable futures.

Yours sincerely

Clare Gillies
Lead inspector

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