

Inspection of a good school: Ferndown First School

Mountbatten Drive, Ferndown, Dorset BH22 9FB

Inspection dates:

9 and 10 November 2023

Outcome

Ferndown First School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Sean Watts. This school is part of Castleman Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Rhonda Moore, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark Grigsby.

What is it like to attend this school?

Children learn the routines and the high expectations of the school right from the start, in Reception. They gain confidence year on year and become great ambassadors for the school. For example, pupils undertake their leadership roles with integrity. There are lots of opportunities for pupils to shine personally because staff treat them as individuals and celebrate their achievements.

Pupils enjoy school. Being kind and courteous is becoming central to the 'Ferndown way' of doing things. Pupils and staff build great relationships as a result. Pupils like that there is plenty of space to play at lunchtimes. Everyone looks after each other. Staff are always on hand to provide caring support.

Pupils follow a broad curriculum. Learning about equality and diversity is threaded through the curriculum. This means that pupils gain an understanding of why being inclusive is important. Visits and visitors are well thought out, including the tractor visit in Reception and outdoor adventurous activities to build pupils' resilience in Year 4. However, there are occasions when sequences of work do not enable pupils to flourish in their work. This means that some pupils do not excel academically when they are ready.

Typically, parents report that communication from the school is a strength. Almost every parent would recommend the school to another parent.

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

There is a suitably ambitious curriculum. Some subject curriculums are being refined even more. This work is based on the latest research and ensures that the curriculum includes

the most important content. Most subject curriculums now identify the 'big ideas' and specific vocabulary that pupils must learn. This helps teachers to know what subject content has come before and what pupils need to know across the next year and when they go to middle school. For example, year on year, the teaching of history is helping pupils to understand cause and consequence in an age-appropriate way. As a result, as pupils move through the curriculum, they are making better connections about history over time.

The trust regularly reviews how well pupils are doing. The school's work is continually improving staff's subject knowledge. Everyone is working together to ensure that they implement the curriculum well. The strong emphasis on reading, writing, and mathematics is ensuring that pupils' achievement in these subjects, including in the early years, is rising markedly in comparison to previous years.

Staff skilfully provide precise speech and language support for pupils who struggle with speaking. These pupils are gaining confidence and catching up as a result. The early reading curriculum is effective in helping pupils decode letter sounds and read accurately. In the early years, the curriculum to support children's physical development prioritises holding a pencil correctly. This helps them form letters and simple words correctly right from the start. Increasingly, the sharp focus on improving pupils' writing knowledge means that older pupils are writing with greater cohesion and with a more ambitious vocabulary.

Most pupils meet the school's ambitious curriculum goals over time. For example, typically, they can quickly remember number facts and multiplication tables appropriate to their age. However, there is too little oversight of the impact of some aspects of the curriculum. Some checks on pupils' learning do not identify when gaps in pupils' knowledge appear or when their learning slows. Teaching is not always adept at helping pupils maximise their learning, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). For example, staff usually address pupils' misconceptions by the end of a sequence of work, but some pupils do not get the immediate help they need when they get stuck or make errors in their work. This makes it harder for these pupils to persevere with new learning. There are also times when pupils do not move on to learn more sophisticated concepts or subject content when they are ready.

The curriculum is effective in teaching pupils about how to keep safe online and how to have healthy relationships. Pupils show good conduct around school. The majority of pupils attend well. The school challenges persistent absence. However, the trust does not ensure that the school analyses persistent absence precisely. This makes it difficult for the trust to measure the impact of this work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is not sufficient oversight of the impact of the curriculum. When pupils get stuck, a minority of pupils do not get the immediate support they need to secure new learning. Some pupils do not learn the most challenging subject content they need to excel academically when they are ready. The trust must ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is consistently strong and that it enables all pupils, including those with SEND, to progress through the curriculum in every subject sufficiently well.
- While most pupils attend well, the systems to analyse persistent absence are not as robust as they could be. This makes it difficult for the school standards board (SSB) to hold the school to account. The trust must monitor persistent absence stringently to ensure and assure themselves that everything is being done to increase pupils' attendance and therefore maximise pupils' learning time at school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Ferndown First school, to be good in February 2010.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years,

looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	148161
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10268643
Type of school	First
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	341
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Grigsby
Headteacher	Sean Watts
Website	www.fernfirst.dorset.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This school joined Castleman Academy Trust in January 2021. The trust contains three first schools and two middle schools.
- There are two classes for Year 2. All other year groups have three classes.
- There are several staff in new leadership roles. The headteacher took up his substantive role in March 2023. There is an interim special educational needs coordinator.
- Recent changes to the local governance arrangements include a new chairperson of the SSB.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The after-school club is separately registered with Ofsted and was not part of this inspection.
- Breakfast club is run by the school and was part of this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other school staff. She also met with representatives of trust board, the SSB and held a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer and the school's external adviser.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. An inspector also met with pupils to discuss other curriculum subjects, including English and geography.
- The inspector listened to pupils in Years 1, 2 and 3 read to an adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school site. They spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour.
- The inspector spoke with a range of staff to discuss how leaders support their workload and well-being.
- The inspector considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. There were no responses to the staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Julie Carrington, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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