

The Fountains High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124504
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	359679
Inspection dates	29–30 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Sue Aldridge

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
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	122
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Fox
Headteacher	Melsa Buxton (Executive Headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	25 June 2008
School address	Bitham Lane Burton-on-Trent DE13 0HB
Telephone number	01283 239161
Fax number	01283 239168
Email address	headteacher@fountains-high.staffs.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 0300 1234 234

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E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors, who observed 12 lessons or parts of lessons taught by 12 different teachers. Three of these were joint observations with senior leaders. During learning walks, parts of a further eight lessons were seen. Inspectors held discussions with parents, students, senior and middle leaders, and governors. They observed the school's work and looked at a range of documents linked to safeguarding arrangements, governance, curriculum planning, records, students' work, assessment information and its analysis. Inspectors also analysed completed questionnaires returned by 26 parents or carers, 18 staff and 23 students. Inspectors worked closely with the team inspecting the federated primary school, and held joint discussions with the headteacher and governors and joint feedback at the end of the inspection.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- Whether the quality of target setting and evaluation of students' progress in Key Stages 3 to 5 is good enough.
- How well the provision is personalised to meet the needs of students, particularly those with communication difficulties, including those with profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Whether the governors have improved their methods of holding the school to account, particularly through the collection of first-hand information.
- How effectively middle managers are involved in the processes of school improvement planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Information about the school

Fountains High School is an average sized special school. It caters for students who live in a large area of East Staffordshire and a few that come from Derbyshire. All students have a statement of special educational needs. Needs range from moderate learning difficulties to severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties; a significant proportion have autism. Students with profound and multiple learning difficulties are taught mainly in a single class covering the full age range of the school. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is very high. Most students are from White British backgrounds. A small percentage are from minority ethnic groups and few are from families where English is an additional language. Almost all students in Year 11 enter the school's sixth form. Around a third of the total number of students are in the sixth form. The school is federated with a nearby special primary school, inspected at the same time, and a nursery about two miles away, which was not due for inspection. The three establishments share an executive headteacher and a governing body. A new executive headteacher was appointed in September 2010. The school has National Healthy Schools Status, effective from 2008 to 2011.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Fountains High School is a satisfactory and improving school. Almost all students enjoy their time at school very much, and this is reflected in their good attendance. A typical comment on one student's questionnaire was, 'I love my school. The teachers are brilliant.' The caring and supportive staff are appreciated by parents too. One commented, 'I cannot speak highly enough of the staff, the teaching and the general care my child has received.' Parents are confident that students are safe at school and this is how the students feel too. There are outstanding arrangements for assuring the safety of students. The school successfully encourages students to take plenty of exercise and to eat and drink healthily, features recognised by a national award.

At school and in the local community, students participate well. Their contributions, and the good quality of their behaviour, are recognised and valued by members of the public. The good provision for students aged 16 to 19 prepares them well for adult life, particularly in developing independence and enterprise skills as well as awareness of the world of work. The sixth form provision is good. Students have a wide range of learning experiences on and off the school site, which maximises their independence and personal development. Careful planning for transition adds to the quality of preparation for adult life and all leave school to take their place successfully in suitable further education or care settings.

Students' academic achievement is satisfactory. However, an increasing proportion make good progress, as the quality of teaching is improving steadily. The most able students achieve well, and all students do well in science and information and communication technology (ICT). This is because of skilled teaching. Although the proportion of good or better teaching is increasing, it is not quite high enough for teaching to be judged good overall. Satisfactory teaching is less successful in ensuring that students know how well they are doing during the course of lessons, and what they need to do to improve. Occasionally, staff do not have high expectations of students' ability to work independently.

The provision for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties is satisfactory, and is a focus for development in the school. Occasionally, students' individual targets are not appropriate. There are also limited opportunities for these students to learn alongside and socialise with others of a similar age at school. Although a satisfactory range of learning experiences is offered, the detail of what is provided is not always clearly communicated to parents.

The school's leaders and managers have shown that they are well able to effect improvements, particularly in behaviour, attendance, the curriculum and teaching. Self-evaluation is largely accurate and leaders take account of the quality of learning when judging teaching. However, when they evaluate the overall quality of teaching, leaders do

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not take enough account of the impact of teaching on the progress made by students over time. Teachers with leadership responsibilities are fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and driving improvement. Morale is good, and all are enthusiastic about the changes proposed by the new headteacher. However, governors are not sufficiently involved in contributing to school improvement or in checking the work of the school themselves and so governance is inadequate. As a result, the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory rather than good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching by ensuring that:
 - students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve
 - staff have consistently high expectations of students' ability to work independently
 - evaluation of teaching takes full account of the progress students are making.
- Enhance the provision for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties by ensuring that:
 - students are set challenging and achievable targets
 - there are more frequent opportunities for students to learn alongside and socialise with those of a similar age
 - there is effective communication with parents and carers.
- Improve governance by ensuring that all members of the governing body:
 - are directly involved in setting priorities for improvement
 - play their part in evaluating, first-hand, the work of the school.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

On entry to the school, attainment is low and it remains low because of the nature and extent of students' learning difficulties. Nonetheless, achievement is satisfactory because students' learning and progress are satisfactory. In lessons, students cooperate well with staff and behaviour is good. They show interest, are usually keen to answer questions, and some show curiosity by asking them as well. They enjoy using ICT to support their learning and usually concentrate well when using computers. Some students persevere with difficult tasks, such as making Christmas table decorations in design and technology, but there are also a few occasions when they turn too readily to adults for help. Where teachers regularly involve students in assessing their work and that of others, students do this sensibly and honestly, but some are unclear about how well they are doing during lessons and have little idea of what they need to do to improve. Higher attaining students make good progress because they are taught skilfully and carefully guided to nationally accredited courses that provide an opportunity for them to progress as well as have their achievements recognised. In science and ICT, all students make good progress because

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these subjects are skilfully taught and well resourced. There are also good opportunities for students to use ICT as a learning tool in other subjects.

Students' personal development is good. Those with communication difficulties develop a suitable way of communicating with others, using a variety of means including speech, vocalisation, signs, symbols, pictures, and switches that operate recorded voice messages. This underpins their social development. Older students have a wealth of opportunities to meet others outside school, at other schools, colleges, in the workplace and in their dealings with the public when they do voluntary work at the Pit Stop cafe in Burton-on-Trent. Students take seriously their responsibilities in school, ranging from distributing milk to representing their peers on the school council and making items for the school's Christmas fair.

All achievement is recognised and celebrated and students grow in self-confidence as a result. In general, they get on well together and show respect for differences. Those who find it difficult to learn alongside others become calmer and better able to tolerate being in a group. The curriculum provides good opportunities for students to get to know about the diversity of British society, and includes visits to different places of worship. Students say there is no racist behaviour or bullying at school. The school's merit system is well regarded by students and effective in encouraging good behaviour. The development of skills of independence is a strong feature in the sixth form and this prepares students well for the next step.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Staff know and manage students well. They establish good working relationships with students, helping them to feel secure and valued in school. The teaching of students on examination courses is by subject specialists, whose expertise is instrumental in ensuring that these students make good progress and achieve well. For instance, they ensure that students are familiar with examination requirements, know how well they are doing and what they need to do to be successful. This is not done consistently across all classes though, and opportunities are occasionally missed to remind students of personal targets and celebrate small successes in lessons.

The school makes effective use of groupings to simplify the task of lesson planning. Having seen the success of grouping by ability in science and ICT in Years 7 to 9, the school has now moved to this model in English and mathematics; early signs suggest that this is helping to accelerate progress, as a higher proportion than previously found at this stage are on track to achieve the challenging long-term targets set for them. Most lessons are planned well, with teachers taking good account of prior learning as well as students' preferred learning styles. As a result, tasks most often present a suitable challenge for students. Occasionally, this is compromised by staff doing things for students which they could do themselves. For a small number of students with profound and multiple learning

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difficulties, some individual targets are not suitable because they have already been reached, or they are not achievable because of a student's physical difficulties. The school has no separate swimming pool but makes effective use of the one on the primary site. The teaching of students with complex needs makes suitable use of sensory approaches, including those generated using technology. Staff are well trained in the use of approaches to teaching students with autism, and a specially adapted room is used for some discrete teaching of these students, although the room is rather cramped.

Particular strengths of the curriculum include the range of opportunities that exist for promoting students' personal development, and careful planning of the experiences for those aged 14 to 19, which enable those of all abilities to achieve accreditation and follow a pathway to a suitable placement in the adult world. The school's resources and those further afield are used well to create personal programmes to meet most additional or minority needs. The introduction of 'combined studies' at Key Stage 3 and functional skills for older students has strengthened the opportunities for students to acquire and practise their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills. Effective partnerships extend opportunities for students beyond the school gate and good enrichment through visits, visitors, school journeys and productions add interest and widen students' horizons. The area used for teaching students with profound and multiple learning difficulties is large and equipped with an overhead hoist; it has adjacent, suitably adapted bathroom facilities but there is too little storage space for the mobility equipment used by these students.

The good care, guidance and support provided are well recognised by parents, carers, and students. Transition from the primary to the secondary school is smooth, and staff in the two schools collaborate effectively in this respect. Effective guidance arrangements involve students and their parents in finding out about post-school opportunities and planning together to make sure that a suitable set of actions are taken to support decision making. Individual support is given to those with difficulties such as dyslexia. The executive headteacher recognises that the school needs to develop a more sustainable means of providing speech and language therapy support and plans to achieve this through staff training.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher has quickly communicated her vision for the school to other staff. She has accurately pinpointed fresh priorities for development, such as greater cooperation between the two federated schools, so that expertise is shared. Other leaders and managers are ambitious; they follow developments in education closely and are quick

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to respond by getting involved in initiatives that they see as beneficial to the school. For instance, the deputy headteacher has led well the development of the curriculum for students from 14 to 19.

A determination that all will have the same opportunities to succeed is reflected in links for small numbers of students, to enable them to achieve GCSE passes in subjects such as art in mainstream schools or vocational qualifications in colleges. These links provide good value for money. There is careful tracking of the progress made by every student as well as analysis of the performance of different groups. However, otherwise good attention to equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination is compromised by limited in-school inclusion opportunities for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Leaders and managers know well where the school's strengths and weaknesses lie. However, this is not true of the governing body, which has too little impact on what the school does. Members do not carry out enough first-hand checking of the school's work or provide a suitable challenge to its leaders. They rely too much on information provided by the executive headteacher.

Safeguarding arrangements are excellent, and governors are better informed and involved on these matters. The safety and care of students lie at the heart of all that the school does. Staff are well trained and suitably checked before they start work at the school. Detailed records are maintained of incidents and accidents and risks carefully assessed. The school shares its considerable expertise more widely by providing training in safeguarding to all those who take students on work experience placements. Students are well prepared for the challenges of adult life, and know well how to maintain their personal safety in the workplace and socially.

The school has completed an audit of the provision that promotes community cohesion and has identified suitable actions to enhance this. As yet, there is little evaluation of actions taken.

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

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	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

On entry, students' basic skills are assessed and challenging targets are set for them. Most achieve these and where they do not the school can provide a convincing explanation, such as a period of difficult personal circumstances. The strong emphasis on providing a wide range of opportunities for students to apply their basic skills in more adult settings, as well as to build on their knowledge, skills and understanding, lies at the heart of the setting's success. Provision in school is effectively supplemented by opportunities to learn alongside others in colleges and in the workplace. Provision is tailored effectively to meet individual needs. As one parent noted, staff in the setting 'understand his needs and encourage independence'. All students have access to enterprise activities so they experience working collaboratively with others. For instance, the most able work in a local cafe, and bake cakes for sale there. Less mobile students collect eggs on a local farm and pack them for sale.

There are some significant individual successes in work experience placements, and learning to travel independently, and as well as academic and vocational successes. Students learn effectively about health and safety at work when they follow courses in catering or construction. Accreditation is kept under review and altered to meet needs better. For instance, different accreditation has recently been introduced to improve access to work-related experiences for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties. The school recognises that evaluation of individual students' progress needs to be supplemented by analysing the performance of different groups, such as boys and girls, and those with different needs.

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

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

In a relatively low return for a school of this type, most parents expressed satisfaction with what the school provides. The great majority are happy with their youngster's experience of the school, and confident that it provides a safe environment where students are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle. A few expressed concerns about the provision for students with profound and multiple learning difficulties and inspectors looked carefully at this provision. They found that it is satisfactory. The school is working to improve the teaching here, and to provide further opportunities for students to mix with others of a similar age.

Inspectors found that communication with parents of these students is not always good enough to give them an accurate picture of what is provided. For instance, some parents think that there is no rebound therapy, yet this is provided. A few are concerned that there are different arrangements for the arrival of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties, but entrances used by all students depend on where they arrive and/or disembark in the mornings. A few other parents were also critical of the lack of communication between school and home. However, another noted that staff are 'very supportive and have kept me informed of all aspects of my child's care and education.' Inspection evidence shows that communication is not consistently good.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Fountains High 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 26 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 122 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	10	38	13	50	3	12	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	15	58	10	38	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	13	50	9	35	3	12	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	12	46	10	38	2	8	1	4
The teaching is good at this school	13	50	10	38	2	8	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	42	11	42	3	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	46	12	46	1	4	0	0
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)	12	46	11	42	1	4	1	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	58	8	31	2	8	1	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	11	42	12	46	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	11	42	11	42	2	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	11	42	11	42	2	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	12	46	12	46	1	4	1	4

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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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.



1 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Fountains High School, Burton-on-Trent, DE13 0HB

Thank you for making us welcome in your school and talking to us about your work and school life. We enjoyed our visit.

We found that yours is a satisfactory school. There are excellent arrangements to keep you safe. There are some good things about it too. You all feel safe at school and your parents are confident that the staff take good care of you. You are learning well about being healthy and take plenty of exercise. You attend well and enjoy coming to school. Behaviour is good. You help in school in many ways and also do useful things in the local area. People in the community are impressed by your good behaviour. You have a good range of learning opportunities and almost all of you enjoy coming to school. You all achieve well in science and information and communication technology. Students who follow examination courses such as Entry levels or GCSE make good progress and achieve well. Adults in school give you good support and guide you well in choosing what you will do when you leave. The oldest students are well prepared for life after school. When students leave, they all go on to continue learning or move to day-care centres that suit them well.

There are some things that need to improve. The school has agreed to do these things:

- make sure that almost all the teaching is good or better
- improve what is provided for those of you in Class 1
- improve the way that the governing body checks the work of the school.

You can help by keeping up your good attendance. We wish you all well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Sue Aldridge

Lead inspector

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