

Fairmead School

Mudford Road, Yeovil, Somerset, BA21 4AZ

Inspection dates 26–27 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The majority of students achieve well during their time at Fairmead. Achievement in English, mathematics and science is good.
- Students in Year 11 attain good quality qualifications, including some GCSEs in English, mathematics and art, entry-level qualifications and BTEC, OCR science and functional skills qualifications.
- The sixth form is good. It provides good quality facilities enabling students to achieve well and build successfully on previous learning. Extensive opportunities for work-related learning prepare students well for their futures.
- Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good, with some that is outstanding. On these occasions, students are highly challenged by their tasks so that progress is rapid and sustained.
- Students behave well. Many benefit from good quality additional support to meet their individual needs fully. Students feel safe at school.
- Parents are pleased with the school. The vast majority say that their children make good progress and enjoy coming to school.
- Improvement in the range of topics and subjects promote students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well.
- The headteacher has an ambitious vision for the future of the school. There has been a strong focus on raising achievement through setting targets for teachers and through high quality training and monitoring.
- The governing body manages the budget well and has an accurate view of the school's work. Governors make sure that students who receive additional funding fully benefit from it.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all students make effective use of information and communication technology to undertake research or to improve their presentation skills.
- Younger students sometimes lack confidence and skills in writing letter shapes because support from staff is inconsistent and is not always accurate.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 12 lessons jointly with senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a few short visits to observe students learning and playing, and listened to a few students read.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior staff, members of the governing body, a representative from the local authority and some students.
- The inspection team observed the work of the school and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s own information about students’ progress, planning and monitoring documents, safeguarding information and some students’ books.
- The inspectors took account of the 27 responses to the online survey, Parent View, to provide a helpful picture of parents’ views of the school. Inspectors also took account of 25 responses to the staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Denise Morris, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Fran Ashworth

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school caters for students with moderate learning difficulties. The vast majority have additional complex needs, including autism spectrum disorders, behaviour, emotional and social difficulties, specific learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties or severe learning difficulties. Students come from across south Somerset, with a few from adjacent authorities. All students have a statement of special educational needs for their learning difficulties.
- Most students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is low, and only a very few speak English as an additional language. There are more than twice as many boys as girls.
- The proportion of students supported by the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority) is well above average.
- The school opened a new sixth form in 2013, catering for up to 18 students. These students undertake extended learning opportunities at places away from the school, such as at Yeovil College and Rylands Farm.
- There are currently no children in the Early Years Foundation Stage or in Key Stage 1.
- The school is part of the Yeovil Foundation Partnership with another special school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide more opportunities for all students to improve their skills in using a range of modern technology, for example when carrying out research and presenting their work.
- Improve the teaching of handwriting so that younger students in particular develop confidence and accuracy in their writing by:
 - making sure that there is a consistent approach to the teaching of handwriting across the school
 - providing training for all staff to make sure that letter shapes are correctly formed.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on entry to Fairmead School is usually well below average for their age because of their moderate learning difficulties and/or other difficulties. Most students settle quickly and begin to enjoy school, overcoming past inadequacies, because of effective support and tasks that are well matched to their own particular needs. As a result, they achieve well during their time at the school.
- All groups make similarly good progress in English, mathematics and science, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, those with autistic spectrum disorders, behaviour, social and emotional needs, communication and language difficulties, and those supported by the pupil premium. They all benefit from tasks that suit their individual needs and abilities.
- More-able students make particularly good progress in reading. By Year 7, these students have a good understanding of phonics (the sounds that letters make) and can use this knowledge to read and write unknown words. They read competently and many have the confidence to read aloud to the class.
- Additional catch-up funding for students in Year 7 is used effectively to provide individual support in literacy so that any student falling behind the others quickly makes up lost ground and achieves well.
- Older students regularly write lengthy compositions accurately, particularly in subjects such as history. Students in Year 9, for example, showed that they could express opinions and join in well with writing ideas about a poem they were studying. Writing by younger students is developing more slowly because the teaching of handwriting by staff varies too much to help students know what is expected.
- Almost all students achieve well in mathematics. Students in Years 7 to 9 showed this by carrying out calculations using more than one step. They were successfully challenged to use new methods and enjoyed the practical tasks that were provided.
- In science, students are regularly encouraged to work at a fast pace and have fun while they learn. Outstanding learning was evident as students in Years 8 and 9 tried hard to be the first to find out about 'particle theory' by searching for answers in books and by using modern technology. They used the interactive whiteboard very successfully to respond to questions.
- The lack of information and communication technology resources in some classrooms, however, prevents students from making better progress in this subject and using their skills effectively, for example to undertake research or present their ideas.
- Students supported by the pupil premium are catching up quickly with their classmates and now make the same progress in English and mathematics as other students, acquiring similar qualifications by the time they leave the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Students benefit from teaching that is almost always good, and some that is outstanding. As a result, they make good progress. Teaching typically challenges students to think for themselves through demanding questions and through tasks that meet the needs and abilities of each individual student, helping them all to be fully engaged in learning.
- The teaching of English typically ensures that tasks are well planned so that they match students' abilities. Additional support, often by teaching assistants, is tailored carefully to each student's needs. Communication aids, particularly the use of symbols, make sure that those who find speaking and writing difficult have a means to express themselves. As a result, the vast majority of students can make themselves understood and make good progress in speaking.
- The teaching of reading is supported by an effective approach to teach younger students phonics. As a result more-able students quickly learn to recognise words, whilst others learn to

read symbols to help them enjoy stories.

- The teaching of writing is usually good and there are some excellent examples in students' books of extended writing about a variety of topics. In history, for example, older students have written extended pieces about the slave trade, showing empathy and understanding. However, handwriting is not taught well because the way staff write, particularly for younger students, is not always accurate and, as a result, students are sometimes confused about how to write letter shapes.
- The teaching of mathematics and science is successful because of the high focus on practical tasks and challenges that almost all students enjoy. Students in Years 10 and 11, for example, showed that they were able to calculate averages successfully when working together in groups, combining their ideas and working fast to try to be the first team to find answers. They made very good progress in showing that they were well prepared for their forthcoming examinations.
- The checking of students' progress is accurate and typically helpful, providing examples of how students can improve their work. This is particularly evident in English and mathematics.
- The quality of teaching in the sixth form is usually good because the approaches used by staff are very relevant to students' abilities and needs. The effectiveness of alternative provision for students, both at college and during work-related learning, is good because it provides additional experiences that prepare them well for their futures.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' behaviour in and around the school is good. Students are polite and helpful and regularly support each other. They say that they enjoy school. This is evident in the way that their attendance has improved and in the very low rate of absences and lack of any exclusions.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Older students told the inspectors that they feel really safe. They know the importance of staying safe on the internet and in the community.
- Older students told the inspectors that there is no real bullying at the school and that any teasing is quickly dealt with by staff. Observations of school records and of students' playing and working showed this to be true. Their good behaviour is promoted well by the wide range of different activities, the after-school clubs and the different trips and residential experiences that the school provides.
- The behaviour of a few students with challenging emotional difficulties very rarely affects the learning of others. It is always well dealt with by staff through the effective behaviour management system, so that any disruptions are minimised quickly.
- The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. Through assemblies, visits and visitors, and particularly through the school's active links with a similar school in Nairobi, students have an accurate view of life outside their own communities. As a result of this, and their good qualifications and work-related learning opportunities, students are all fully prepared for their lives after leaving the school.
- Students in the sixth form show good personal skills, benefiting from the use of their own accommodation which includes a common room. Through their work-related learning they have effective opportunities to learn about cooking, farming, and personal care. Through their business enterprise scheme, in which they run their own soup kitchen every Tuesday, they learn about banking and how to look after their money.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is very ambitious for the school and has driven improvement successfully since the previous inspection by making sure that all students do well so that they can be as self-reliant as possible in the future. She is ably supported by the senior leadership team and governors.
- Leaders make effective use of the national standards for teaching to improve teachers' skills.

There are several examples of staff at all levels progressing up the pay scales because of effective training, which has helped them to improve students' progress. The governing body is fully involved in checking how well students are doing, and leaders are aware of which teachers deserve promotion.

- Leaders check students' progress regularly to make sure that the students are making the progress expected of them and so that they can speed up the learning of any student falling behind. Information gathered over the past two years shows that the school is successfully improving students' results and is closing the gaps in achievement. Twice as many students are now on target to meet their goals than in previous years.
- The school provides regular training for staff in aspects such as behaviour and safeguarding, ensuring consistent practice across the school.
- The local authority works well with the school by supporting leaders in checking the quality of teaching and learning and by providing training for staff.
- There are some good links with local schools, colleges and businesses, helping to develop students' academic and personal skills and providing experiences that will benefit them in the future.
- The rich range of subjects and topics taught includes Spanish and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award that students relish. Additional residential and day visits provide well for the needs and abilities of students.
- Leaders promote good relationships with parents, who are pleased with the school. Through what they provide, leaders successfully eliminate discrimination and promote good relationships which make sure that all students have equal access to the experiences on offer.
- Leadership of the new sixth form is good because it promotes the learning and personal development of students well and offers some good quality academic and work-related opportunities. 'I am pleased that my son has the opportunity to continue his education in such a school,' wrote a parent.
- Safeguarding procedures meet requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is supportive, providing good challenge to leaders. Governors are fully involved in checking what the school offers students, looking at teaching and behaviour and at how well students are doing. They have a clear view of what is working well and what needs improving, including a good knowledge of the quality of teaching. Governors have a good range of skills which they use to benefit the school. Effective management of finances means that money is well spent to enrich students' learning, including the pupil premium. This money is used well to provide additional support and small-group activities for eligible students, enabling them to make similar progress to their classmates. Governors know about setting targets for teachers and work to ensure that the best teachers and staff are rewarded through promotion. They rigorously tackle any underperformance.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	123940
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	427161

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	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Hilary Pallister
Headteacher	Diana Denman
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 January 2012
Telephone number	01935 421295
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