

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Tracy Felstead
Headteacher
Fairmead School
Mudford Road
Yeovil
Somerset
BA21 4NZ

Dear Mrs Felstead

Short inspection of Fairmead School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2018 with John White, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in February 2014.

This school continues to be good.

There have been significant changes to the leadership team and governing body during the last year, including you becoming headteacher and the appointment of a new chair of the governing body. However, the leadership team and governors have maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Since your appointment you have strengthened the school's approach to assessment so that pupils' learning can be planned to more accurately meet their needs. Leaders carefully monitor progress by observing teaching, and looking at examples of pupils' work. You have also made changes to the way that some classes are organised, which has led to pupils feeling more settled and making better progress.

Pupils are extremely positive about the school. My colleague and I noticed how many pupils were smiling during lessons, clearly enjoying the work that had been set for them. Staff are also very positive about the way the school is led and managed. They feel proud of the progress pupils make. The school is a calm and well-ordered environment. Pupils develop good behaviour and learning habits which enable them to work well with other pupils, and respond quickly to adults' requests or directions. Relationships between pupils and adults are very strong. Teachers and teaching assistants know the pupils very well, which helps them provide the right level of support and care each pupil requires.

The introduction of a structured approach to supporting pupils' social and emotional development is working well. Through regular assessments, teachers are able to keep a close eye on how each pupil is progressing. Interventions are planned when required, including music and drama therapy. Parents notice the improvements to

their children's well-being, behaviour and self-confidence. During the inspection, parents talked to an inspector about their children loving the school, being much more able to express themselves, and becoming much more confident.

At the time of the last inspection, inspectors highlighted the need to increase opportunities for pupils to use modern technology, and to improve the teaching of handwriting for younger pupils. Pupils' current work shows that they make good progress in their handwriting, learning how to form their letters correctly and to write words on the lines in their books. Pupils now use computers for independent writing, to carry out research, to design and make objects, and to redraft their work.

You and other leaders are very aware of the aspects of the school's work that need to be focused on in future. You are very keen to make the school as good as it possibly can be by reflecting on your work, accepting support from your school improvement advisers, and getting ideas from visiting other high-performing special schools. You are in the process of reorganising the leadership team so that you have enough capacity to oversee the different parts of the school, and address areas that need further improvement. Governors have identified the need for them to review their roles and responsibilities to make sure that they are able to continue to provide a good level of challenge and support to leaders.

Safeguarding is effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding at Fairmead. You, other leaders and governors ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and highly effective. All staff use the recently introduced secure online system to alert leaders to any concerns that they have. These are swiftly acted upon, with records clearly illustrating what action has been taken. School leaders doggedly pursue external agencies when they do not respond in the way that is required to ensure their concerns are taken seriously.

The school's recruitment procedures are secure. Staff training around safeguarding is thorough and includes regular updates.

Pupils feel safe. They explained how school staff sort out any behaviour difficulties with peers to keep them safe, and how comfortable they feel in the arrangements made for travelling to and from school. There are good arrangements in place to make sure that they are safe when on visits out of school. Pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe when online, and to develop a good understanding about sex and relationships.

Inspection findings

- At the beginning of the inspection, we agreed on the things that the inspection would examine during the day. These included how well leaders ensure pupils develop good literacy, numeracy and communication skills; how well the curriculum prepares pupils for life after they leave the school; how well pupils are cared for and how well they behave; and how well governors fulfil their

responsibilities.

- Pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy, and learn to communicate effectively. Pupils produce work of a good standard, which they feel proud of. Their work shows clear evidence of the progress they make. Teachers set work that is well matched to each pupil's ability, resulting in pupils achieving a wide range of qualifications. The most able pupils obtain GCSEs. Teachers provide clear feedback to pupils, helping them improve their work. Post-16 and secondary-aged pupils learn to work independently, for example knowing what to do to check that their spellings are correct. Some younger pupils rely on teaching assistants to help them when they are stuck, so do not learn to develop strategies to respond to challenges on their own.
- Middle leaders spend time observing teaching and monitoring assessment information in order to see how effectively pupils are learning. However, they are not clear about the development priorities for their areas of responsibility. Strategic planning does not include enough information for governors to know what progress is being made.
- The curriculum has been developed around learning pathways, which focus on building pupils' skills. Throughout their secondary and post-16 education, pupils are encouraged to learn about and consider possible career options. A careers adviser provides impartial support, which often includes attending annual reviews and talking with parents. Strong links with a wide range of local educational providers, employers and colleges ensure that pupils have regular opportunities to develop their employability skills, and get used to working with a range of different people. As a result, pupils talk excitedly and keenly about where they are planning to move on to when they leave school.
- Governors visit the school regularly to observe teaching, check on safeguarding arrangements, and maintain an awareness of pupils' progress. Accurate self-evaluation by school leaders ensures that you provide governors with reliable information about the school's overall performance. The chair and vice chair meet with you each week to make sure you are getting the support you need. If governors become aware of anything that causes them any concern, they raise it with you immediately. They make sure that they understand their responsibilities by attending training events.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- strategic planning includes enough detail so that governors can check that actions are successfully completed within agreed timescales
- middle leaders strengthen their roles so that they contribute more effectively to whole-school developments
- younger pupils become confident to tackle learning challenges on their own.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Somerset. This letter will be

published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andy Lole
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with you and the leadership team. Meetings were also held with two groups of pupils, and four governors. Some parents spoke to an inspector when they picked their children up at the end of the day. I had a telephone conversation with one of the school's improvement partners. Inspectors carried out joint observations with yourself or other members of the leadership team. We observed learning for all age groups, in a range of subjects. We looked at pupils' work during lessons, and with you and an assistant headteacher in a meeting. We looked at a range of documentation, including minutes from governors' meetings, self-evaluation records and school development plans, and information about pupils' progress, behaviour, safeguarding and the curriculum. We looked at all responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, considering the views of eight parents, and also 32 responses to the staff questionnaire. A letter from a parent was also taken into account.