



Fairfield High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116944
LEA Herefordshire
Inspection number 279959
Inspection dates 17 May 2006 to 18 May 2006
Reporting inspector John English AI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Peterchurch
School category	Community		Hereford
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Herefordshire HR2 0SG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01981 550231
Number on roll	330	Fax number	01981 550171
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr C Barker

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	17 May 2006 - 18 May 2006	279959

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Fairfield High School is a small comprehensive school, set in the Golden Valley a few miles to the west of Hereford. Most of the pupils are of White British background. An above average proportion of pupils have statements of special educational need (SEN) and about a quarter have learning difficulties and disabilities, also above average. A below average proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is around half the national average. The school is an Arts Specialist College, a Leading Edge School, has the Arts Goldmark and the Sportsmark, and is part of an Excellence Cluster.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The school judges that it is providing an outstanding education for its pupils and inspectors agree. Fairfield High School has developed an exceptional climate for learning where most pupils feel happy and valued, achieve well at their studies and develop into sensitive, perceptive young people. As one parent wrote, 'Since (my daughter) started at Fairfield, she is blossoming into a confident, funny, considerate person who takes an active interest in all around her.' Many parents made similar comments and an overwhelming majority were fully supportive. A very small minority felt that their children did not enjoy school and a few felt that the school did not take sufficient account of their views or keep them well enough informed.

Standards on entry to the school are around average, although standards of literacy are lower than in mathematics and science. By the time the pupils leave school, standards of attainment are high. Pupils make outstanding progress overall and exceptionally so in the final two years. A very small minority of pupils make less good progress in English because of their weaknesses in writing. Personal development is also outstanding. The pupils develop a wide range of interests and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent.

Teaching, the curriculum, and care, guidance and support are all outstanding. The school rightly prides itself on its intimate knowledge of the needs of each pupil and its ability to provide for them. It is a highly inclusive school. The school has very high expectations of the pupils and is lavish in its encouragement and support. Despite its relatively remote rural setting, the school works very well with other schools and agencies to enrich its provision and support pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. He is highly respected by everyone in the school community and knows all his pupils and all aspects of his school very well. He is well supported by his senior and middle managers and his vision is fully shared by all teaching and support staff. The senior leadership team has a very good understanding of strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievement, based on detailed individual knowledge of each pupil, but it does not support this with sufficiently detailed strategic analysis of the data to provide a sharper focus to plans for improvement. However, the school has taken decisive and effective action to eliminate weaknesses identified in the previous inspection and has the capacity to improve. It provides outstanding value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the quality of the strategic analysis of data to provide a sharper focus to areas for improvement.
- Develop more strategies to eliminate weaknesses in writing.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Attainment on entry to the school is broadly in line with the national average, although standards in literacy, particularly writing, are lower than those in science and mathematics. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. In the 2005 national tests, 85% of the pupils achieved the age related target (Level 5) in English, mathematics and science. Standards have risen steadily in all three subjects over the last three years. The achievement of all the pupils in Years 7 to 9 is very good in most subjects and outstanding in science. By the end of Year 11, standards are exceptionally high. The achievement of pupils from entry to the school to the end of Year 11 is outstanding in many subjects, including mathematics and science and many of the vocational subjects. A very small minority of pupils do not achieve as well because of weaknesses in their writing.

There are no significant groups of pupils who do not achieve as well as their peers. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities do well because of the relevance of the curriculum to their needs and excellent support from learning assistants and teachers. A parent commented 'We are amazed at the progress made by my son with SEN in a short time.'

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and makes a significant contribution to their personal development. They have well informed views and opinions about a wide range of moral and social issues and speak confidently and often passionately about local and national events. In an assembly, pupils responded sensitively when told about the circumstances of others less fortunate than themselves, playing their part in a moving and spiritual occasion. Pupils have a good understanding of the requirements for life in a multicultural society.

Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to school are outstanding. They report that they enjoy many aspects of their learning and are motivated to work hard because of the respect they have for the staff and their pride in the school. Nearly all parents agree that their children enjoy school. Classrooms are characterised by excellent teamwork and cooperative learning. All pupils are well prepared for future life with key skills, such as information and communication technology, while some also are supported by the full key skills or ASDAN courses.

The pupils are involved in many ways that contribute considerably to their school and wider community. Year 9 pupils, for example, had helped at the village day-care centre. Pupils take part in many clubs and activities.

The attendance rate is above average. Incidents of poor or unkind behaviour are rare. Pupils follow health and safety procedures sensibly. They understand the requirements of a healthy diet, but admit they do not always adhere to them.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and has improved since the last inspection when it was reported to be very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects and are strongly committed to raising attainment. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and make a significant contribution to pupils' very positive attitudes towards learning. Teachers are sensitive but firm in the way that they manage behaviour. Expectations of pupils' academic and social achievement are very high. Procedures to assess pupils' progress are very good and support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is excellent.

There are many good and outstanding features of lessons. Pupils learn at a good pace because teachers pose challenging questions and plan interesting activities that are well matched to pupils' differing capabilities. Pupils work cooperatively in pairs or in small groups. They enjoy practical tasks: one pupil was heard to say 'That was a brilliant lesson' after completing a science investigation. Subjects are covered in considerable depth and this promotes pupils' thinking skills well: in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, pupils were encouraged to consider the underlying concepts as well as the process when tackling a mathematical problem.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. In Years 7 to 9 it is broad and balanced, in Years 10 and 11 it is exemplary. It is designed so that it meets all the pupils' needs and preferences and the school is prepared to put on some lessons after school in order to achieve this. Some courses, for example Early Years Care, are viable because the school's Leading Edge status allows it to share staff with two local schools. Management of the rich, work related curriculum is excellent, supporting those with learning difficulties and disabilities while providing challenging opportunities for gifted and talented pupils.

There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, with about one in three taking part in any one evening. Pupils enjoy flourishing musical activities and sporting clubs, including cricket for boys and girls.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are outstanding. All staff are highly committed to helping each pupil achieve well academically and socially. Pupils know who to approach for guidance and advice and readily do so. They receive effective careers guidance and help with choosing the most appropriate courses of study. Child protection procedures are well managed and effective.

There are effective routines and practices to ensure pupils' health and safety. In various subjects, such as science, technology and physical education, pupils learn about the importance of healthy living. Links with parents are very good and the vast majority appreciates the high levels of individual care and attention their children receive. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is excellent. Teaching and support staff work extremely well together to ensure that these pupils are fully included in all school activities. Progress towards targets in individual education plans is regularly reviewed and parents are fully involved.

Procedures for assessing pupils' academic progress are good. Staff gather a wide range of information about individual pupils' attainment. They use it well to identify underachievement and provide appropriate support. Pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve and are given effective opportunities to evaluate their own work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding and fundamental to understanding the high level of achievement in the school. His vision is based on high aspirations for the achievement of all pupils and a concern for all aspects of their education. He places achievement and personal development at the centre of the school's aims and is well supported in this vision by his senior leadership team and the other teachers. He is very well respected by staff, parents and pupils. He takes a very personal interest in the development of every pupil in the school and is tireless in supporting those who may be at risk of failure, as well as encouraging those who achieve great success. He provides clear direction but also empowers all staff to develop their own ideas. The result is a flourishing and ever developing school. The senior managers have a clear view of strengths and areas for improvement in performance although this is not always supported by detailed strategic analysis of the data available. As a result, action taken to correct a known weakness, for example in standards of writing, is not always as sharp as it could be.

The school takes the views of parents and pupils into account and the questionnaire of parental opinion revealed overwhelming support for the school, although a few would like more regard for their views and to be kept better informed. A parent represented the views of many in writing 'I feel very privileged that my children have been lucky enough to go to Fairfield.' The school works well with other agencies to support learners and makes a substantial contribution to other schools through its community programme and its acknowledgement in the local authority as a leader in a number of key areas, for example the curriculum. Resources are well managed and the school offers outstanding value for money. Governors support the school well. The school in recent years has been successful in recruiting and retaining good quality staff to meet the needs of the curriculum and the pupils. Status as an Expressive Arts College has resulted in improved provision and standards in the arts subjects. The key issues identified in the previous inspection have all been resolved. It has very good capacity to improve.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils

I am writing on behalf of the inspection team to give you a brief report of our findings. But first I want to thank you very much for the way you received us, answered our many questions and helped in many other ways to enable us to complete our task.

You told us in all our meetings with you that you enjoyed school, and felt safe and well looked after. Nearly all of you said you thought that the school was excellent. We agree with you. We found that the school is outstanding in everything it does. This is supported by the data about your performance in your subjects, which shows that as pupils pass through the school they improve their grades considerably every year and particularly in the final two years.

So you achieve well in your academic studies, but we were also very impressed by the progress you make in your personal development. You leave school well rounded people with a wide range of social skills and the self-confidence to make your way in life.

What makes all this happen is the staff at your school. You have an outstanding headteacher, who encourages and supports you. You have outstanding teachers, extremely well supported by classroom assistants, technicians, administrators and others. The curriculum enables you to choose appropriate options in Years 10 and 11. The school also gives you outstanding care and support, and looks after you well if you ever have any worries or concerns.

Congratulations to all of you, and to all the staff at the school.

Very best wishes for the future.

John English Additional Inspector