



Fairmead School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 123940
LEA Somerset
Inspection number 281595
Inspection dates 19 October 2005 to 19 October 2005
Reporting inspector Sarah Mascall RISP

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Mudeford Road
School category	Community special		Yeovil
Age range of pupils	5 to 16		Somerset BA21 4NZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01935 421 295
Number on roll	63	Fax number	01935 410 552
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs E Jardine
Date of previous inspection	23 February 1998	Headteacher	Mrs Valerie Brookham

Age group 5 to 16	Inspection dates 19 October 2005 - 19 October 2005	Inspection number 281595
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors.

Description of the school

Fairmead is a special school for boys and girls aged between 4 and 16 with moderate learning difficulties who live in and around Yeovil. An increasingly large number of pupils have more complex needs including autistic spectrum disorders, social and behavioural difficulties and speech and language difficulties. All pupils have statements of special educational need and almost all are from White British backgrounds. There is one pupil for whom English is not their first language. At the time of the inspection there were no pupils under the age of five. The majority of pupils are in Years 7 to 11 and there are only 14 pupils in the primary department. Five pupils are looked after by the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspectors agree with the school's own evaluation of its effectiveness and judge Fairmead to be a good school. Leadership and management are good and have enabled the school to go through a considerable period of improvement over the last three years. The headteacher has a clear vision of what she wants to achieve and is well supported in achieving this by her senior management team and governors. Parents are very positive about what the school has done for their children.

Pupils make good progress because teaching is good overall. Although teachers know pupils very well, they do not ensure that lesson planning is sufficiently focused on meeting the specific needs of individual pupils and limited use is made of pupils' individual education plans (IEPs). The personal development of pupils is good and they make excellent progress in developing an understanding of healthy lifestyles and build skills that will assist them well in later life.

Pupils' experiences are enriched by a good curriculum that supports them in developing independence particularly well. The care and support of pupils is good overall but there are shortcomings. For example, the recording and procedures for checking on the use of restraint, on the rare occasions it happens, are inadequate. The school has appropriate systems for considering the data it has gathered on pupils' progress but is not yet using this effectively to evaluate areas that could be improved further.

The governing body make a very good contribution to the life of the school and is extremely well led by the chair of governors. Governors and the senior management team, though, have a good understanding of the strengths of the school and areas that need to be improved. The school is well placed to continue with its improvements and provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

To bring about further improvements to its effectiveness, the school should:

- make better use of the range of data on pupils' progress to analyse more closely what is successful and what could be improved
- establish effective recording systems when staff need to physically hold pupils and ensure that these are monitored carefully
- ensure that pupils' IEPs are more effective in supporting teachers' planning and to meet the range of needs in each class

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

All pupils, regardless of their special educational needs, make good progress in their learning and achieve well. They make good progress in learning to read and many improve their writing skills well. Pupils do very well in developing their communication skills and are able to express their ideas and thoughts clearly. Progress in mathematics is good, particularly for those pupils in the primary years. Progress in science has been satisfactory; however, the appointment of a specialist teacher is enabling pupils to

now make better gains in their learning. Pupils across the school are confident in their use of information and communication technology (ICT) and by the time they leave school they understand how to use the Internet and publishing programmes. Pupils' good progress is reflected in the range of accreditation they are achieving in Year 11. Last year all pupils gained GCSE in art and all achieved passes in entry level examinations in a range of subjects. There are high expectations that several of the present Year 11 group will gain GCSEs in English, mathematics and art as well as accreditation in ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) bronze award.

The targets the school sets itself, although satisfactory, could be more challenging. A lot of work has gone into gathering a range of data on pupils' progress but as yet the school is not making full use of all of this to look at areas that could be developed further and improved upon.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is given high priority within the school through the personal, social and health education programme. Pupils enjoy school immensely and are full of praise for the school. This positive attitude is reflected in their good overall attendance. Parents' views confirm how much their children love going to school. Behaviour is good and pupils understand the rules and what is expected of them. They clearly know the difference between right and wrong and the number of exclusions is gradually reducing over time. Pupils make very good gains in their social development and develop into mature, sensible young adults. All pupils have many opportunities to take on responsibilities and are rightly proud of their successes. They are keen to celebrate their and others' achievements in assemblies and have appropriate opportunities to consider their own actions and those of others. The opportunities for pupils to improve their spiritual development although satisfactory, could be improved further. There is a good awareness by pupils of life in different countries and this is well supported through the very good links with a school in Zambia. Visits to the theatre and places of interest ensure that pupils have a good awareness of other cultures but they do not yet have a good understanding of life in a multicultural society.

Pupils have a very good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles and ways of ensuring their own safety and well-being. Pupils learn to cook in the primary department and develop their skills in food studies as they get older. They have a very good understanding of a healthy diet and appreciate the healthy focus of the tuck shop. The active role pupils play in the life of the school is reflected in the excellent school council. It has a strong voice and is proud of its achievements in bringing about change. Pupils are involved in the community very well and work hard to raise money for a range of charities. Mini-enterprise schemes such as the Fairmead Horticultural society and the good opportunities for pupils to experience the world of work ensure pupils are well prepared for life when they leave school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A strength of teaching lies in the good understanding teachers have of the range of special needs in the school. They have benefited from a number of training courses and staff, particularly in the primary department, put this knowledge to very good use. There are excellent relationships with pupils and humour is used well to encourage and support pupils so that they gain in confidence. Staff use ICT well, including the interactive whiteboards. As a result pupils are confident in their use of computers to help them learn successfully. There is very good teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers make good use of the assistants in working with individuals, ensuring that those, for example, who are struggling in a class environment are able to complete the same work as their peers but on a one-to-one basis. Staff know pupils very well but they do not always use this knowledge to help them plan to meet the needs of the wide range of ability within each class. Part of the problem in meeting pupils' individual needs is the fact that IEPs have been changed several times over the last few years. Until recently they were not helpful in enabling teachers to focus on pupils' academic targets.

Teachers generally make helpful comments on pupils' work and assessment overall is satisfactory. However, although primary staff are confident in the use of performance descriptors (P-levels), that are designed to provide a common basis for measuring the progress of pupils for whom the early levels of the National Curriculum are not appropriate, secondary teachers are only now beginning to assess pupils' progress in this way. As a result, the school has recognised that there is room for improvement in the accuracy of teachers' assessments.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a wide range of activities that supports pupils well and has been improved considerably since the last inspection. There is a very good range of accreditation and the introduction of the ASDAN award is appropriate. This was confirmed by a parent who commented on how happy her son was doing the ASDAN course and how much confidence it has given him. There are good opportunities for pupils to go to college and attend work experience placements. These pupils are also well supported by the effective personal, social and health education and citizenship programme and as a result they are well prepared to move on to the next stage of life after school.

There are good opportunities for pupils to work alongside those in mainstream schools and the school is successful in returning a number of pupils back into mainstream. Pupils are well supported through the school's outreach work which also provides support and training for mainstream schools. The school is keen not to be isolated and these links together with those with other special schools ensure that staff and

pupils benefit from sharing their skills with others. For example, the good links with local schools enable pupils to use their facilities for science and physical education.

Good use is made of the community to enrich pupils' experiences and there is a good range of visits that enhance learning. A very good range of clubs both before during and after the school day is available, as well as residential trips that enable pupils to develop their skills both socially and academically.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and guidance, as well as the support for pupils' independence, are seen as a priority by the school. The systems in place to encourage pupils to develop healthy lifestyles are excellent. There are good procedures for child protection and pupils' health and safety is promoted very well. A lot of work has been done on risk assessments since the last inspection and the new electronic recording system is very effective. However, the recording of incidents in which staff have to restrain a pupil is unsatisfactory. At present, records are disorganised and are not properly monitored by a member of the senior management team. There are very good links with multi-agency professionals and pupils benefit from the very good specialist knowledge of staff. Parents are particularly appreciative of the support their children and families receive from the school.

A considerable amount of work has gone into improving pupils' IEPs and the school has now established a new format which is appropriate and which they plan to continue improving. However, the quality of the targets within the plan are variable and they are not being used as working documents by all staff.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

A considerable amount of work has been done in the last three years to improve the school. A lot of this is a direct result of the very hard work and dedication of the headteacher and her commitment to staff and pupils. Her style of management ensures that all those involved within the school, including governors, parents and pupils, have a say in what goes on and feel a part of the process of development.

The headteacher is very keen to ensure that staff develop their skills and she has empowered them to take on wider responsibilities and access training to help them fulfil their roles. This is very evident in the very good initiative involving two support staff in monitoring aspects of pupils' progress and in checking that the wide range of special needs within the school is being met.

Senior staff are very aware of their roles and responsibilities and carry these out well. There are appropriate systems in place to check on the quality of teaching but the school recognises that these need to be more rigorous. The result of this is that there is insufficient attention being given to improving the quality of teaching throughout the school.

The governing body is a very effective group. There is a very good working relationship between the headteacher and chair of governors that is both supportive and questioning. Finances of the school are managed very well. The school has a very good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and this is reflected in the accuracy of its self-evaluation. In spite of the amount that has already been achieved since the headteacher was appointed, staff and governors are keen to develop the school further and there is a good capacity for improvement.

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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	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	1	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?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	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?	2	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	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	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	No
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

Thank you for making my team and I so welcome in your school. We very much enjoyed meeting and talking to you. We were very impressed by how many of you take an interest in staying healthy and hope you will continue with this.

These are some of the things we liked best:

- The headteacher and the senior staff work hard to make sure the school runs well.
- You clearly like coming to school and because of this nearly all of you attend every day.
- Because your teachers are good at what they do and know you very well, you learn well.
- The school is excellent at helping you understand about looking after yourselves and keeping safe
- The school has found lots of ways to help you understand what it is like to go to work and prepare you for life when you leave school.

To make things even better we have suggested three things that the school should now do:

- The teachers know a lot about how well you do; they need to use this information to help you to do even better
- When a few of you get very upset you need to be held by staff to stop you hurting others or yourself. At present records are disorganised and are not properly checked by a member of the senior management team.
- The school has improved your individual education plans but teachers need to use them more to make sure that each of you learn in the way that suits you best.

Thank you again for all your help. We wish you well for the future.