

Fairfield Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111197
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	288888
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Eileen Mulgrew HMI

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	294
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Maureen Isherwood
Headteacher	Mrs I Hodkinson
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003
School address	Peelhouse Lane Widnes Cheshire WA8 6TH
Telephone number	0151 4240123
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Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Fairfield is a larger than average junior school serving an area with high levels of economic disadvantage. The number on roll has fallen since the last inspection. Almost all the pupils are White British with the majority transferring from the feeder infant school. A larger than average number of pupils join the school at times other than Year 3 and leave before the end of Year 6. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal is above the national average. There is a small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, with two pupils at an early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) is above the national average; three pupils have a statement of special educational need.

The school has been awarded ArtsMark Gold, Information and Communication Technology mark, Halton's healthy school award and National Association for Computers in Education.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Fairfield Junior School provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The headteacher and all the staff have created a welcoming oasis in which pupils feel safe and are well cared for. 'Every child is special', is the school motto and forms the basis for its work. The majority of the parents have confidence in the school and support it. The award of Artsmark Gold bears testimony to the emphasis placed on the development of the creative arts. Pupils' success is celebrated in displays of their high quality artwork which create a vibrant, stimulating environment. Pupils talk enthusiastically about the plays and concerts in which they have performed.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with some good and outstanding teaching. The brisk pace and high expectations in some teaching enable pupils to make impressive gains in learning and reach average or above average standards. In weaker lessons progress is slow and pupils do not make the gains in learning of which they are capable. This uneven picture has been affected by staffing issues. Gaps in pupils' learning have developed in mathematics and English, especially for the higher achieving pupils and some pupils with LDD. Although pupils' progress is assessed, not all staff make enough use of this information to plan work that matches closely the needs of learners. Pupils have a satisfactory grasp of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT). Although pupils make satisfactory progress over their time in the school, not all pupils attain the higher standards of which they are capable.

The curriculum is satisfactory but provides limited opportunities for pupils to develop and use literacy, especially writing, numeracy and ICT skills in other subjects. The provision is enriched by the good variety of out-of-class activities and the residential trip to Switzerland. Pastoral care for the pupils is strong, with all staff committed to providing a safe, caring and friendly environment. All statutory requirements are met. The school works effectively with parents, the local authority and neighbouring schools to promote the well-being of the pupils. Although some pupils have academic targets they do not always know what to do to improve their work.

Pupils' personal development is good. Relationships are good and pupils feel secure and supported. The pupils' good behaviour means the school is an orderly place where pupils take responsibility for several aspects of their work and play. Most pupils attend regularly and the school celebrates good attendance.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Monitoring and evaluation procedures have improved, resulting in a better understanding of what needs to be done to raise pupils' achievement. The school has started to tackle underachievement and has shown improvement in mathematics and reading. Nevertheless, until recently, not enough had been done resulting in a decline in progress in English and too few pupils gaining above-average standards in mathematics and English. There is still some way to go to ensure all pupils reach the higher levels of which they are capable. Governance is satisfactory. The governors have a realistic picture of the strengths of the school and the improvements it needs to make and have been instrumental in recent appointments which have strengthened the senior staff team. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and mathematics.

- Ensure that all teachers make effective use of assessment information to match work to pupils' learning.
- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good or better.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Overall, achievement and standards are satisfactory. Pupils enter the school in Year 3 with skills in reading, writing and mathematics which are broadly average, although, in the last two years, the number of pupils joining in Year 3 with standards that are above those expected for their age has increased. Standards reached by pupils in English, mathematics and science have risen but pupils are not yet making the progress they should, resulting in too few pupils gaining the higher levels in mathematics and significantly fewer reaching the higher levels in English.

Improvement in science over recent years has resulted in satisfactory progress, with half of all pupils gaining levels above those expected for their age. Improved progress in mathematics has meant that an increased number of pupils gained the expected level for their age but it is still not swift enough for higher achieving pupils. Progress in English has declined in the last three years with only one in every ten pupils gaining above the expected level for their age. However, this masks some improvement in reading. Pupils with LDD make the same rate of progress as their classmates and achieve similar standards.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Throughout the school behaviour is good and pupils work and play well together. A small group of parents voiced concern over disruptive behaviour and bullying. The school is aware of an ongoing problem with a small group of pupils in the upper years and the headteacher is working with the local authority to resolve this issue. The vast majority of pupils enjoy school. They are polite, friendly and welcoming to visitors. Although attendance is slightly below the national average, the school does all it can to promote good attendance and punctuality. The names of pupils who have good attendance for the term are on display.

Spiritual, moral and social development is good. Pupils have opportunities to explore themes in personal, health and social education. Through music, art, dance, and design and technology pupils develop an awareness of other cultures. Choosing healthy options at lunchtime and attending the out-of-school sports clubs show how pupils understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. 'It helps you live longer,' said many pupils. The elected school council members take their responsibility seriously. They meet regularly and feel they have an impact on school life. Recently, they organised a competition to design a healthy meal. All pupils contribute to the wider community, for example, by raising money for charities and singing for senior citizens at Christmas time.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with some good and outstanding teaching mainly in the upper years of the school. Typical features of effective lessons include precise, confident,

enthusiastic teaching based on a clear assessment of pupils' prior learning and tasks that are well matched to their needs. Lessons move along at a brisk pace and work challenges all pupils, including those with LDD. As a result pupils enjoy lessons, have fun, make rapid gains in their learning and know exactly how to move on in their work. For example, in a Year 6 mathematics lesson pupils were buzzing with enthusiasm as they solved algebra puzzles. In many lessons, however, these opportunities are missed and pupils, especially the higher achievers, do not make the gains in learning of which they are capable.

Pupils with LDD are well supported so they are fully involved in all lessons. On occasions teaching assistants are not given sufficient guidance on how to support groups of learners, particularly during the introductory sessions of lessons. The effectiveness of this support is thus diluted. Pupils' progress is thoroughly assessed but not all the teachers use the information to plan work which matches the different needs of all learners, especially the higher achieving pupils. Regular marking of work includes very supportive comments and an acknowledgement of the pupils' efforts. However, pupils are not always clear about what they have done well or how they can improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements. There is an emphasis on the creative arts, for which the school has received ArtsMark Gold. The quality of artwork, using a wide variety of media, is excellent and the pupils' successes are celebrated by high quality displays and exhibitions, concerts and performances. The curriculum is further enriched through the good range of out-of-school clubs, visits and visitors, such as the annual trip to Switzerland and the life education caravan which extend pupils' learning experiences.

Subjects such as art and history are beginning to be linked together to make learning more exciting and meaningful but such cross-curricular links are at an early stage of development. Pupils have few opportunities to use their satisfactory skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT in other subjects and this adversely affects their progress. For the teaching of mathematics and English, each year is grouped into ability sets. However, within those sets pupils are often given the same work, which does not meet their different needs. An overdependence on worksheets and copied work in some classes limits the opportunities pupils have to develop their writing skills and organize their own work. Pupils with LDD are sensitively supported to enable them to take part in all subjects.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall. Pastoral care of pupils is good, with staff committed to creating a harmonious environment. Pupils feel safe and are confident that any problem would be swiftly dealt with and resolved. Health and safety are promoted and monitored. The installation of the gate and new doors help many parents feel that their children are well cared for and safe. Safeguarding procedures meet current government guidelines. There are procedures to help pupils transfer from the infant school, and visits to the high school make the move at the end of Year 6 smoother for pupils. Provision for pupils with LDD enables their needs to be met and, as a result, they make at least the same progress as their classmates. The school works well with parents, seeking advice from external agencies such as education and health personnel. However, the tracking of individual pupils' progress is at an early stage

of development. It is not yet rigorous enough for teachers to use to keep pupils aware of how well they are doing compared to a similar age group and what they need to do to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, supported by an effective deputy headteacher and strong leadership team, is focused on raising standards and achievement for all pupils. Self-evaluation is satisfactory but the impact of strengths in some areas has been overestimated. Although weaknesses have been identified, steps to tackle underachievement in English have been too slow, resulting in a decline in progress over the last three years.

Recent action taken to develop literacy has had some impact on raising standards in reading. The school recognises there is much to do to raise the standards in writing and this is the main priority in its development plan for this year. The school uses consultants from the local authority to establish new approaches to raising achievement.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors fulfil their statutory duties. Subject leadership in mathematics and English has been strengthened and this is already having a positive effect; there are signs of improving achievement. Governors are in an informed position to challenge as well as support the school. Consequently, the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

The middle leaders follow clear guidelines to monitor and evaluate their subjects effectively. The results of this evaluation are used to inform priorities in the school's development plan. Although checks are made on the quality of teaching by the headteacher, the local authority and subject leaders, this information is not consistently evaluated for the impact on pupils' progress. Improvements since the last inspection have been satisfactory.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Fairfield Junior School, Widnes, WA8 6TH

As you know we recently visited your school to see how well you are learning. We would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and talking to us about Fairfield. You were all very friendly and greeted us with lots of smiles.

We think your school gives you a satisfactory education and these are the things we found best about it.

- Most of your parents are happy for you to go to Fairfield.
- You have wonderful opportunities to develop skills in the creative arts.
- Most of you work as hard as you can.
- Some of your teachers give you really interesting work to help you to make lots of progress.
- You have a headteacher who thinks you are all special.
- All the teachers and the school's governors are working hard to make improvements for you.

We have asked your headteacher and teachers to help you: to reach higher standards in English and mathematics; to check your work and plan lessons for you, so that you can make quicker progress; and for your teachers to share ideas so that all of you can have lots of exciting work to do.

We hope you continue to enjoy your learning at Fairfield. Best wishes for the future.