

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London  
WC2B 6SE

T 08456 404045  
F 020 7421 6644  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



24 October 2006

Mr John R Hedley  
Fairfield High School for Girls  
Fairfield Avenue  
Droylesden  
Manchester  
M43 6AB

Dear Mr Hedley

Ofsted survey inspection programme - Attendance for Learning in Secondary Schools

Thank you for your hospitality and co-operation, and that of your staff, during my visit on 12 October 2006 to look at your work in promoting attendance.

The visit provided valuable information which will contribute to our national evaluation and reporting. Published reports are likely to list the names of the contributing institutions, but individual institutions will not be identified in the main text. All feedback letters will be published on the Ofsted website at the end of each half-term.

The evidence used to inform the judgements made included: interviews with staff and pupils, scrutiny of relevant documentation, observation of two lessons and discussion with a local authority officer.

The overall effectiveness of your work in promoting attendance was judged to be good.

#### Achievement and standards

- Achievement and standards are good. For the last three years, more than seventy percent of pupils have achieved at least five GCSE results at grade C or above. There have been recent improvements in the proportion with good results that include English and mathematics, and the contextual value added measure is significantly above average and continuing to rise.
- In lessons observed, pupils whose attendance record had been scrutinised during this visit were making good progress.
- The school has monitored pupils' value added between standards at one stage of education and the next against the pupils' attendance rate. The correlation is very low: there is no convincing evidence that achievement at this school is affected by attendance issues.
- In the main, pupils are aware of the school's procedures relating to attendance. They know that a number of staff have a particular role in

checking up on attendance or counselling pupils on attendance and related behaviour issues. When pupils have been off school, they are generally conscientious in copying up work missed and, if need be, asking teachers for help. However, procedures for catching up after absence are not as systematic as they could be.

- Pupils' positive attitudes in general, including attitudes to attendance, reflect the school's very good ethos and commitment to learning and personal development.

#### Quality of teaching and learning of attendance

- The lessons seen were good. For the pupils tracked on the inspection, progress was effective, though there was insufficient separate provision to stimulate the most able on the one hand or structure learning for the less able on the other.

#### Quality of curriculum

- The curriculum (in relation to the promotion of maximum attendance) is satisfactory. At present, the school offers a mainly traditional curriculum with some vocational provision and work based learning is sometimes negotiated for older pupils who find it hard to cope. The school has appropriate plans for greater curricular innovation next year.
- Few pupils said that they did not like school. However, younger pupils warmed to the prospect of more varied alternative courses when they are older. There are sensible adaptations to accommodate the needs of the small number of school-refusers and others who have difficulty with the mainstream curriculum.

#### Leadership and management of attendance

- Attendance is maintained at a high level of about ninety three and a half percent. Unauthorised absence is probably about three quarters of a percent. Data varies (including differences between data from the school, the local authority and Ofsted), and the school has recently changed its electronic recording and analysis system to improve reliability. The recording of absence for family holidays, and other instances where authorisation is in question, has now been regularised. The school is in the top quarter of secondary schools in Tameside with regard to attendance.
- Attendance is managed well. Management of it is suitably delegated to senior staff and administrative staff; and the level of management activity is broadly commensurate with the generally good levels of attendance.
- There are thorough procedures to attend to the needs of the few pupils who have very serious attendance problems, generally allied with more profound behaviour and welfare difficulties.
- There is scope for increased effort in monitoring pupils whose attendance is indifferent, but not poor (for example, in the 85% to

90% range). At present, procedures (including the format of letters to parents and the use of data) are mechanistic. The school should review its intervention and escalation methods. Where there is stubborn indifferent attendance that cannot be explained by particular illnesses or eventualities, escalation procedures should put more pressure on parents (perhaps interview, rather than repeating a letter already sent). The school is planning to elicit further attendance information from its feeder primary schools to enable early intervention.

- The attendance policy is reasonable but needs up-dating to take account of recent changes.
- Managers might consider logging 'catch-up' arrangements when pupils return after absence, which are secure without being burdensome.
- The local authority has a clear view of how things stand with regard to attendance at the school and there is helpful professional liaison.

### Inclusion

- In the main, attendance problems do not greatly limit pupils' achievement: inclusion is good in this respect.
- For pupils who have serious problems in coping with school life, including attendance, there are effective support procedures, including liaison with parents and other agencies.

Areas for improvement, which we discussed, included:

- improving intervention and escalation procedures (including the use of data) for those whose attendance is a little lower than would be reasonable
- making sure that provision to enable pupils to catch up on work when they return from absence is water-tight
- updating the attendance policy.

I hope these observations are useful as you continue to develop your attendance work in the school.

As I explained in my previous letter, a copy of this letter will be sent to your local authority and will be published on Ofsted's website. It will also be available to the team for your next institutional inspection.

Yours sincerely

*Jim Bennetts*  
Her Majesty's Inspector

*cc LA*