

Fairfax School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103557
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308357
Inspection date	5 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Matharu HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1104
6th form	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Anthony Hopkins
Headteacher	S Calvert
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2004
School address	Fairfax Road Sutton Coldfield B75 7JT
Telephone number	01213 781288
Fax number	01213 783176

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. The school was visited for one day. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records and documentation, observation of the school at work, interviews with senior members of staff, governors and students, and the parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average sized 11–18 comprehensive school serving the area of Sutton Coldfield. There is enhanced provision for students with a range of physical disabilities. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, as is the number of students known to be eligible for free school meals. The majority of students are of White British backgrounds. The school holds the following awards: Artsmark Silver, Sports Mark, the Healthy Schools Award, the International Schools Award and Investors in People Award. Specialist status for Business and Enterprise was awarded in September 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Fairfax School is a successful and inclusive school. Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that the overall standard of education provided is good.

Students join the school with above average attainment. The school builds on this to achieve good standards that have been well above the national average in Key Stage 3 tests over recent years. In 2007, results at the end of Year 9 slipped, particularly in science and at the higher levels in English. The school has responded to this vigorously. Careful and systematic monitoring of students' progress has been introduced, which has helped school staff in identifying where interventions are necessary. A range of suitable strategies, such as individual mentoring, are used as appropriate, which is boosting progress. Above average standards have been consistently achieved over recent years at Key Stage 4. In particular, the number of students gaining good passes in English and mathematics is consistently well above average. Students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make good progress from Years 7 to 11. This is because the school sets challenging targets for students at both key stages and has improved the academic guidance and support provided for them. Achievement and standards in the sixth form are satisfactory, and improving. School leaders are careful to analyse any areas of relative underperformance. They are accurate in their analysis of the school's strengths and weaknesses. For example, they are aware of the continuing priorities to raise standards and achievement in science and modern foreign languages throughout the school and standards in the sixth form. Action taken by the school is successfully tackling underperformance in these areas.

Specialist status in business and enterprise contributes strongly to the school's success. This is evident all around the school: in the teaching and learning developments led by the specialist subjects and the results in these areas, the impact on curriculum provision for the school and wider community and, most notably, on students' personal and social development. Here, there is evidence of outstanding development of future work-related skills through enterprise activities that permeate the ethos of the school.

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, is good. Their behaviour is good in lessons and around school. Most students enjoy their learning and display confidence and positive attitudes. Students' contribute very well to the life of the school and the wider community. They particularly enjoy the wide range of activities available to them. As one student commented, 'We are lucky here because there is always something going on that is fun to do'. Students' views are listened to and acted upon. They have a number of opportunities to feedback their views. For example, the headteacher's 'Tutor Group of the Week' enables students to discuss school issues and provide feedback on teaching and learning. Students hold their headteacher in high regard; they like the fact that she is highly visible around school, knows many of them by name and is firm, but approachable.

A relatively small number of parents responded during the inspection with completed questionnaires. Of these, the majority reported favourably on many aspects of the school, particularly the range of opportunities available and the support and dedication of staff. A minority of parents raised concerns about whether children's views are properly considered and about the quality of aspects of leadership and management. Such concerns were not supported by the inspection evidence.

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan and structure their lessons well and routinely share clear learning objectives with students. They have high expectations of behaviour and the vast majority of students respond to this well. The atmosphere in lessons is calm and positive. Relationships between adults and students are good. In the most successful lessons, teachers demonstrate skill in providing high levels of challenge for all students. They engage students through a variety of interesting and relevant tasks, which encourages pair and group work. This is prompting valuable independent and cooperative learning skills. There are examples of good assessment in lessons, with clear feedback on the criteria for success and how the students might improve. However, this is inconsistent across the school. Sometimes, valuable opportunities to improve the quality of work and to help students to focus on improving their own learning are not fully exploited.

The curriculum was not inspected in detail, but it is evident that a full curriculum review has recently taken place, which has resulted in appropriate revisions. This is an inclusive school, and developments in vocational provision are continuing well in order to meet the needs of all students. The wide range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities complement the curriculum well; in particular, large numbers of students enjoy a variety of sporting, musical, drama and arts activities. A very large number participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, with considerable success at the Gold Award level. Opportunities are seized to compete in a vast array of local, regional and national competitions in which students enjoy considerable success.

Arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and fully meet all statutory requirements. One of the factors contributing to the recent improvement in students' progress is the improved academic monitoring that is now established. Whilst care for students' welfare and well-being has been a consistently strong feature of the school, the tracking of students' progress at departmental and whole-school levels was considered by school leaders to be less effective. Considerable progress has been achieved in this respect. There is some excellent practice, for example in design and technology, where regular and detailed assessment information provides staff and students with information about progress and areas for improvement. The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides clear direction for the work of the school and good leadership. She has a sharp understanding of the areas in need of improvement. Effective self-evaluation is enabling the school to build on its strengths and eliminate any perceived weaknesses. The headteacher is well supported by a capable leadership team, which should be completed next term when a newly-appointed deputy headteacher joins the team. Much has been achieved in a short time, notably the reorganisation of the sixth form, a thorough curriculum review, and restructuring of the timetable, with imaginative restructuring of staffing and responsibilities in order to move the school forward in raising achievement. Good systems are in place to monitor teaching and learning and student progress. Following the staffing restructuring, subject and pastoral leaders are in a position to make stronger contributions to the improvement agenda. They form an increasingly effective middle leadership team. They are clear about their roles in developing teaching and learning and in raising achievement. Most provide good direction for the work of their teams. Governors support the school well and hold it to account effectively. They are clear about the school's priorities and where there are still improvements to be made. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection. There is strong and purposeful ambition to improve further and good capacity for this.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory and rapidly improving. Standards achieved are satisfactory; the school is aware that raising standards is a priority and is making determined efforts to improve results. Senior leaders are fully aware of the logistical difficulties posed by the previous shared provision with another school. After a full review, the school has reverted to having its own sixth form provision on one site. Students' current progress is rapidly improving, due to the close monitoring and interventions now in place. Sixth form students are very positive about their courses and value the good relationships they have with their teachers. They enjoy the enrichment activities and the various responsibilities available to them. The comment, 'It is very easy to get involved here as there is so much going on' typifies students' views. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Students comment favourably on the good guidance and support provided, including academic mentoring. The quality of leadership and management of the sixth form is good. It is rigorous and accurate in its analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve results in external examinations in the sixth form.
- Raise standards in science and modern foreign languages throughout the school.
- Ensure students are aware of the criteria for success in all lessons and that they are clear about what they have to do to improve their work.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	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	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

March 10 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Fairfax School, Sutton Coldfield B75 7JT

Thank you for your warm welcome when we visited your school recently. It was a pleasure to observe your work and talk with some of you about this. Your views are important to us and we appreciated your openness and cooperation. It is very clear that most of you are pleased to attend Fairfax School and really value the way that your teachers care for you and help you to achieve good standards.

Our view is that your school provides you with a good education and that you are right to be proud of it. You make good progress by the end of Year 11. Progress in the sixth form is currently satisfactory and rapidly improving. The great majority of you have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. You make good progress in your learning because you are well taught and provided with good quality care, guidance and support. Your teachers know you well and do their best to meet your needs. They also try to ensure you enjoy school.

The school aims to achieve good examination results but also attaches importance to developing your personal and social skills and preparing you for adult life. We feel that your school is very successful in achieving this. The specialist nature of the school adds much in this respect and helps you to develop very good work-related skills for the future. Many of you are involved in sports, music, the arts and enterprise activities and value the very wide range of extra-curricular activities available to you. You have many opportunities to take responsibility and contribute to the life of the school, and many of you do this impressively.

Your school is well led and managed. Your headteacher provides good leadership and she is strongly supported by the senior staff and governors of the school. They are particularly good at analysing your progress and results and working out how things might be improved further. As a result, we feel sure your school will continue to improve. To do this, we have asked the headteacher and your teachers to continue their efforts to raise standards in science and languages and in the sixth form examination results. We have also asked all teachers to make sure you understand exactly what is expected of you in your work, and also that you are clear about what you need to do to improve it. You can help here by taking note of the advice offered and acting upon it. We feel sure you will continue to do well and look forward to hearing of your future success.

Best wishes

Judith Matharu Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex B

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Best wishes

Judith Matharu
Her Majesty's Inspector