

Fairfield High School for Girls

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 106275 |
| Local Authority | Tameside |
| Inspection number | 309081 |
| Inspection date | 4 December 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Jane Austin HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Girls |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 945 |
| Appropriate authority | The local authority |
| Headteacher | Mr John Hedley |
| Date of previous school inspection | 11 October 2004 |
| School address | Fairfield Avenue Droylsden Manchester Lancashire M43 6AB |
| Telephone number | 0161 3701488 |
| Fax number | 0161 3711620 |

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- how well students, including the most able, achieve
- the reasons for variable performance across subjects and the steps the school is taking to address this
- how well students are guided to achieve as well as they should
- the effectiveness of the school's quality assurance systems.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail. The inspectors agreed with the school's own judgements about students' personal development and well-being, the curriculum, and how well students are cared for and supported.

Description of the school

Fairfield High, founded in 1796, is a long-established school for girls. It is currently of average size and serves students whose social and economic circumstances are, overall, a little less favourable than the national norm. However, the percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below average. Most students are White British with small numbers from a range of other heritages. Almost all speak English as their first language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average with only a small number having statements of special educational needs. The school is popular and oversubscribed: the pupil population is very stable. The school's specialism is science. It has the Healthy Schools award and recognition as an Investors in People.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Fairfield is a good school with outstanding features. Its motto, 'Tradition, Vision and Learning', encapsulates its character and strengths. It is a harmonious and lively community, to which students are proud to belong.

Overall, students make good progress in relation to their starting points and standards at both key stages are consistently above average. The unvalidated 2007 results of the Key Stage 3 national tests indicate a rise in standards in each core subject, reversing the slight overall dip seen in 2006. There was a significant improvement in results in English, with 92% of students reaching or exceeding the expected level. The 2007 GCSE results show that the steady trend of above average standards at Key Stage 4 has been sustained. Standards in the school's specialist areas of science and mathematics are well above average. However, the school recognises that performance varies markedly between subjects and is taking robust steps to address this.

A key factor in students' good achievement is their outstanding attitudes to learning. As one pupil aptly commented, 'The great majority of girls know they are here to work.' Levels of attendance are well above average. Students enjoy coming to school and learning. They are very keen to contribute to the community and make a positive difference in a range of ways. For instance, the school council and Eco-group have organised and funded outdoor seating. Students who benefit from the help of those trained as peer counsellors value their support highly. In lessons and around the school students are polite and their behaviour is outstanding. They show a mature awareness of the needs of others in class and are considerate as they move around the school, some areas of which are very cramped. Students are well aware of how to stay safe and healthy in and out of school. Levels of participation in sport are high. Students' preparation for working life is outstanding. Well above average standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) combine with a good range of enterprise activities and students' desire to succeed, to ensure that they are very well-placed with regard to their future economic well-being.

Teaching and learning are good overall. Very good relationships between staff and students promote a highly positive climate for learning. Teachers are well prepared with comprehensive plans for lessons: sharply focused learning objectives are shared with students. Lessons move at a brisk pace. Teachers' good subject knowledge leads to thorough explanations and well-targeted questions that extend learning, for example, by dealing with misconceptions. There is a high level of challenge to students to extend their spoken responses. The high expectations teachers have of students are supported effectively by clear guidance on what they need to do to improve. Where learning is comparatively weaker, the level of challenge is not closely enough matched to students' learning needs; students are not sufficiently actively involved in their learning because teachers dominate lessons; and opportunities to extend learning, particularly for the most able, are missed.

The curriculum is good. The school is maintaining the traditional strengths of its curriculum, such as the very high uptake of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4, while broadening the range of vocational qualifications offered. This reflects the school's increasing responsiveness to students' views, a development arising in part from its specialist work. Students value the life skills course: it makes a positive contribution to their personal development. In partnership with the local further education (FE) college, an alternative curriculum is provided for a small

number of students for whom it is appropriate. The most able are offered the opportunity to study critical thinking at AS level and most take advantage of this. A diverse range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities are available, some in partnership with the local FE college and leading to qualifications. The 'caf, scientifique' and the science bistro, features of the school's specialist provision, are popular because they provide opportunities to carry out experiments. Many students are enthusiastic sportswomen: the school is a national centre of excellence for volleyball.

The care, guidance and support provided for students are outstanding. They say they feel very well cared for and are confident to ask for any help they need, whatever the problem. The student support centre provides a good range of courses designed to strengthen aspects of students' personal development. For instance, there are sessions focusing on the skills and qualities needed for anger management and assertiveness. The school works hard to find individual solutions for vulnerable students. The very well targeted support provided for them, including for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, is enabling them to make the same good progress as their peers. There are effective links with a good range of external agencies to meet the specific needs of certain students. Students are very appreciative of the high quality guidance and careers advice they receive in making choices for Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses. Challenging targets are set and shared with all students. Progress towards these is tracked regularly and staff at all levels know how well students are doing. They use this information very effectively to tailor provision and intervene when required. A very successful mentoring programme is in place. Where there are concerns about progress, students know the reasons for these and what they need to do to improve. Liaison with parents to promote achievement is very good. Appropriate child protection and health and safety procedures are in place.

The school is very well led by the headteacher, ably assisted by a dedicated and energetic senior team. He has set out a clear vision for the school that has resulted in a common sense of purpose and high staff morale. Incisive steps have been taken to effect the improvements needed to realise this vision. These are well founded on a thorough self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development. Comprehensive systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the work of the school, the outcomes of which effectively inform planning for improvement. A sharp focus on raising achievement is at the heart of the school's work. The roles of leaders and managers at all levels have been restructured to sustain this, and rigorous systems are in place to hold staff accountable for students' performance. Middle leaders have embraced their new responsibilities with enthusiasm: regular, detailed tracking of students' progress is fundamental to these. Nonetheless, the impact of these systems across departments is variable and senior leaders are working hard to improve practice where this is required. High quality work has been instrumental in the improvement of whole-school systems for tracking students' progress and in evaluating the impact of interventions, especially in the school's specialist area and in the core subjects. Governance is good: governors are well informed and provide both support and challenge to the school. The school has addressed the issues raised by the previous inspection and has good capacity to improve. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in all subjects to the level of the best.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The attendance of learners | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 1 |

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 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 | 1 |
| 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 |
| 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 High School for Girls, Manchester, M43 6AB

Thank you very much for making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We appreciated the time some of you gave up to talk to us. Your views helped us evaluate the quality of the school's work and I would like to share our findings with you.

We think Fairfield is a good school with outstanding features for the following reasons.

- You make good progress to reach standards that are consistently above average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4.
- Your outstanding attitudes to learning and mature approach to work play a significant part in your success. We were impressed by your courteous, polite behaviour.
- Your teachers help you make good progress in lessons. Termly checks on how well you are doing are really helpful in ensuring that everyone who needs help to succeed gets it.
- You make a very good contribution to the community, for instance as prefects, peer counsellors, members of the school council and through the Eco-group.
- You are offered a good range of courses at Key Stage 4. You get good advice to help you make the right choices both at this stage and when you leave school.
- The care the school provides for you is outstanding. Staff work very hard to ensure that the right support is available to meet your individual needs and as a consequence you all make good progress.
- Many of you participate in the wide variety of extra-curricular clubs and sports.
- The headteacher is steering the school in the right direction.

There is always room for improvement so we have asked the headteacher and staff to focus on ensuring that you all make the progress you are capable of in all subjects.