

Fairfield High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109290
Local Authority	Bristol, City of
Inspection number	324939
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Dowgill

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	939
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	J Ashton
Headteacher	Lyn Chamberlain
Date of previous school inspection	23 November 2005
School address	Allfoxton Road Horfield Bristol BS7 9NL
Telephone number	01179 527100
Fax number	01179 527168

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Fairfield High School is an average sized secondary school. Since the last inspection, Fairfield has merged with another school and moved into new buildings on that site. The new school premises also house Elmfield School for the Deaf and some of the secondary aged students from this school attend lessons at Fairfield.

The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average and is increasing year on year. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average and two-thirds of students with statements have either behavioural, emotional and social difficulties or moderate learning difficulties. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is much higher than average. The percentage of students from a minority ethnic heritage is very high. Student mobility is high.

The school has very recently been designated a specialist school in the expressive and performing arts and has achieved the Healthy Schools award. The previous headteacher retired in summer 2008 and a full-time interim headteacher and part-time executive headteacher were appointed in September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Fairfield High School provides its students with a satisfactory standard of education. There are some areas of strength, noticeably in the care and support the school provides, which result in students' good personal development. The school has gone through a difficult period of transition since its last inspection, with the move to new premises and changing pupil population coinciding with significant changes in the school's senior leadership. The new headteachers have been in post five weeks but already have identified the key areas for improvement and are beginning to put strategies in place. Staff are working hard to bring about improvements but as yet these are not sufficiently well coordinated into a consistent whole-school approach.

The GCSE examination results improved in 2008 and were broadly in line with those found nationally. Given the students' starting points, this represents satisfactory achievement. The examination results of students of Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani heritage were well below those of their peers. Improving academic performance is a key priority for the school and senior leaders know that to achieve this, teaching has to improve. Too much teaching is currently satisfactory; teachers do not use assessment information effectively to inform their planning and to set work that is challenging for students of all abilities. Although teachers set students long-term targets, too many are unsure as to how to achieve these, and marking does not provide them with clear enough guidance on how to improve their work. The curriculum meets the needs of most students well. The recent changes, in particular the introduction of a broader vocational provision, have not had time to have had an impact on raising students' academic achievement but have made a good contribution to their personal development. There is an extensive range of enrichment and extra-curricular activities that have a high participation rate.

The care and support provided by the school are excellent and result in the students' good personal development and well-being. The school has links with a comprehensive range of external agencies and works very well with these in supporting individuals and groups of students with particular needs. Most students enjoy school, are friendly and welcoming and have good relationships with all school staff. They understand what it means to stay safe and act accordingly. Students have a good awareness of healthy living and many participate in a variety of school sporting activities. The contribution of students to the school and wider community is outstanding and many willingly give their own time to support others. Most students' preparation for future economic well-being is good.

Only a few parents responded to the Ofsted questionnaire and the very large majority of these were complimentary about the school. Very few identified any concerns, but those that did included behaviour and communication with parents. Since the last inspection, the school has taken effective action to promote positive behaviour resulting in a considerable improvement in students' behaviour and a significant decline in exclusions. Student behaviour is now good. The school has worked hard to improve its communication with parents and has had some success in this area, although a few parents still feel this could be better.

The school has only very recently gained specialist status in the expressive and performing arts and it is too early to judge the impact of this on the school and its community. However, it is enhancing provision in the designated subjects, and other subjects are formulating plans to use specialist status to aid their development.

Although there has been improvement since the previous inspection, in particular in improving behaviour, this has not been as rapid as it could have been. The two new headteachers have not yet had sufficient time to embed their plans and so capacity for further improvement is currently satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment information to inform planning so teachers set work that is suitably challenging for students of all abilities.
- Ensure teachers use short-term target setting and day-to-day marking more effectively so students have clear guidance on how they can improve their work and make faster progress.
- Improve the GCSE examination results for students of Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani heritage.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The students' attainment on entry in Year 7, although varying slightly each year, is below the national average. By the end of Year 9, students make good progress in English and satisfactory progress in mathematics and science. The standards they attain have fluctuated slightly over the past three years. They have been broadly in line with the national average in English, but below average in mathematics and science. The standard of work students reach in lessons in Years 7 to 9 is broadly average and they make satisfactory progress.

The standards attained by students in GCSE examinations in 2008 were a significant improvement on those of 2007 and were broadly in line with those found nationally. The percentage of students attaining five A*- C GCSEs including English and mathematics was close to the national average. Given their starting points, this was satisfactory achievement. Performance at GCSE in 2008 was particularly strong in English, history, drama and fine art. Standards, although improving, were below average in mathematics, science, and design and technology. The standard of work seen in GCSE lessons was above average in most subjects.

The school has successfully addressed the considerable difference in the GCSE performance between girls and boys, and in 2008 the gap narrowed to that found nationally. Those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to their peers. The GCSE examination results of students from Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani heritage were well below those of their peers. Although the school is aware of the variation in performance of students from different ethnic groups, it has not taken sufficient action to address this.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Most students enjoy school and appreciate the diverse community and opportunity to mix with students from different backgrounds. They value and respect the views and beliefs of others and their moral and social development is good. Students have a good awareness of how to stay safe. The behaviour of students has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Students behave well around the school, and are co-operative when learning in class. They are

friendly and helpful to others, including visitors. Bullying and racist behaviour are rare and when they do occur are quickly dealt with. Punctuality to school and lessons is good and attendance is in line with the national average, although the school is working hard to improve this.

Students understand the need for healthy living and appreciate the availability of healthy school meals. A substantial number take part in organised sports and many use the school's facilities for informal exercise. Students' contribution to the community both in and outside of school is outstanding. A high proportion of students are involved in a wide range of activities including mentoring younger students and supporting new students in summer transition courses. Many students are keen supporters of charity work and high numbers perform in local events, such as the St Paul's Carnival. The school council has good representation, a substantial budget and a wide agenda for improvement. Most students prepare well for their future economic well-being through the acquisition of basic skills and through good opportunities to take initiatives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In most lessons, teachers ensure students know what they have to achieve by the end of the lesson. However, teachers are not using assessment information effectively to inform their planning. In too many lessons teachers set similar work for students of all abilities so not all students are challenged sufficiently and, for some, the pace of learning is not fast enough. Hence, the progress students make is often no more than satisfactory. Teachers are effective in their management of students so they learn in a calm and orderly atmosphere but do not always involve them actively enough in lessons. Where teaching is most effective it is lively and dynamic, motivates students and challenges them to think for themselves. In these lessons, students are interested, work hard at a good pace, and take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are beginning to use the new interactive whiteboards well to support whole-class teaching and students make good use of ICT in a number of lessons. Teaching assistants are used effectively to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, so that they make progress similar to that of their peers.

The quality of day-to-day marking is inconsistent both across and within subjects. Too much marking is checking work completion and does not provide clear and detailed explanations of the reasons for the grade given, or show students how they could improve their work in future.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has modified the curriculum since the last inspection to meet better the needs of students and has plans in place for further improvements. There is a broader range of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11, including some taught off site. These have helped improve boys' attendance but have yet to have an impact on raising standards. The school provides increasing opportunities for students to take GCSE early and start advanced supplementary courses. There is good provision to help students in Year 7 improve their levels of literacy. There is a good range of courses on offer to meet local needs, for example twilight courses in Urdu and Arabic.

A particular strength of the curriculum is the variety of enrichment and extra-curricular activities provided. There is a wide range of opportunities for students to participate in music, arts and

sport, as well as day and residential visits in this country and abroad. A comprehensive programme of study support is also available. Students appreciate the variety of provision on offer and their participation rate is high. The extra-curricular activities provide good opportunities to develop community cohesion.

Although specialist status is new, the school offers dance, drama and music as separate subjects throughout Years 7 to 9. Other subjects are beginning to explore how specialist status can help them develop their curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support the school provides for its students are excellent, although academic guidance is not as effective. The wide range of staff involved in supporting students all have their best interests at heart and ensure that individual needs are fully met. The overwhelming majority of parents agree that their child is well cared for and safe at school and students concur with this view. All the necessary safeguarding and risk assessment requirements are in place.

There is comprehensive provision in place to support students with particular needs. A multi-disciplinary team very effectively support those students who have particular issues, closely monitoring each individual. Similarly, the school very sensitively inducts those students who start at different points in the year. The care for students with a range of learning difficulties is very effective, focusing accurately on their needs and having a strong impact on their learning and attitudes to school. In all its facets of care, the school works very effectively with external agencies to ensure the highest quality provision wherever possible.

The school provides good guidance for students when choosing their future pathways. Although academic targets are set and teachers regularly review student performance, the target setting procedures are applied inconsistently across subjects. Too many students do not know what it is they have to do to reach their targets. Comments in the termly school reports are not always useful in helping parents to support their child's learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The very recently appointed interim headteacher and executive headteacher are beginning to formulate a structure to develop the capacity of leadership and management at all levels in the school. They are aware that a vision of how the school should develop in line with its recent award of specialist school status is required and are working hard to implement this.

Leaders and managers at other levels understand their role in bringing about school improvement and many work hard in their area of responsibility to achieve this. Most leaders undertake an analysis of the work of their teams and produce development plans. These evaluations, however, are not sufficiently co-ordinated to ensure a whole-school approach to improvement. Although senior staff and middle managers undertake monitoring, particularly of teaching and learning, the approach to this is inconsistent. There is an insufficient focus on learning, and the outcomes of monitoring are not always accurate and are not used effectively to improve teaching.

The school has considerable information on students' progress but does not always analyse it sufficiently to identify the performance of different groups of students. Targets are sufficiently

challenging in areas such as GCSE and are beginning to help the school regain standards close to the national average.

The school undertakes much work in the local and wider community and makes a good contribution to promoting community cohesion. The strong community ethos within the school means that there is no discrimination and a high level of social equality, although some groups of students do not achieve as well as others.

The governing body is supportive of the school and was helpful to senior leaders in supporting the move to the new premises. However, governors do not fully monitor the school's performance or hold it sufficiently to account.

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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
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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
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

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/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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
The extent to which 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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	2

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Fairfield High School, Bristol, BS7 9NL

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for your contribution to the recent inspection. We very much enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views of the school. This letter is to inform you of our findings.

The inspection team judged that overall your school provides you with a satisfactory education. The new headteachers know what is required to improve the school but have not yet had enough time to put all their plans into place. The examination results improved in 2008 and were in line with the national average. The senior leaders know that some teaching needs to improve and that you all need to be set challenging work that involves you in your learning.

The care and support the school provides are excellent and result in your good personal development. Your behaviour is now good and we would hope that it continues to improve as it helps you learn. Your understanding of what it means to stay safe and lead a healthy lifestyle is good. Most of you enjoy school and make the best of the wide range of opportunities provided, especially extra-curricular activities. We were very impressed by your excellent contributions to the life of the school and your community.

The senior staff, governors and teachers all want to improve the school further and we believe that, with your help, they can achieve this. We have asked them to focus on the following.

- To make sure that teachers use assessment data to inform their planning so the work they set you is suitably challenging.
- Ensure teachers use short-term target setting and day-to-day marking more effectively to provide you with clear guidance on how you can improve your work and make progress towards achieving your longer-term targets.
- Improve the GCSE examination results for those of you of Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani heritage.

We wish you the best of luck in the future.

Paul Dowgill Lead inspector