

Fairfield High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116944
Local Authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	326500
Inspection date	11 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Richard Masterton

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	372
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Wilcox
Headteacher	Christopher Barker
Date of previous school inspection	17 May 2006
School address	Peterchurch Hereford HR2 0SG
Telephone number	01981 550231
Fax number	01981 550171

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall efficiency of the school, and investigated the following issues.

- Has achievement remained outstanding?
- Is there some (relative) weakness in English and if so what are the reasons?
- Are there identifiable groups of pupils who may not be achieving as well as their peers?
- How rich and effective is the school curriculum?
- Has the school taken due steps to promote community cohesion?

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given through its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Fairfield High School is a small school set in the very rural Golden Valley to the west of Hereford. Most of the pupils are from a White British background. An above average proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school is a Specialist Arts College, a specialist school for applied learning and a Leading Edge School. It is also now designated as a Consultant School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. At its last inspection, it was outstanding in all main categories. Since then it has significantly improved not just in respect of the areas for development identified in that inspection but also in terms of major developments to its educational provision for pupils and in the response that these have generated.

Pupils join Fairfield School with average levels of prior attainment. Their subsequent success in GCSE examinations is significantly and consistently well above average. A group of girls who did not respond well to many efforts made by the school to help them realise their potential caused a dip in 2008, which was noticeable particularly in English. Even in that year, however, 89% of pupils gained five or more GCSEs with grades C or higher. This was well above the 64% national average. Current standards are very high and back to previous levels. Pupils' examination success shows that their progress is excellent, and this outstanding achievement is being consistently maintained year-on-year. This progress is directly attributable to the quality of the school provision. Parents recognise this success and have very great confidence in this school. It is highly oversubscribed.

After study in all required disciplines of the National Curriculum during their first three years, pupils are given an extremely wide range of courses and learning opportunities. A bespoke experience is offered to every pupil through consultation and counselling concerning the learning pupils need and would wish to undertake. The school's two specialist areas of arts and applied learning enable the school to offer an exceedingly flexible range of courses from the highly academic, through the creative, to very practical vocational subjects. Every pupil is richly catered for. This outstanding curriculum is striking for the way that pupils may choose from such a varied range of studies, including animal husbandry, engineering, photography and construction. There are more than 26 subjects offered through flexible staffing and an extended school day, demonstrating how being a small school need not limit curriculum choice. Most noteworthy is the way that the school offers so many vocational opportunities all on its own site. The grounds of the school have recently been extended for sports and applied studies. Pupils have built many facilities themselves as part of their learning. Much of the unique school environment with its wide variety of animals including two exotic alpaca, its areas for pupils to study, relax, talk and reflect, was recently constructed and is now cared for by the pupils themselves. Every useful space, surface or corner is used for displaying pupils' work in art, even the pens for the animals kept in the science area. Small wonder then that pupils respect their school environment and gain so much enjoyment, wonder and spiritual stimulus from it.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Every child truly matters. They are all known so well that any failure to progress is noticed at a very early stage and action taken. As all pupils in each year group are taught the same subject together, teachers and assistants use a fluid system of class organisation to ensure every pupil is given appropriate work and support if needed. Class materials for learning are made available online that day for pupils to use at home. The resulting progress is remarkable, including that of pupils with learning needs and/or disabilities. Given the way that most pupils develop, individual targets that would normally be generated by statistical methods would be too modest and undemanding. This school expects much more and pupils rise to the challenge. The care, guidance and support they receive is also outstanding. It stems from the way pupils are known so well individually, but great care is also taken over their induction into the school and the way that pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education. Almost every pupil leaving Year 11 last year was recorded as continuing in

employment, education or training. This good record is directly due to the quality of provision for pupils' learning in Years 10 and 11.

Pupils' personal development and maturity are outstanding. That the pupils are so happy at school and do so well stems from the school mission to make learning enjoyable and to nourish all aspects of human development, including the emotional and the spiritual. Caring for animals or the environment gives some pupils vocational skills. For other pupils, it offers the stimulus they need to grow to become responsible, caring members of their community. Pupils help each other in all aspects of their schoolwork and forms part of the fabric of the school's success. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, nurtured very strongly by the contribution of the headteacher to their religious education and through assemblies. Pupils work safely and very responsibly and can be trusted to work with minimum supervision on major tasks, such as construction projects within the applied learning programme. Pupils are very health conscious. Many eat well using the school canteen and a very high proportion take additional exercise through such activities as the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Their enjoyment is evident in their demeanour in all aspects of their schoolwork. Their contribution to the community is exceptionally high, not simply through the requirements of their courses, the opportunities for positions of responsibility and work for charities, but also in the way that they work together, for each other, adding value to the educational experience for everyone. Pupils' high academic standards and experience of working in so many different ways equip them well for their future.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher's outstanding inspiration and vision inspire a similar vocational commitment from senior and other staff. Strength of management is deep rooted throughout the school, with very self-critical evaluation and bold planning. It is inspired by a consensus, based on experience, that young people can be fulfilled and successful through high achievement, happiness, relevant studies, learning by doing, learning together, acquiring special skills and, above all, learning in ways that match their individual temperaments. Pupils' progress is regularly assessed and monitored. Great care is taken to help pupils see beyond the confines of their small rural school and the school vigorously promotes community cohesion. Cooperation with other schools and local providers is outstanding. The work of the school to support other local education providers and the sharing of its expertise through professional networks reflect a deep commitment to building success and fulfilment for everyone. There are many opportunities for pupils to learn about other cultural traditions, to go on visits and to travel abroad, but there are fewer opportunities for them to experience the culture of our large cities. Governance is very strong. There is close scrutiny of the work of the school which contributes so much to the life of the local community. Governors are vigilant in checking that all pupils succeed and are very effective in helping the school to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide opportunities for pupils to gain greater awareness and experience of the big city communities of the United Kingdom.

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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?	1
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	1

Achievement and standards

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

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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**

12 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairfield High School, Peterchurch HR2 0SG

Thank you very much for the way that you welcomed me on my visit to your school. It was very interesting to see you at work and to have the opportunity to talk to so many of you. It gave me some of the most important information that I needed and I am very grateful.

You attend an outstanding school, but I am sure that you know that already. Those of you who I asked how it might be improved were at a loss for a reply and I understand why. The curriculum opportunities you enjoy are outstanding and truly remarkable in the context of your small school. You have a precious and almost unique environment in which to learn. You are very well taught. Outstanding teaching means that teachers really believe in your ability to succeed. This inspires you, and you do not disappoint them. You make remarkable progress, reaching standards that are well ahead of pupils nationally. The quality of care and guidance you receive is outstanding. Consequently, you are developing into very mature, thoughtful and responsible adults. It is very evident that you enjoy school, grow healthily, work very safely showing responsible initiative and that your behaviour is of a very high standard. What is very impressive is the way that you help each other so much, working together and helping to make life at school so satisfying. Your preparation for the next stage of your studies and careers is also outstanding. Your own and the school's success is due in large measure to the outstanding, inspirational leadership of the headteacher and his staff. They really have identified what is needed for you all to do so very well. Governors too have kept the school firmly 'on track' and have worked hard to provide the extended grounds and new facilities where you learn.

To help you be better prepared for your careers after leaving Fairfield, I have asked the school to try to give you more insight into the world of the big cities where many of you are likely to work in your future lives.

Please continue to play your part in making Fairfield School such a happy, supportive and inspiring place to learn.

Yours faithfully

Doug Masterton Lead inspector