

# Fairmead School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123940
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	328021
<b>Inspection date</b>	13 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Kell

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	66
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Hilary Pallister
<b>Headteacher</b>	Leon Wellman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 October 2005
<b>School address</b>	Mudford Road Yeovil BA21 4NZ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01935 421295
<b>Fax number</b>	01935 410552

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<b>Age group</b>	5–16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school admits pupils from the south of the county, which is a mixture of rural and urban localities. All pupils have a statement of special educational need. In most cases, this is for moderate learning difficulties, although some pupils have other learning needs. These include social, behavioural and emotional difficulties, autism, and severe learning difficulties. The overwhelming majority of pupils have a White British background. There are twice as many boys as girls on roll. Only a quarter of pupils are of primary school age, and at the time of the inspection, no children were taught as part of the Early Years Foundation Stage. A small number of pupils are in public care and a similar proportion is entitled to free school meals.

The school has achieved the Healthy School Award and International School status, and has been granted a Sports Mark Award. The deputy headteacher was made acting headteacher in September 2008, but he has not been replaced and so the leadership team remains one person short.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Fairmead School provides a satisfactory quality of education. Leaders' strong commitment to equality of opportunity and the good links that they have established with partners enable the school to promote pupils' development well. Despite this, the school's overall effectiveness is not as high as senior leaders judged it to be. This is because although leaders monitor what is going on in the school, they do not use the information that they collect efficiently. It is not evaluated critically in order to check that what is in place is having the greatest possible impact on pupils' learning and personal development.

Pupils make good progress in all aspects of their personal development. They enjoy being at school and so they attend regularly. They behave well in lessons and around the school, and they are keen to participate in what the school has to offer. Pupils are enthusiastic learners but activities do not always stretch them as much as they could. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but learning does not always proceed at a rapid pace. This is because of a lack of rigour in the school's procedures for assessing pupils and in establishing the P levels or National Curriculum levels at which they are working. As a result, the learning activities that teachers plan are not informed by a secure knowledge of pupils' capabilities. This reduces the rate of pupils' progress. Overall, their progress and achievements are satisfactory. Standards of work are extremely low because of the nature of the pupils' learning difficulties. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum although it is in breach of a statutory requirement. It does not provide a modern foreign language for pupils in Years 7 to 9 but it has not amended pupils' statements of special educational need to reflect this.

The school provides a good level of pastoral care, guidance and support. Pupils are looked after well, with good procedures for ensuring their safety in school and when they are off site. Academic guidance and support, however, are not as effective. As assessment is insecure, the school cannot set annual P or National Curriculum level targets for its pupils with confidence that they are entirely accurate and, therefore, that they provide the right degree of challenge. Consequently, when pupils' progress towards these targets is reviewed, measurements of their apparent progress are not entirely valid. This prevents leaders accurately evaluating pupils' achievements and reduces their ability to assess critically any differences in performance between different groups of pupils.

The current leadership team has maintained continuity through a period of upheaval and uncertainty caused by staffing changes. However, a senior vacancy remains and this is putting an extra burden on the team. The governing body is subject to similar pressures as it has recently lost a significant number of members. These shortages limit leaders' ability to carry out all the tasks that are required of them. Despite this, they have overseen a good approach towards establishing community cohesion. Leadership and management are satisfactory, as is the school's capacity to evolve further.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all statutory requirements in relation to the curriculum are met.
- Implement rigorous assessment systems to determine pupils' attainments and use this data to ensure that lessons consistently feature learning activities that accelerate pupils' learning.
- Establish realistic, challenging targets for all pupils based on their prior achievements and develop a clear rationale to measure and evaluate all pupils' progress over time.

- Make school self-evaluation more effective by scrutinising more closely the findings of routine monitoring and by using these evaluations in ways that have the most impact on the school's development.

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**

Standards are very low compared with national expectations because of pupils' learning difficulties. Pupils make satisfactory progress throughout school. Their achievement is satisfactory, including the outcomes of accredited examinations that they take at the end of Year 11. At a whole-school level, long-term individual pupil targets are not entirely accurate and ongoing records of pupils' achievements lack robustness. Consequently, pupils' acquisition of their targets is not a reliable indicator of the extent of progress that they have made. Information in a much wider database of the achievements of pupils with special educational needs that the school buys into indicates that their progress is satisfactory. Pupils with particular learning difficulties, such as autism, or those who show especially challenging behaviours make the same progress as others. Their rate of progress suffers from the same assessment shortcomings, but the school has in place other elements to support them. Pupils with autism benefit from regular one-to-one work in the study base and staff's good use of additional methods of communication, such as symbols. Pupils with social, behavioural and emotional difficulties get many withdrawal opportunities to talk through anxieties, which enables them to re-engage with learning and to make progress in their work.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils are polite and outgoing. They make good progress in developing their independence and communication skills. As their confidence and self-esteem grow, their social skills develop and they become increasingly aware of the needs of others. The extent of this personal development was summed up very well by the parent who commented: 'In four years he has changed from an angry, aggressive child who was unable to string a sentence together into a confident, chatty, positive young man.' Pupils have a good understanding of what they can do to remain healthy and how to stay safe. Pupils are prepared well for leaving school. In 2008, all leavers entered some form of continuing education, reflecting the positive attitudes, other personal qualities and study skills that were developed at school. Pupils make a good contribution to the school community, such as by representing their class on the school council, and they have been involved recently in the appointment of new staff. The pupils have a good perspective of a much wider community too, through the school's very active partnership with a special needs school in Zambia. Fairmead pupils have raised funds for this school and there is regular communication between the two sets of pupils and staff, including reciprocal visits.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Lessons are orderly and are always characterised by good relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults. Pupils follow classroom rules and procedures well and they have a positive attitude to work. They make good progress in developing their communication competence. Teachers provide many opportunities for them to develop their speaking and listening skills and additional approaches are used to support pupils with particular communication difficulties. Pupils' behaviour is managed very securely and teaching assistants make an important contribution in this respect. Despite this, pupils are not always challenged as much as they could be because teachers' expectations of what they can do are not based on a very clear understanding of what they have already achieved. Therefore, the planned learning activities are not always sufficiently personalised to meet individual pupils' needs. As a result, learning is not accelerated through a systematic and carefully planned series of activities that maintain a rapid pace of learning over time.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

Pupils have access to a satisfactory range of learning activities. A good work-related learning programme is supported by work experience and college links. There is a good focus on developing the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology and a well-planned curriculum for personal, social and health education. Individual pupils' curriculum needs are catered for well through the use of planned and well-managed withdrawal sessions. Pupils benefit from a comprehensive variety of enrichment activities. As well as planned educational visits, these include a breakfast club, an after-school sports club and a range of options for Years 7 to 10. This options afternoon gives pupils the chance to choose subjects as diverse as gardening and international cooking. However, the school is failing to meet statutory requirements for pupils in Years 7 to 9. It is not offering a modern foreign language even though pupils' statements of special educational need state that this should be provided. Overall, despite having some strong features, the curriculum is not as effective as it could be. This is because leaders do not evaluate rigorously how well it is being planned and delivered or the impact that it is having on the rate at which pupils acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 3

Pupils receive high quality personal care. All the necessary child protection and safeguarding procedures are securely in place, and risk assessments are carried out routinely. The pupils confirm that they feel safe in school. Staff have a consistent approach when they communicate with pupils or have to make a physical intervention to manage particularly challenging behaviour. Strong links with parents and other agencies, such as a variety of therapists, maintain this consistency when addressing pupils' personal needs. The impact of the school's provision for guiding and supporting pupils' personal development becomes evident when pupils put into practice the skills that they have learned in school. Work experience is a case in point, and one pupil described this as making him feel 'grown up and more independent.' The staff's very good understanding of pupils' personal needs is the reason why the school is able to do such good

quality pastoral work. This is not mirrored in its procedures for guiding and supporting pupils' academic progress because staff do not have the same level of understanding about their learning needs. Loose assessment systems result in insecure P or National Curriculum levels being determined. Therefore, targets that reflect the appropriate level of challenge cannot be set and so staff cannot track pupils' progress towards achieving a goal and provide the right level of intervention that will help them on their way.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

School leaders have done a good job in maintaining stability through a difficult period even though there is not a full complement of either senior staff or governors. They have begun to recognise some of the aspects of the school's work that they need to develop, but this is at an early stage. The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and leaders have established a very caring culture and an ethos that 'every child matters'. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and appreciate how quickly their children settle. 'You only have to be in school for a short time to realise the happy environment and happy children', commented one parent. However, the school does not have a sharply tuned understanding of how it can develop its quality of education in order to raise and maintain the momentum of learning. Leaders monitor what is happening but they interrogate their findings at only a superficial level. Therefore, the data that they collect have only limited value because the findings are not translated into actions that would have the most impact on bringing about change. A lack of rigorous analysis is evident in the way that assessment information is used. The data are not processed in a way that raises searching questions about how well individuals and groups are performing, and are not used effectively to set longer-term targets for pupils.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
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

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<sup>1</sup>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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	2
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	2

## The quality of provision

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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**

14 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairmead School, Yeovil BA21 4NZ

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school and a special thanks to those who gave up their time to speak with us.

Yours is a satisfactory school where your personal development is good, and you make adequate progress in your work. We were impressed with how well you behave and how often you go to school. You help each other a great deal and do things around the school, like being on the school council and helping your friends. You develop into polite and grown-up young people. You know a lot about how to stay fit and remain safe. The staff care for you a great deal and help you to get ready for leaving school. You make the most of this and it is very pleasing to see that all of your friends who left school last year went to college.

The people who run the school have ideas about how they can make things better and we have given them some things to focus on:

- Provide you with all the subjects that you should study, including the chance to learn a modern foreign language for those of you in Years 7 to 9.
- Make sure they know exactly how well each one of you is doing, so that teachers always give you things to do in lessons that help you to learn as much as possible.
- Check in detail that every one of you is doing as well as you possibly can.
- Choose the few most important things that they need to do to make your school better.

You told us that you enjoy school and that you feel safe there. We were pleased to hear that the older pupils enjoy their work experience and the time that they spend in college. You can help the staff to make the school even better by continuing to go to school as often as you can and working hard while you are there.

Thank you once again and I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell Lead inspector