

Fairfax School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103557
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	355405
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Rob Hubbleday HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1398
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	286
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martyn Collin
Headteacher	Sarah Calvert
Date of previous school inspection	5 March 2008
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Age group	11–19
Inspection date(s)	10–11 February 2011
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Thirty-seven teachers were observed teaching 40 lessons and many other teachers were seen for short periods of time. Meetings were held with a wide range of groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and members of the leadership team. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at documentation, such as development plans, assessment and tracking data, the minutes of governing body meetings and various incident logs. Questionnaires were returned by 60 parents, carers and the inspectors considered these alongside questionnaire responses from students and staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well do higher-attaining students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve?
- What is the extent of improvements in the sixth form?
- How effectively has the senior leadership team developed the way which teachers use assessment information in lessons?

Information about the school

Fairfax School is much larger than the average comprehensive school. It serves the area of Sutton Coldfield which has retained two selective grammar schools. It was awarded specialist status for Business and Enterprise in 2004. The proportion of students with special education needs is below average. However, the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is much higher than average because the school manages specially resourced provision for students, currently numbering 26, with a range of physical disabilities. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is average, as is the percentage of students from minority ethnic groups. The school holds many awards, including: Artsmark Gold; Sports Mark; the Healthy Schools Award; the International Schools Award; Investors in People Award; the Economic, Business and Enterprise Quality Mark; the Quality CEIAG Award (Careers Education and Information Advice and Guidance); and, most recently, the National Standard for Enterprise Education.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Fairfax is a good school. It has some outstanding features. The students reach high standards in their academic work, behave in an exemplary manner and contribute extremely positively to the life of the school. They develop a wide range of broader skills relevant to their future education or employment. Attendance is high. The school has nurtured a range of very effective partnerships with other schools and agencies to extend the curriculum and underpin the outstanding care, guidance and support it provides. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for, especially those with a statement of special educational needs who attend because of the school's enhanced provision. These students make good or better progress and are included fully in the life of the school through well-managed support.

The quality of teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. The sharpness of the teachers' insight into the students' level of understanding is a marked feature of the most effective lessons. This awareness enables these teachers to plan and adapt work to suit the needs of a range of students. Many teachers confidently use a wide repertoire of strategies to engage the students in thinking deeply about their understanding of new ideas. The most consistently effective teaching and learning is at Key Stage 4. A significant proportion of teaching, mainly at Key Stage 3, is no better than satisfactory because although relevant techniques are employed, they are not fully exploited. Learning and progress in these lessons are restricted by teachers spending too much time explaining facts and demanding too little from more-able students.

The governing body plays an outstanding role in establishing the school's strategic direction. It takes its own development and training needs very seriously and has the confidence and professional insight to hold the school to account in a rigorous manner. The headteacher, senior leadership team work and governing body work together effectively so the school is well placed to continue improving. The school has addressed key issues in science, languages and the sixth form which were identified in its previous inspection. It has made significant inroads into tackling other issues, but has not entirely succeeded in securing the effective use of assessment information within lessons. Consequently, although attainment is high and rising, achievement and outcomes overall are good rather than outstanding, reflecting the inconsistent quality of learning. The school's self-evaluation is crystal clear and accurate and is used well to determine priorities and steer development planning, which is of good quality. Monitoring activity is comprehensive and an accepted

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process which has encouraged improvement. However, it has not involved all middle leaders enough and its impact has been less emphatic than hoped for in some respects.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that an even greater proportion is of good or better quality by:
 - ensuring that teachers plan with greater precision how they will challenge all groups of students, especially the most able
 - having the same high expectations of the quality of learning and progress required at Key Stage 3 as is found at Key Stage 4.

- Ensure that monitoring of provision has greater impact by:
 - reducing and simplifying the range of monitoring activities which are carried out
 - reaffirming expectations about the pace of change
 - extending the role of middle leaders in securing consistency in the quality of teaching and learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Attainment when the students enter the school is above average and they go on to reach high standards by the end of Year 11. Achievement is good across a broad range of subjects. The proportion who gain five GCSE passes at grade C or above including English and mathematics is significantly above average. Students in the current Year 11 are securely placed to surpass the results of previous years. All groups of students enjoy their learning and make progress because they apply themselves willingly, contribute to discussions and try their hardest. However, students told the inspectors that they could work even harder in Years 7 and 8. Most students in Key Stage 4 make good progress but some of the most able make only satisfactory progress in gaining the very highest grades, for instance in English and mathematics. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, especially those with physical disabilities or on the autistic spectrum. The students’ outstanding behaviour ensures that all groups make the most of the extremely wide range of opportunities to contribute positively to school life. Their high attendance shows how they value what the school offers. Consequently, they are extremely well equipped to make their way successfully in future training or employment.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
	1
Taking into account:	

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The teaching is often of good quality, with a significant minority which is outstanding. In the most effective lessons, the learning is structured within a very clear framework of expectations about the precise objectives which different students need to attain. The teachers vary the pace of learning to suit the students' emerging understanding and are very good at identifying when students need further practice or are able to move on more rapidly. Active participation is fostered through such strategies as paired discussion, peer evaluation of work and drafting initial ideas on small whiteboards so that teachers can quickly gauge the students' understanding. There is, however, a significant proportion of teaching which is only satisfactory, often at Key Stage 3, because teachers, despite using similar techniques, do not exploit them to good effect. Lesson planning for these lessons lacks precision about what is to be learnt and how objectives will be matched to the needs of different groups. Questioning sometimes lacks rigour and is not well targeted.

The curriculum is well organised and provides a wide range of opportunities for studying traditional courses, vocational subjects and developing cross-curricular skills. Extensive use is made of entering students early for GCSE examinations, enabling the school to tailor students' timetables in Year 11 to maximise their examination success. At Key Stage 3, remodelling of the curriculum is too recent to be able to evaluate. There is an excellent range of activities to enrich the formal curriculum. 'Enterprise focus weeks' allow the school to offer imaginative and powerful opportunities for learning which are highly valued by the students. The school's creative arts festival, the annual Eisteddfod, plays an exceptionally vibrant part in the students' lives. The school has placed care, guidance and support for students at the heart of its work. Transition at all points is well planned, ensuring that all students move with confidence to the next stage of their education. The very

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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well-established house system provides a trusted and secure structure to support the students’ broader development. Students say they are known as individuals. Efforts to improve attendance since the last inspection have proved highly effective. Provision for students with a statement of special educational needs offers very well-targeted support drawing on a wide range of external agencies and school-based specialist staff.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team has effectively introduced many developments over the last few years. A particularly high proportion of the staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire said they understood what the school was trying to achieve and were proud to belong to it. The leadership team has created a culture of trust and confidence and many staff have willingly altered their practice, for instance to adopt more active assessment techniques. Others, however, have not kept pace with the level of change required to make the school outstanding. A wide array of monitoring activities carried out by the senior team has not been entirely effective in securing consistency and the role of some heads of department in quality assuring day-to-day provision is underemphasised. A sophisticated data handling tool to track the progress of individual students against their targets is being used with markedly good impact to improve attainment. Equal opportunities are well served by the school’s intense focus on good achievement for every individual. There are no significant gaps between the performance of different groups relative to the national picture. Nevertheless, the analysis and reporting of this performance at a strategic level are not undertaken routinely.

The governing body is very well led in a professional and confident manner. Its rigorous evaluation of its own practice has resulted in a strongly developed understanding of how to both support and challenge the school. There are clear, well-managed policies for safeguarding procedures at all levels and these are consistently implemented and regularly monitored. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion and has an appropriate understanding of its context and a relevant plan which details actions. There are strong links with more culturally diverse schools in the city. Partnerships are extensive and cover many aspects of the school’s work, with a strong emphasis on business and enterprise activities.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress in lessons and the school’s tracking information shows that all students in Years 12 and 13 are working at least at target grade, with some above. The results of external examinations have improved each year and current indications are that value-added data are rising strongly. Attendance is high and punctuality is good both to school and lessons. The students’ response to sixth form life is outstanding and they enthusiastically raise funds for charity, mentor younger students and take on a wide range of responsibilities within school and the wider community. The curriculum is good and offers a wide range of options for AS and A-Level courses. There is a growing range of vocational courses alongside opportunities to improve key GCSE grades to provide an appropriate pathway for some students to further study and/or employment. A small number of students benefit from courses offered within the Sutton consortium, which enables students’ interests and aspirations to be met while retaining their strong affiliation with Fairfax.

The quality of teaching and learning is good with many lessons that are engaging, well planned and suitably resourced. Students and teachers have excellent working relationships. Students are thoroughly prepared for the next stage of their education or for employment. The head of the sixth form has introduced clear, consistent systems to monitor and track students’ progress. This information has highlighted where intervention is needed to address underachievement or to ensure that the most-able students are provided with appropriate challenge and mentoring. Students are well informed about their targets and what to do to improve. The head of sixth form’s leadership has been instrumental in identifying priorities and driving improvement.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors and the headteacher were disappointed by the small number of questionnaire returns. These did not reveal any commonly shared concerns and several were highly complimentary about the school. One parent spoke to the lead inspector about a concern she had with the way teachers dealt with any racist incidents. The inspectors took full note of the concern but no other parents, carers or students mentioned this issue. The school was able to demonstrate that it had taken strong action whenever it had knowledge of any inappropriate language being used by a student.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Fairfax School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 60 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1398 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	40	30	50	6	10	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	38	36	60	0	0	1	2
The school informs me about my child’s progress	22	37	33	55	5	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	33	33	55	5	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	13	22	41	68	5	8	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	14	23	40	67	6	10	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	11	18	34	57	11	18	2	3
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	21	35	33	55	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	13	22	42	70	4	7	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	13	22	35	58	9	15	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	13	22	30	50	8	13	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	15	25	32	53	7	12	1	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	21	35	37	62	2	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	36	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



14 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Fairfax School, Sutton Coldfield, B75 7JT

I recently led an inspection of your school and arranged for the inspection team to meet with groups of students to gain their views. I also took note of the questionnaire responses we received. I am writing to you now to give you a summary of our findings which are contained in the full report.

You go to a good school which has some outstanding features. You achieve well and your behaviour is exemplary. Attendance is high compared to other schools. Students with disabilities are particularly well catered for and do well. The quality of teaching is good, with some that is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers plan and adapt work to help you make fast progress at whatever stage you are at. The inspectors saw most of the really effective teaching taking place at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The headteacher, senior leaders and governors are doing a good job in keeping the school improving. The quality of the sixth form, for example, has become much stronger since the previous inspection in 2008.

The inspectors think that it will be useful if the school concentrates on two areas for improvement.

- Making even more teaching of good or better quality by planning lessons at Key Stage 3 which challenge all of you more of the time, especially the most able.
- Making sure that the way the school checks on how well it is doing is simplified and made more efficient and effective.

You are already playing your part through attending and behaving well.

Thank you very much for welcoming us to your school. We were all sorry that we would not be there to see your Eisteddfod, which we heard so much about.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday
Her Majesty's Inspector

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