

Fairlands Middle School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	123888
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	380757
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2012
Lead inspector	Robert Pyner HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	522
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Heather Fuller
Headteacher	Peter Elmy
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 March 2009
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

Inspection team

Robert Pyner

Her Majesty's Inspector

Marion Hobbs

Additional inspector

Richard Sutton

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 28 lessons or activities amounting to approximately 14 hours of direct observations. These included five joint observations with members of the school leadership group and in all 20 teachers were observed. Inspectors held meetings with members of the school leadership group and other team leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chair of the Pupils' Development Committee, staff, groups of pupils and one parent, together with a telephone conversation with another. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at progress tracking and performance data, the school improvement plan, pupils' work and numerous policies, guidelines, plans and reviews. An inspector heard some Year 6 and Year 8 pupils read. The questionnaire responses from 227 parents and carers, 112 pupils and 23 staff were also analysed.

Information about the school

Fairlands is an average-sized middle school, with specialist status in technology, serving Cheddar and the surrounding rural area. Most pupils are White British and the proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is in line with the national average; pupils' needs include moderate and specific learning and communication difficulties. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below the national figure. The school meets the current floor standard for Key Stage 2, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress. The school has achieved the following national awards: International School, Healthy Schools Plus and Eco-Schools Silver.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. The outcomes for Year 8 pupils, including English, mathematics and science, show clear year-on-year improvements since the last inspection leading to overall attainment which is above average. Taking pupils' starting points into consideration, this indicates good progress across the school.
- This improvement has been driven by the headteacher and members of the school leadership group using the comprehensive progress-tracking systems within the school. Using data from these systems, school self-evaluation procedures have targeted subjects for improvement, which have led to demonstrable success, for example in the outcomes for mathematics. Curriculum team leaders have been involved in this process, and are fully committed to raising achievement, but the approach to the use of tracking data, and holding teachers to account for the progress for individuals, groups or classes, is inconsistent.
- Good teaching has led to the improvements seen in pupils' attainment and progress. The school has worked effectively on the recommendations from the last inspection relating to teaching. However, assessment is not yet used consistently to ensure that tasks in lessons are sharply focused to ensure challenge for all groups, particularly more-able pupils. Moreover, whilst there are examples of effective feedback and marking, there is not a consistent approach which provides clear guidance on what pupils need to do to improve their work.
- Pupils are overwhelmingly positive about procedures to keep them safe and this is recognised by parents and carers. Attendance rates are above average and rates of exclusion low, reflecting the school's strong culture of inclusion. Overall, behaviour is good and pupils are friendly and courteous with positive attitudes to learning.
- The headteacher's commitment and drive is recognised and appreciated by pupils, parents and carers and staff. He is ably supported by members of the school leadership group and together they have successfully fostered a community where the talents and aspirations of individual pupils are developed and celebrated well.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and accelerate pupils' progress across the school further by:
 - developing the audit and evaluation systems used by team leaders so that the cycle for the review of pupils' progress consistently holds teachers to account for the achievement of individuals and groups in their classes
 - sharpening the use of assessment to develop lesson planning which leads to greater match in learning activities for different abilities, particularly for the more able
 - improving the consistency and quality of feedback and marking so that it gives pupils clearer guidance on the next steps in their learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

In most subjects, pupils' attainment by the time they leave the school is above average. The school's comprehensive progress-tracking data show consistent improvement since the last inspection in English, mathematics and science, together with the other specialist subject of design and technology. There have been particularly impressive improvements in attainment at the higher levels in mathematics which are above the averages for similar middle schools. Additionally, the school's outcomes at Level 5 in English, mathematics and science in 2011 were above the national averages for Year 9 pupils published by the Department for Education. Overall, pupils make good progress from their starting points in Year 5 when they join the school. The progress of all groups of pupils is tracked very well and school data show that disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress as do those whose circumstances have made them vulnerable. Pupils make good progress in reading throughout the school as a result of the school's close attention to this aspect of literacy. Most parents feel that their children are making good progress and inspection evidence confirms this view.

In lessons, pupils generally know what to do and make good progress when provided with a variety of tasks which include discussion with teachers, especially at the beginning, to clarify the purpose of their learning. Pupils say they enjoy practical activities such as in a Year 8 mathematics lesson observed, where they were using cubes to reinforce their understanding of the measurement of volume. Good opportunities exist for pupils to work in pairs or groups, although tasks are sometimes not sharply differentiated to ensure effective challenge for more-able pupils. Progress is also good when the pace of lessons develops pupils' thinking and teachers use questions to assess their understanding and use this information to adjust learning. Younger pupils can explain the system of self-assessment used at the end of modules of work well but some older students were less confident about the procedure and how it is used.

Quality of teaching

Most pupils and parents and carers noted in their responses to the inspection questionnaires that teaching in the school is good. Inspection evidence confirms their

view that teaching is effective across the planned curriculum. A strong feature of lessons is the respect and cooperation between pupils and staff, leading to very positive relationships. This provides a strong basis for effective learning and ensures that pupils are well engaged, motivated and enthusiastic. Other strengths include high expectations, the use of teachers' subject knowledge to ask probing questions and planning for a variety of activities, including practical tasks. During the inspection, effective questioning was seen in an English lesson where Year 8 pupils were describing characters in a Victorian setting. In effective lessons, well-targeted activities are planned to challenge specific groups, as was observed in a mathematics lesson for Year 5 pupils where groups were identifying acute, obtuse and reflex angles. Support staff facilitate the learning of individuals and groups well.

Where teaching is less effective, opportunities are lost to accelerate the progress of groups of pupils, particularly the more able, because learning tasks are not focused sharply to challenge their understanding and skills. Feedback on pupils' learning and teachers' marking are not completely consistent across the school. Where it is effective, marking provides clear guidance on how pupils can make the next step in their learning.

There are good contributions overall across the school to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a strong element of moral and social development in lessons and around the school; spiritual development is developed through, for example, effective assemblies led by visitors to the school. Pupils' understanding of cultural differences are developed through programmes of work and initiatives such as the recent Olympic Challenge project and the developing links with a school in Russia.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Systems to check and track absences by pupils are rigorous, leading to above average attendance rates for all groups of pupils. Pupils' punctuality is good. There is a strong culture of respect in classrooms and around the school, based on highly effective relationships between pupils and adults. This creates a strong environment for successful learning. The strategies for managing pupils' behaviour, both in classroom and around the school, are well understood by adults and pupils and consistently applied. Pupils spoken to understand that they are part of a strong community where everyone is valued for their contribution and encouraged to make the most of the opportunities available. In their responses, all parents and carers noted that their children felt safe at school. In the pupils' questionnaire, most noted that they felt safe and happy at school all or most of the time.

Staff know pupils extremely well and those with particular needs are cared for effectively. This was confirmed by parents and carers. Pupils interviewed said they understood that bullying can be in a variety of forms, including cyber bullying. Systems to protect pupils include the collection of mobile telephones at the beginning of the day. Pupils say they know they can speak to a member of staff if they are worried or concerned. Those pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable are well supported and they appreciate the support that they receive in the 'Ark'.

The large majority of pupils consider that behaviour is good in lessons all or most of the time. Their responses show that they feel strongly that the school helps them to do as well as they can. Most parents and carers agree that there is a good standard of behaviour at the school and little disruption to lessons and inspection evidence shows that this is an accurate view. Pupils proudly spoke of their roles in supporting the work of the school through such activities as membership of the school council, sports leaders and as 'buddies' to help younger pupils when they transfer to the school.

Leadership and management

The headteacher is fully committed to improving pupils' achievement in all aspects of school life. His drive and leadership are recognised and appreciated by pupils, parents and carers, and staff. For example, there were a number of specific written comments from parents highlighting the effectiveness of the transition arrangements for their children when they joined Fairlands, sometimes from small village schools. He has developed a rigorous and robust system for the tracking the progress made by individuals and groups and has used this successfully to target improvements and measure the outcomes of any interventions. This has been the basis of the good improvement in achievement since the last inspection. In this endeavour, he is well supported by the school leadership group who share his vision for the development of the school. Work to develop the role of curriculum team leaders in the process of evaluating subject outcomes and supporting and challenging teachers to raise achievement has shown some success in a number of subjects, but it is not yet consistent across the school.

Members of the governing body are knowledgeable and understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Through their links with curriculum team leaders, they display high expectations for improvement in outcomes, and appropriate systems are in place to support and challenge school leaders. The overwhelmingly positive responses in the staff questionnaire demonstrate that staff have a shared vision for the work of the school. However, school leaders and governors are aware that there is more work to do to raise achievement further and there is a common commitment to work together to meet their own demanding expectations. Consequently, the continuing drive to build on the improvements made demonstrate a strong capacity to improve further.

The broad and balanced curriculum enables pupils to develop their talents and skills in a wide range of activities including music. The curriculum is further enhanced by a strong range of extra-curricular clubs, visits and cultural activities. The school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and sits at the heart of this very inclusive learning community.

Safeguarding procedures are effective and meet all current government requirements. The school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity is exemplified by its effective work to support pupils with specific needs to play a full part in the life of the school as well as ensuring that they make progress and narrow the gap in achievement with other groups.

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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



10 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairlands Middle School, Cheddar, BS27 3PG

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we inspected your school recently. Special thanks go to the pupils who met inspectors and to those of you who completed the questionnaire; we found these very useful. We enjoyed talking with all the pupils we met and found what you had to say very informative and relevant.

This letter is to tell you about our findings. Fairlands Middle School is good and improving well. You and your parents told inspectors that you feel very safe in school. You also told us that you are happy to go to school, that you learn a lot in lessons and that staff help you in many ways to do as well as you can. Your overall attendance and behaviour are good and the school is a pleasant place to work and learn. You make good progress in your work throughout the school and achieve well by the time you leave. The progress that you make has improved since the last inspection. Teaching is good and this is partly the result of the high-quality relationships between you and the adults in the school.

The headteacher, senior staff and governors lead the school well. They know that some aspects of the school could be improved further. These are the areas that the inspection team have asked them to work on.

- Raise attainment and help you to make faster progress by:
 - helping curriculum team leaders to support teachers so that you can make the greatest possible progress in all subjects
 - giving you activities in lessons which really challenge you so that you learn as well as you can, especially those of you who find some work easy
 - helping your teachers to provide you with better guidance on how to improve your work, including the marking of your books.

You too have an important part to play by continuing to work hard, making the most of the wide range of opportunities you have at school and attending regularly.

Yours sincerely

Robert Pyner
Her Majesty's Inspector

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