

Fairfields School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122160
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	327641
Inspection date	11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Frank Price

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	73
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jo Richardson
Headteacher	Corallie Murray
Date of previous school inspection	7 February 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Trinity Avenue Northampton NN2 6JN
Telephone number	01604 714777
Fax number	01604 714245

Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Evidence was gathered from visits to lessons, discussions with pupils, staff and governors, school documentation and assessment information. This inspection evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following:

- how well self-evaluation information to secure improvements is used
- how well pupils' spiritual and cultural development is promoted
- the exemplary features of the school.

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

Description of the school

Fairfields School educates pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), physical and communication difficulties and sensory impairments. Pupils come from Northampton and the surrounding area and most are from White British backgrounds. The school provides opportunities for pupils attending other local schools to share its specialist facilities and expertise, as well as a School for Parents to provide support and guidance for parents of pre-school children who have a physical disability or communication difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Fairfields School is an outstandingly effective school. It provides a stimulating, supportive and positive learning environment for its pupils, which enables them to make outstanding progress. The teamwork of the governing body, teachers and support staff is superb and is focused on encouraging pupils to thrive. The school has many exemplary features. These include specialist teaching approaches for pupils with physical disabilities and for those who have ASD. The professional development opportunities for staff are outstanding, and include visiting centres of excellence abroad, to keep their own knowledge up to date and to inform and improve their own practice. The school offers an excellent range of out-of-hours activities for pupils, and they enjoy these leisure activities immensely. Parents rightly hold the school in extremely high regard. They value the work of the school and how it enables their children to succeed. One parent described the school as 'fantastic' whilst another noted the improvements in her child as follows: 'He is a totally different boy from when he started school.'

Pupils' academic standards are well below average on entry to the school, and remain low owing to their severe and complex learning difficulties. However, pupils make excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this is continued across Key Stages 1 and 2. Pupils make excellent progress in achieving their individual targets in numeracy, literacy, communication, physical, personal and social development. Last year just over three quarters of the pupils made good or excellent progress. One of the reasons for this outstanding progress is the careful analysis of assessment data, which quickly identifies areas where pupils are struggling. These pupils then receive twice-weekly booster sessions to enable them to practise and develop their skills. Close tracking shows this approach to be very effective, and it improves their progress substantially. Pupils achieve exceptionally well in all subjects. All pupils, regardless of their background or disability, achieve equally well.

Excellent teaching is a determining factor in enabling pupils' outstanding progress. Teachers and support staff are extremely skilled in using specialist approaches. For example, they provide a very structured learning environment for those pupils with ASD. Staff understand the need for a brisk pace to lessons to maintain pupils' attention. Teaching is extremely lively, stimulating, creative and fun. In a literacy lesson, pupils enjoyed wearing a hat with a letter sound on it. Excellent use is made of a wide range of resources to capture pupils' attention. Resources are aimed at stimulating the senses, such as handling tactile objects or responding to music and singing. The school operates a 'total communication' approach which incorporates the use of symbols, signs and electronic devices to assist pupils in both their understanding and expression of communication. On occasions, signing is not used consistently enough by staff. The innovative opportunities for staff to keep their professional development up to date enable pupils to benefit from a wide range of effective teaching strategies. The curriculum is well planned and meets the needs of all pupils excellently. It promotes community cohesion exceptionally well. All groups of pupils are included in the life of the school and they demonstrate a high level of understanding, appreciation and trust of one another. There are excellent opportunities to be involved in community projects and pupils gain an appreciation of other cultures in different parts of the world through art, music and religious education.

The care, support and guidance provided for pupils are outstanding. Welfare and protection procedures to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils are rigorous. Parents report that their children like being at school because they feel safe and are happy there. Targets for learning are clear and precise. They are known to teachers, support staff, parents and carers and they

have a central role in lesson planning. Support staff have a wide range of specialist skills and experience and make a very effective contribution to ensuring that all pupils, irrespective of the severity of their learning difficulties, make equally rapid progress. Pupils' additional needs are met very well. Speech and language provision makes a significant contribution to the outstanding progress pupils make in developing their communication skills. A small number of pupils gain considerably from spending time in mainstream schools. The newly introduced visual-based annual review procedure is an innovative way of including pupils in reviewing their progress and in setting new targets.

The excellent care, support and guidance enable pupils' outstanding personal development. Parents and carers report that children feel safe at school and their enjoyment of school is evident in lessons, in their attitudes to their work, their behaviour, and in the pride that they show in the school when communicating with visitors. Spiritual and cultural development is effectively promoted through circle time, the well-planned assemblies, the strong link with a local church and the links with schools in India, Thailand and Africa. The outstanding relationships pupils develop with staff help them to become confident learners. The many visitors to school, for example musicians, theatre groups and dancers, and the regular visits they make to places in the local community contribute to the outstanding progress they make in developing as young people. Whenever possible, pupils learn the importance of leading healthy lifestyles by making suitable choices about food, drink and leisure activities, including those offered through the good range of after-school clubs. Essential skills for living such as shopping, budgeting and personal independence are addressed very well through the curriculum, and the development of feeding skills is supported very effectively by the work of the lunchtime supervisors. Attendance is good. The headteacher, together with an effective senior leadership team, provides outstanding leadership and management. The headteacher is extremely successful in fulfilling the school's vision of securing a 'constant drive for innovative, excellent practice'. This is seen in the extended out-of-school activities offered to pupils, the links with international schools, the strong partnership working with a range of stakeholders and the use of specialist teaching strategies, informed by effective training opportunities, which are all used to bring direct improvement and benefits for pupils. Confident, clear and professionally stimulating leadership inspires staff to do their best for the pupils.

There is a widely held commitment at all levels for continuous school improvement. The school development plan is well constructed, widely shared and features suitable priorities which focus on improving pupil outcomes. The support and challenge provided by the governing body are outstanding. They take an active role in the life of the school and carry out lesson observations and hold specific responsibilities to ensure the school is effectively held to account. Leadership at all levels of the school is secure and this, together with very effective procedures to monitor the work of the school, means that it has an excellent capacity to improve.

Outstanding use has been made of assessment data to carefully measure the progress of pupils and to put in place effective intervention programmes, where needed. This information is also used by teachers to inform their planning to further improve pupils' progress. The school acknowledges that the use of comparative assessment data to check how well pupils are progressing against similar pupils nationally is in the early stages of development. The school's self-evaluation procedures clearly have a strong impact on pupils' progress, but currently there is no validation by an external person to bring about even greater rigour to the systems for checking its work.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Pupils make outstanding progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and this provides an excellent start for pupils. Excellent leadership and management routinely ensure rich opportunities for children to develop as learners. Children settle quickly and very well. They make outstanding progress in each of the areas of learning because teaching is precisely planned to match their learning needs and children respond well to high expectations placed on them as learners. The excellent relationships they quickly develop with staff help them feel safe and they become increasingly confident and independent. Staff expertise is excellent. For example, an approach to help children with physical disabilities to overcome their difficulties, called conductive education, is used very effectively. Parents value the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and say they are 'thrilled' their children are there. They like the way in which their children's progress is shown to them and the way in which targets are used to promote progress. The work of specialists such as physiotherapists, speech therapists, nurses and social workers is coordinated very well in supporting their children's overall development. Resources to support learning in each area are stimulating, although the absence of a covered outside area limits learning outside the classroom in bad weather. The school has plans to address this issue.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the rigour of evaluating the work of the school by further developing the use of comparative assessment information and obtaining external validation of its work.

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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

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
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**

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairfields School, Northampton, NN2 6JN

I enjoyed my visit to your school and meeting and talking with you. The care, guidance and support given to you by staff are excellent. This is extremely important to you, as it means that you like coming to school, really enjoy your lessons and are encouraged to do the best you can. You get off to a flying start in the Early Years Foundation Stage class and you continue to make outstanding progress throughout your time at school. For some of you, your steps of progress might be very small, but to you they are hugely important. You develop your physical, communication and independence skills very well. Your behaviour is very good and you are polite, helpful and a credit to your school. Your teachers and support staff are outstanding. They know you very well and make sure that the lessons are exciting and fun and are just right for you. You are taught an excellent range of subjects in an interesting way. You have lots of opportunities to be involved in activities when the school day has finished and you enjoy these very much. Your parents are delighted at how good your school is and are thrilled with how well you do.

Your school is exceptionally well run. Your headteacher and all the staff and governors work together very well to make sure your school is truly outstanding. There are lots of excellent things about your school, such as how well staff are trained, the after-school clubs and how well you are taught, which make your school so special. I have asked staff to make the school even better by measuring your progress against that of pupils in similar schools, and by using people who have special experience but who do not usually work for the school to help check how well it is doing. You can play your part in helping to ensure that the school continues to be outstanding by enjoying lessons and continuing to work hard. I wish you well for the future.

Yours faithfully

Frank Price Lead inspector