

Fairfield High School

Peterchurch, Hereford, HR2 0SG

Inspection dates

2–3 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students receive an outstanding education at Fairfield High School. This includes their personal development as well as their academic achievement.
- The headteacher's strong and clear-sighted leadership is the main driving force behind the school's continued success. Her high ambitions and desire for the school 'not to rest on its laurels' are shared by senior leaders and staff.
- Students in all year groups achieve exceptionally well and significantly above national averages by the end of Key Stage 4. The progress students make in English and mathematics is much better than the progress of students in most schools.
- Teaching is consistently good and very frequently outstanding. The school is extremely well placed to raise the quality of much of the good teaching to the next level.
- Teachers are thorough professionals, eager to improve their performance through sharing good practice and undertaking training. They have high expectations of students, as seen in the challenging targets they set them.
- The school provides exceptionally good support to help students improve their reading, writing and speaking, so that their literacy skills do not hold back their learning in other subjects. The results are impressive and most students can talk confidently about their learning.
- Students display excellent attitudes to learning. They behave exceptionally well around the school. They show high levels of respect and courtesy towards each other and to their teachers and other staff.
- There is an exceptionally positive learning atmosphere throughout the school.
- Leaders at the school have a relentless focus on maintaining and building on established high standards. They continually review the performance of students and staff.
- Governors are fully committed to the success of students at the school. They are developing a clear view of how well the school is doing and what needs to be done to improve further. They show determination in wanting to provide better support and challenge to the school's leaders.
- One parent spoke for many others when commenting: 'I am proud to say that my children go to Fairfield'.

Information about this inspection

- A number of students from Year 9 and two members of teaching staff were in Ypres, Belgium on a history field trip during the inspection.
- Inspectors observed parts of 29 lessons, including 10 jointly observed with senior leaders.
- They observed tutor time, break and lunch times. They looked at a range of students' work. In addition, inspectors briefly visited a further 20 lessons to sample the quality of marking and students' attitudes to learning.
- Inspectors met with groups of students of different ages and abilities. They discussed achievement, teaching, behaviour and safety.
- Interviews were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders such as the special educational needs coordinator, subject leaders and three members of the governing body.
- A telephone discussion was held with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors checked the school's analysis of how well it is doing, records of students' attainment and progress, attendance and exclusions, safeguarding procedures and school policies.
- The inspection took into account the views of 87 parents who completed the online questionnaire (Parent View), and the views of four parents who wrote to the inspectors.
- The views of the 26 staff who completed questionnaires or wrote comments about the school were also considered.

Inspection team

Peter Humphries, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Stephen Williams

Additional Inspector

Hilary Green

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Fairfield High School is smaller than the average-sized secondary comprehensive school.
- The vast majority of students are from white British background.
- The proportion of students eligible for pupil premium funding, which is additional money provided for looked after children, students known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups, is below the national average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below that in other schools.
- One student attends off-site provision provided by the local authority.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enable an even higher proportion of students to make outstanding progress across all subjects and year groups by ensuring that:
 - teachers' marking always gives students precise guidance about how to improve their work and allows them to reflect and comment on how they can make better progress.
- Continue to improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - governors hold all school leaders in charge of areas of the school's work to account for the progress and attainment of students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students start the school with levels of attainment which are broadly in line with the national average. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 has been significantly above the national average in many subjects, including English and mathematics, in the last three years, demonstrating the gains students make from the excellent teaching and support they receive.
- Achievement in English and mathematics is outstanding. In 2012 and 2013 the proportion of students making and exceeding expected levels of progress was significantly above the national averages. The proportion of students achieving A* and A grades at GCSE was significantly above the national average in English. The proportion of students achieving A* to C grades at GCSE was significantly above national averages in both English and mathematics.
- The attainment and progress of the more able students in English, mathematics, science and other subjects are above national averages.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar progress in English and mathematics to others, taking into account their individual starting points. Overall they make progress that is significantly better than students in other schools nationally.
- Students who are eligible for pupil premium funding make very good progress from their starting points. In 2013, in both English and mathematics, the average points score at GCSE for those students was higher than for all students nationally. In mathematics, this group of students have a higher average point score than other students in the school. In English, other students achieve approximately a third of a grade higher than students eligible for the pupil premium funding. However, this gap is narrowing rapidly, due to effective additional support given by teachers and teaching assistants.
- The Year 7 catch-up funding is being used effectively to ensure students acquire the literacy and numeracy skills they need to be successful. Students benefit from one-to-one support, small group teaching, including excellent intervention to improve reading and comprehension skills, and the provision of additional resources to help them learn. As a result, they are making good progress.
- The support provided for reading and literacy is very good. Students frequently read a wide range of material. Opportunities to read are given to students in all subjects. The vast majority of students said that they enjoy reading.
- The school makes limited use of early or multiple entry to GCSE examinations and they are not used for all students. Its use is carefully planned and targeted so that students achieve the best grades of which they are capable.
- The student who attends the local authority off-site provision has good attendance and is making good progress.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Almost all the teaching observed by inspectors was either good or outstanding. This closely matches school leaders' own assessment and inspectors found that leaders have a very accurate understanding of what makes for good learning.

- Teachers have high expectations of what student can achieve and use information about different students' abilities to plan challenging lessons, which motivate students to make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers provide regular opportunities for students to develop their reading, writing and communication skills. As a result, students make rapid progress across subjects.
- High quality teaching is underpinned by teachers' excellent use of assessment. Teachers have a very strong understanding of how well each student is doing and what students need to do to strengthen their subject-specific knowledge and understanding. This information is shared very effectively with students through high quality oral feedback.
- Teachers use questioning effectively to gauge students' understanding so they can change tasks when greater consolidation is needed. As a result, students make rapid gains in knowledge and understanding. Skilful questioning was seen in an outstanding food technology lesson; this encouraged lively debate about the success, or otherwise, in meeting the design brief for the production of chilled desserts. Students were required to justify their answers and to suggest alternative views to their own. This enabled students to make considerable gains in their ability to evaluate and review the quality of a finished product.
- In the very best lessons, teachers plan activities which encourage students to work things out for themselves. In these lessons, teachers use effective questioning, which develops students' thinking skills. Students are encouraged to reflect on what they have learnt and to think more deeply about their responses. In an outstanding Year 11 art lesson, for example, students commented on and evaluated each other's work without prompting from the teacher. The students listened carefully to the advice and made changes and adaptations to their work.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together to ensure that teaching meets the needs of the whole group, including disabled students and those with special educational needs. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed and have a clear impact on raising the achievement of the students with whom they work. Teachers use the feedback from teaching assistants on students' progress to plan appropriate learning activities for individual students.
- Students who met with inspectors spoke glowingly about the quality of teaching across the school; they value the excellent working relationships they have with their teachers and particularly appreciate teachers' willingness to provide additional support and guidance when they fall behind or need extra help.
- Teachers provide regular feedback to students about their learning and progress. Most marking is helpful to students and provides advice on what they can do to improve. Occasionally teachers' written feedback is not detailed enough and expectations of what students need to improve are not made specific. A recently introduced 'I need to..' policy, where students comment about what they need to do next in their learning, is enabling students to respond more fully to teachers' comments, but this is not yet used consistently across all subjects.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The school is an exceptionally calm and purposeful environment in which to learn and flourish socially, personally and academically.
- Students take their learning very seriously. They believe everybody has the right to learn, and they manage their own behaviour, and that of others. Students recognise the positive contribution learning and good behaviour has to their school and adult life and work.

- Students' exemplary behaviour makes a strong contribution to their learning and achievement over time. Students say they love coming to school and their attendance and punctuality are improving and now excellent. Persistent absenteeism is rare.
- Students feel extremely safe. There is very little bullying, including homophobic and prejudice-based bullying, and students feel confident that the school deals effectively with any that occurs. Students have a very thorough understanding of how to keep safe and particularly appreciate how effectively the school keeps them up to date with issues related to e-safety and cyber-bullying.
- Students appreciate the number of different people that can go to if they are upset, or if bullying occurs. Students, staff and parents speak highly of the recently appointed 'learning managers' who, they say, are making a significant contribution to supporting students who feel vulnerable.
- The school is very successful at working with parents to bring about improvements for students who find behaving well difficult. The number of exclusions is low because the school works hard to improve and modify students' behaviour and sees exclusion as an absolute last resort. Teachers' expectations of good behaviour are consistent and low-level disruption is uncommon.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher sets the tone for all members of the school community through her clear expectations and unrelenting focus on improving achievement. The attitude shared between all leaders is that there is always room for improvement. The headteacher's letter to parents in the school prospectus states, 'we do not rest on our laurels'. Her vision and passionate commitment to the needs of the students drive consistently high standards. The school's ethos makes a strong contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The impact of the school's actions to improve the achievement of students eligible for additional funding is enabling these students to make progress well above others nationally.
- Teachers are set high targets to improve their teaching and nothing less than good performance, judged by outstanding student progress and attainment, is accepted or rewarded financially. Leaders undertake regular monitoring of teachers across the school, by dropping into lessons, checking students' books, and using information about students' progress to assess the quality of their teaching.
- Very effective strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning have had a clear impact in raising achievement by ensuring students receive a consistently high quality of education. Comprehensive and personalised training for teachers has led to a significant increase in the proportion of outstanding teaching; no teaching is inadequate.
- School leaders accurately evaluate the effectiveness of the work of staff in raising students' achievement. This analysis is used to plan appropriate actions for further improving the education students receive.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum through all of the key stages including an appropriate balance between academic and vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. Provision is made for more-able students to study single sciences. Students' literacy skills are developed across all subjects so that they are better able to access the curriculum.

- The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted through a wealth of activities that take place before, during and after school. These activities include sport, drama, visits to the theatre and literary festivals, residential visits and events looking at Fair Trade and child slavery. The school's extensive range of visits enables students to both participate in and observe a wide variety of cultural activities. Students from the school achieve success in a wide range of sports.
- Students receive excellent information, advice and guidance, including careers advice, throughout their time at the school. In 2013, almost all students progressed successfully to their next stage of their education, training or employment. This is consistent with previous years.
- The school engages with parents of all backgrounds and its success is shown by high rates of attendance at consultation evenings and other school events.
- The local authority provides light-touch support for this outstanding school because it believes the school has the capacity to manage its own improvement.
- Safeguarding meets all statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are highly committed to the vision that the school provides the best educational experience for its community. They have worked very hard in the last three years to clear a substantial financial deficit. The governors have a developing understanding of the quality of teaching in the school and ensure there is a strong link between the quality of teaching and teachers' progression through the pay scales. They work closely with the headteacher and are provided with detailed information about the school's performance. They hold the headteacher to account. However, they are less rigorous in their questioning and challenge of leaders at other levels. The governors have a good understanding of how the additional government funding contributes to the raising of standards.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	116944
Local authority	Herefordshire
Inspection number	427240

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	449
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paula James
Headteacher	Sue Gaston
Date of previous school inspection	11 June 2009
Telephone number	01981 550231
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