



# Fairfield High School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 111432  
**LEA** Halton  
**Inspection number** 278693  
**Inspection dates** 2 March 2006 to 3 March 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mr Martin Pope CFBT Lead Inspector

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Peelhouse Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community		Widnes
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Cheshire WA8 6TE
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 423 3571
<b>Number on roll</b>	868	<b>Fax number</b>	0151 424 3316
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mrs C Fone
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 October 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Jeffrey Hughes

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11 to 16	2 March 2006 - 3 March 2006	278693

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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Fairfield High School is an average sized comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16 who come from a wide catchment area that includes wards of significant deprivation. Attainment on entry is broadly average. The number of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups or whose first language is not English is low. The school was designated as a specialist arts college in September 2004.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

Inspectors agree with the school's view that this is a satisfactory school. Following a difficult period, affected by high levels of staff absence and senior leadership instability, the school is now improving as a result of the clear and purposeful leadership of the new headteacher and senior leadership team. Standards and achievement are broadly average and improving, particularly at Key Stage 3, but further work is required to raise standards at Key Stage 4. Most parents are positive about the school, but a significant minority are concerned about poor behaviour and would welcome a more active say in how the school is run. Most pupils enjoy school and behave well in lessons, but a minority have poor attitudes to learning and attendance. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory overall and the school ensures that pupils feel safe. The care for pupils is satisfactory and for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. The school works well with other agencies to promote the well-being of learners.

Arts college status has had a positive impact on teaching and learning and on morale. Outstanding performing arts work is a strong feature and dynamic partnerships have been established. Curriculum provision is good and pupils are offered a broad range of opportunities. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with many examples of good practice. However, there is inconsistency in the implementation of agreed strategies, which results in less effective learning. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and has the capacity to develop further. The school's self-evaluation is honest and governors and key staff know what needs to be done to move the school forward. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

**Grade: 3**

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and achievement further by building on improvements evident in Key Stage 3.
- Ensure the consistent implementation of school policy by all staff in order to improve teaching and learning and to raise expectations.
- Improve the attendance, punctuality and behaviour of a minority of pupils.

### Achievement and standards

Because of the below average progress made by pupils who took general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) examinations in 2005, the school considers achievement and standards to be inadequate. This slow progress was due in part to high levels of staff absence, at all levels, which disrupted pupils' learning. The new senior management team has successfully refocused the school's efforts. Consequently, the work seen by inspectors enables them to judge that achievement

and standards are now satisfactory.

Attainment on entry to the school is average, although a significant proportion of pupils join the school with below average attainment, particularly in literacy skills. In 2005, standards reached by the end of Year 9 were broadly average indicating good progress in English and satisfactory progress in mathematics and science. This is a clear indication of improvement at Key Stage 3. However, the trend in GCSE results has been static and the school has not yet been able to fully meet the challenging targets set through the Excellence in Cities and performing arts college programmes. There are signs of improvement with the current Year 10, but further work is required to raise standards. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the very few pupils from minority ethnic groups or who are at early stages of learning English make satisfactory progress.

**Grade: 3**

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

Inspectors agree with the school that pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils say they feel safe in school and most feel that bullying is dealt with effectively, although this sometimes takes too long. Most pupils enjoy school, have positive attitudes towards learning and want to do well. However, a minority of pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11, have a poor attitude to attendance, punctuality and their studies. The school has worked hard to improve attendance which is now satisfactory overall, although it is still below average in Years 9 and 11, and truancy is a problem in Years 9, 10 and 11.

Most pupils have good relationships with their teachers. Behaviour, both in lessons and around school, is generally good although a minority of pupils are challenging and disruptive.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory due to a well balanced personal development programme. Pupils understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and are beginning to adopt them. They contribute well to the school through the school council, peer mentoring and the prefect system; they also contribute to the local and global communities through links with a school in China, and a wide range of charity work. Pupils are provided with a broad range of opportunities to develop workplace skills, although some pupils have weak social and oral skills.

**Grade: 3**

### **Quality of provision**

#### **Teaching and learning**

The school judges the quality of teaching and learning as satisfactory. Inspectors agree. Pupils say that, in some lessons, time is wasted by the poor behaviour of a minority and inspectors confirm that this is the case. Problems arise when teachers do too much of the work and pupils are not sufficiently challenged. There is some good, and occasionally, outstanding teaching. What drives learning here is the teacher's enthusiasm, good planning and high expectations so that pupils enjoy the lesson, remain on task and make good progress. Information and communication technology (ICT) is also used effectively in many lessons. Since September, a robust system of lesson observation has been in place. This is already identifying inconsistencies and helping to foster the spread of good practice. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are understood. Such pupils are well served by teachers and classroom assistants. Some provision is made to extend the learning of the most able, but this is not consistent across all subjects. Assessment is improving. Pupils know their strengths and weaknesses and the steps they need to take to improve. Underachieving pupils are now quickly identified. There are, however, inconsistencies in the quality of teachers' marking.

### **Grade: 3**

#### **Curriculum and other activities**

The school judges its curriculum as satisfactory. Inspectors think it is good and improving. What is taught in lessons provides a broad and balanced programme of study. As befits a specialist arts college, dance and drama feature in Years 7 to 9, and 60% of pupils in Year 10 include at least one of the five available performing arts GCSEs in their options. Vocational courses and an alternative curriculum further enhance the provision in Years 10 and 11, helping to meet the diverse needs of pupils and building on their prior attainment and experience. The most able scientists take GCSE biology, chemistry and physics.

Appropriate support is provided within the curriculum for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The personal development programme ensures that health and safety education is good but daily tutor time is not always well used. Enterprise days and a careers programme with extended work experience help pupils make reasoned decisions about their future. Pupils speak very positively about the range of extra-curricular activities available to them, especially in the performing arts and physical education. Effective booster and revision clubs in many subjects are offered to pupils in Years 9 and 11.

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Care, guidance and support**

The school rates its care, guidance and support of pupils as good, but inspectors judge this to be satisfactory with some good features. Health and safety procedures,

including child protection, are fully in place and risk assessments are routinely carried out. The school has a well developed programme to help pupils in the transition from primary to secondary school. There are effective links with external organisations to support the welfare of pupils. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable children is very good. The newly refurbished Support Block provides suitable facilities for supporting individual needs. Consequently, vulnerable pupils feel happy and safe, and know who to turn to. However, pastoral care by form tutors is variable, with a lack of consistency in implementing school policies. The school works hard to raise pupil aspirations through its AimHigher programme and offers satisfactory careers advice and guidance. Monitoring of pupil progress is rigorous. Pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. However, the guidance given by teachers has not yet fully impacted on progress and form tutors do not always insist on high standards of attitudes and behaviour.

**Grade: 3**

## **Leadership and management**

The school has undergone turbulent times since the last inspection and has had considerable periods without a headteacher and other senior and middle managers. Despite these uncertain times the leadership team, made permanent in 2004, have responded well, bringing stability to the school and refocusing its work on raising standards, tackling disaffection and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The whole school community shares the headteacher's vision, expressed in the phrase 'Enjoy Learning'. The leadership has started to raise the sights of teachers and pupils by establishing a new culture of reviewing and evaluating performance. Parents' and pupils' views are sought and acted on. The process of self-evaluation is satisfactory and, in some areas, good, but it is not yet consistently used by all teams to fully identify and improve underperformance. While the overall impact of the new leadership team is satisfactory, the 'green shoots' of recovery are clearly evident. This is particularly so in Years 7 to 10 where pupils have had the full benefit of more rigorous monitoring. The school's links with the community and other agencies, particularly through the vibrant and well led performing arts college programme, enhance provision effectively and have raised the aspirations of pupils. The governing body is supportive and is becoming more evaluative.

Overall improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Since their appointment, the leadership team has shown the capacity and commitment to bring about the further improvements required.

**Grade: 3**

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	3	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	3	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

We would like to thank you for the way that most of you welcomed us to your school for the recent inspection. We were very impressed by your helpful and friendly approach and appreciated your offers of help and directions.

Your school has faced a number of difficulties in recent years as a result of staff absences. We think that things are now improving and that you are well placed to take the school forward together with the staff. We enjoyed our conversations with many of you and feel that you know your school well and have good ideas about how it could be better. Your headteacher has a clear vision for the school and we hope that you support him and the staff in improving some things.

We feel that Fairfield is a satisfactory school with many good features. Performing arts work is really impressive. You involve yourselves in a broad range of activities and trips, and the links with China and other partners are a real strength of your school. We hope that you continue to open your horizons to other cultures and communities. The support to those of you with learning difficulties is very good and we were impressed by the care and guidance you all receive to help you to improve and to make important choices. However, we think that teachers and some of you could sometimes make better use of Form Time.

We saw many good lessons in which you behaved well and made good progress. But in too many lessons, the behaviour of some pupils spoils things for others. You need to work hard with the staff to address this. We also feel that some pupils have poor attendance and do not make enough of an effort to get to registration or lessons on time. This affects how well they can do in their examinations. The attitudes and progress of pupils in Year 7 to 9 are getting better, but some Year 10 and 11 pupils need to take their work more seriously if they are to succeed.

We have suggested that the school needs to do three things to improve further:

- raise standards by building on the good work you are doing in Key Stage 3
- make sure that all your teachers have the same approach to marking your books and organising lessons
- improve the attendance, punctuality and behaviour of some pupils.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you every success in the future and really hope that you help your headteacher to make Fairfield an even better school.