

# Fairlands Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	123888
<b>Local Authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	328012
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Kenneth (Ken) Bush

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	508
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Heather Fuller
<b>Headteacher</b>	Peter Elmy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17 May 2006
<b>School address</b>	Masons Way Cheddar BS27 3PG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01934 743186
<b>Fax number</b>	01934 744457

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Fairlands is of average size for a middle school. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. The percentage of pupils identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below the national average. The great majority of pupils are of White British origin, with a very small proportion whose first language is believed not to be English. Fairlands is a member of the Cheddar Valley Community Learning Partnership.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Fairlands Middle School provides its students with a good and rapidly improving standard of education. The headteacher provides extremely good leadership, giving strong direction and a clear vision for improvement, and is well supported by an enthusiastic and able senior leadership group. Middle leadership and governance have strengthened in the recent past and are also now good. Consequently, the capacity to improve further is good. Since the previous inspection, there has been a determined and successful effort to raise expectations amongst both staff and pupils and to bring about more consistency in pupils' academic performance in subjects across the school. This greater focus on accelerating progress at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 has translated into high standards and consistently good and improving levels of achievement.

Teaching and learning are good and improving as a result of better monitoring and evaluation by senior and middle leaders and a strong emphasis on high quality and well-targeted professional development. Robust systems are now in place to track pupils' progress but some lessons do not make enough use of assessment information to provide activities that are consistently challenging for all pupils. There has also been some improvement in the effectiveness of feedback given to pupils, particularly through useful oral comments provided during lessons. However, the quality of marking is still too variable in different subjects. The curriculum is a major strength of the school. A well-established partnership approach to curricular development with other local schools has enabled Fairlands to create outstanding and innovative provision, carefully tailored to meet the needs of each individual pupil. The quality and range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities are exemplary.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding, as they were found to be at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils are extremely active members of a thriving community in which they feel valued and respected, and consequently they have a real sense of belonging. Staff readily enable and encourage pupils to show initiative and demonstrate leadership potential in a range of practical ways, such as 'co-management' of the dining area at lunchtimes. This also contributes to the excellent relationships between staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils themselves. The care, guidance and support of pupils are given a very high priority by the school, which has created a positive climate for learning. As a result, all groups of pupils, including those who are vulnerable, make good progress. The school is strongly committed to working with the local community, although it has yet to develop its contribution to community cohesion more widely or to fully evaluate the impact of the work done so far. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and endorse the actions that the headteacher and the senior staff are taking to move it forward. One parent commented: 'My daughter is very happy at Fairlands. She is receiving excellent all-round education from a very dedicated staff, led by a superb headteacher. I could not ask for a better school for my daughter and feel very lucky that we have found Fairlands!'

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lessons consistently stretch and challenge pupils to further accelerate achievement.
- Ensure that written feedback to pupils is of consistently high quality and shows them how to improve their work.

- Develop the contribution made to community cohesion beyond the school and local community, and systematically evaluate the impact of related actions.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils join Fairlands in Year 5 with broadly average standards. By the end of Year 6, however, standards are typically above average. In the 2008 national tests at Key Stage 2, there was a significant improvement in attainment on the previous year, particularly in English and in mathematics. Science maintained the high standards it had reached for a number of years. The rate of progress at Key Stage 2 also improved last year and is now good and improving as a result of more focused and effective intervention with students at risk of underperformance.

During the first two years of Key Stage 3, pupils at Fairlands maintain good rates of progress, which are improving rapidly. This enables them to attain standards across the curriculum which are consistently above average by the time they leave the school in Year 8. As a consequence of well-targeted and increasingly effective support, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable groups progress at a rate which is at least equal to that of their peers.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils at Fairlands are highly knowledgeable about being healthy and clearly understand its importance, as shown by their active and wholehearted involvement in the many sporting pursuits provided by the school. Attitudes to learning are invariably good and pupils relish the variety and range of the school's activities. Their behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. Pupils' attendance is outstanding, reflecting not only how they look forward to coming to school, but also the work done to establish productive partnerships with parents. Pupils feel safe in school because they know who to go to for advice and support, whether older peers, tutors or other staff. They also have excellent knowledge of what to do to stay safe in difficult situations and demonstrate their understanding of potential hazards in practice during lessons that particularly require safe practices, such as science, design and technology, and physical education.

Pupils show care and thoughtfulness towards others, both within school and beyond it in the local community; their support for charitable activities such as Comic Relief is particularly notable. They are proactive in identifying initiatives to support the school, and use their representation on a strong school council to make their case and follow it through effectively. In doing so, they are also acquiring good skills to support their future economic well-being and which contribute to their good achievement. Taken as a whole, these outstanding features of pupils' personal development mean that they become confident, responsible and well-rounded individuals. They enjoy school, value the company of their fellow pupils and clearly benefit from the opportunities they are given to take responsibility and show leadership skills.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Lessons are generally well planned, and taught by well-qualified professionals. The best lessons have good pace, engage pupils' interest and feature a broad range of suitable activities. In the majority of the most successful lessons seen during the inspection, teaching promoted pupils' creativity and the opportunity to learn alongside their peers. For example, in art, pupils working in pairs produced some innovative and successful interpretations of art that showed how much these lessons had excited their imagination. These pupils clearly appreciated this approach. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported by highly proficient assistants with specialist skills who make a genuine difference to their success in learning effectively. Gifted pupils are given good opportunities to extend their learning through work that is sometimes carried out off site.

However, there is some variability in the quality of teaching. Some lessons seen did not fully ensure that tasks took into account the broad ability range of pupils, and as a result were insufficiently challenging and too teacher-directed to enable students to achieve well. Teachers provide good oral feedback and there is evidence of some good practice emerging in marking, but this is also inconsistent across the school and does not always give specific advice about what students need to do to improve their work. Progress has been made, however, in developing pupils' skills in assessing their own work and that of their peers.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

The curriculum is very well matched to the needs, capabilities and interests of the pupils and meets all statutory requirements, including the most recent changes at Key Stage 3. The school has successfully ensured that the transitions from first school and then later to upper school are seamless in terms of continuity of learning and progression. In mathematics, design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT), two-year courses at Key Stage 3 have been designed in collaboration with local partners, leading to high levels of pupil engagement and good progress. This also allows pupils to enter secondary school at a stage where they can confidently approach their options for GCSE and beyond. The school's new Virtual Learning Environment provides an excellent platform for continuing development of an already outstanding curriculum, as well as considerably enriching provision in ICT lessons and in other subjects.

Provision for modern foreign languages is excellent and a distinctive feature of the school, with three languages offered, including at Key Stage 2. Sport and the arts also figure strongly and there are new developments to encourage pupils to understand the processes of their own learning. On a number of days in the year, the normal timetable is suspended to enable highly motivating cross-curricular work to be pursued, such as in Health Week. Regular trips and outings are a feature of provision, developing an awareness of the world beyond the school and engendering independence and creativity. The breadth of extra-curricular and enrichment activities is outstanding. The well-attended activities range from chess to productions to bands, and there are numerous sporting teams.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

Fairlands is an exceptionally caring school. Staff look after pupils very well, ensuring that they have a safe environment, and support pupils in reaching their targets. Tutors and year leaders know their pupils very well and track their development through the school effectively. Vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported by the school, which also effectively coordinates input from outside agencies, when necessary. The school does much to promote healthy lifestyles and its success in this respect is reflected in its national awards and, particularly, by pupils' enthusiastic response to the numerous sporting and other outdoor activities the school provides. It has successfully maintained a high rate of attendance by enlisting and maintaining the support of parents. Guidance for pupils overall is satisfactory, although it is better suited to support pupils' pastoral development than their academic progress. Staff's commitment to their roles as personal tutors is very strong. Arrangements for ensuring the safeguarding of pupils are securely in place and regularly reviewed.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Fairlands is an inclusive, tolerant and welcoming learning community which rightly prides itself on its commitment to develop the whole child through high quality care and support. The inspirational headteacher has successfully focused the school on raising standards and achievement and clear plans are in place to continue improvement into the future. Systems for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing the actions taken by the school have been securely established and leaders and managers generally have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of further development. Middle leaders are becoming increasingly proficient in setting challenging targets to increase progress and this is an area of noticeable improvement since the previous inspection. Fairlands is making an effective contribution to community cohesion within the school and local contexts, but has yet to develop it in full more widely. There is at present only limited evidence that it has evaluated the impact of its planned actions in promoting community cohesion. Equality of opportunity is effectively promoted and strongly endorsed by a governing body which discharges its statutory functions well and plays an increasingly active role in the life of the school.

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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?	2
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	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 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

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
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	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
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	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
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?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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**

20 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Fairlands Middle School, Cheddar BS27 3PG

Thank you for the very nice welcome that you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed being in your lessons and finding out what you think about your school: most of you are obviously very proud of it and enjoy going there.

These are the main things which we found out:

- Fairlands is a good school which is improving quickly.
- You reach good standards in tests and other assessments and make good progress in Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.
- Teaching is mostly good.
- You have an outstanding curriculum, including excellent lunchtime and after-school activities.
- Staff at the school really care about you and give you good support to help you achieve your targets.
- Your headteacher leads the school very well, and is supported well by other staff and the governors. We think that your school could be even better and so we have asked that:
  - some of your lessons should be made a little more challenging so that you can make even better progress
  - your work is consistently well marked so that you always know how to improve it
  - your school finds even more ways to work closely with the community and prepares you for living in Britain as a diverse country with people from many different countries and backgrounds.

You can play your part in improving your school by continuing to work hard and by taking an active role in how the school works, including with the community. On behalf of the inspection team, good luck for the future.

Yours faithfully

Ken Bush

Lead inspector