

Basic Skills Quality Mark Programme – Visit Feedback Report

School name	Fairfields Special School Trinity Avenue Northampton NN2 6JN		
Headteacher	Karen Lewis		
School and/or HT email	head@fairfields.northants-ecl.gov.uk	Tel no	01604 714777
Alliance QM Assessor	Alan G. Hutchinson	Visit date	18th Nov 2015

Purpose of Visit	Renewal Visit RV
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The Assessor spoke with the following people

Headteacher and Senior Leaders YES	Literacy Subject Leader YES	Numeracy Subject Leader YES	Parent NO
Class teacher YES	Pupils YES	Governor representative NO	Teaching Assistants YES

'Learning Walk' completed? YES	Relevant evidence-base reviewed? YES
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N.O.R. <i>116</i>	Renewal Previous targets well met	BSQM Number: PQM/04788
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Context:

Fairfields is a special school for pupils age 3 - 11 with profound/ multiple learning difficulties within the autistic spectrum disorder and/or physical, medical, multi-sensory and communication difficulties. This was my fourth visit to the school, having carried out the Interim and Renewal visits since 2010. I have to say it continues to be one of the most memorable - and welcoming - schools I have had the privilege to visit. The school aims to achieve high standards of performance in teaching, management and communication: in spite of the profound levels of disability held by the youngsters, the staff focus on the learning process to help children achieve beyond expectations.

There have been several major changes since my interim visit in March 2014. The catalyst for development has come primarily from the change in headship from Corralie Murray, who retired, to the new appointment of Karen Lewis. A second post as Head, Karen has slipped

into the role seamlessly; although there has been a great deal of change ('all for the good' - staff comment) it has been done after careful thought, consultation and wholly for the benefit of the children.

Changes include:

- Increase in pupil numbers by approx. 20% - now 116 on roll with pressure to take more. The balance of gender remains about the same (80 boys, 36 girls).
- Over 100 staff in the team. This in itself is a challenge for the leadership team particularly in terms of staff recruitment, induction and training, performance management.
- Re-organised classrooms; previously classes were mixed across two key stages. There is now a clear and distinct grouping of Early Years, KS1, KS2, specifically in age groups.
- Adaptation of rooms and facilities to meet current needs.
- There are significant changes to the curriculum and method of delivery, as described further on in this report.

The caring, compassion and overarching support of the staff as a whole is exceptional. They are patient, resourceful and hard working, going the extra mile to ensure that children are nurtured, supported and educated to the highest standards. A question raised by the head that I found most thought provoking: Are the children Doing .. or are they Learning? This is a good starting point for a review of curriculum needs for any children, but particularly for those with such profound needs.

The school has had three 'Outstanding' Ofsted results in succession; the most recent inspection, March 2014, awarded Grade 1 to every category. There was only one developmental point raised: ensure that pupils are challenged constantly. It would be easy to sit back after such an inspection and aim to maintain existing standards rather than driving the curriculum onward. One day in this school confirms that there is no complacency. The leadership team are effectively and sympathetically but decisively moving the school forward: the new head reaffirmed that this is a 'good/ outstanding' school .. with a way to go. The school continues to direct the Leading Teacher Alliance which has swelled in numbers to 73 primary, secondary and special schools both within and beyond the county. There is a great deal of work in this, quite an achievement. Karen is also aware of the need for this school to benefit directly from the work involved in being a national teaching / training school.

**Suggested areas for development in preparation for the next Quality Mark visit:
Some Developments and Targets we discussed include:**

In General:

Fairfields is working systematically and purposefully towards a Developmental Curriculum. This requires constant planning, monitoring and evaluation.

As with all schools there is a need to consider how to replace 'Levels' in a meaningful way. The steps that these children make are very small .. but hugely significant. This school in conjunction with other Northants special schools is looking how to record and assess levels

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beyond P8 that do not negatively describe it as 'below national expectations'.

The school has moved to weekly planning for pupil achievement. The curriculum needs to be broad, balanced and robust, with a focus on transferable skills.

In Literacy:

Based on the starting point, progress in English is Good or better. At KS1, 93% reach expected progress or better in Reading, 79% in Writing. At KS2 this raises to 100% reaching expectations in Reading; with 63% in Writing. Overall progress is good, and the school will want to maintain this level of progress.

- There is still a concentration on Basic Skills: Speaking/ Listening/ Writing/ Reading is having a clear impact on the whole school. Phonics are taught daily.
- Writing is the main focus for development this year.
- Concentrate on developing transferable skills across the curriculum.

In Numeracy:

- The development of the Mathematics curriculum is a key target for the months ahead and this is a priority on the leadership agenda.
- Results are currently Good: In Number, 100% reached or exceeded progress expectations at KS1; 73% at KS2.
- Having put such emphasis on Literacy skills in the last 12 months, Numeracy is now a key area to focus on.

'Good practice' identified in relation to the 10 Elements of the Quality Mark:

Elements 1,2,3 and 10 relating to Assessment, Target setting, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating impact.

- The atmosphere is calm, purposeful and firmly focused on learning. Realistic and measurable targets are set for each individual child. There is clearly an awareness of levels and targets for every child. Individual Pupil Targets for Literacy and Numeracy are set out to track progress, and these are well used by teachers and supporters alike.
- Staff training focuses on Teaching and Learning; the leadership of the new Headteacher is effective in promoting Basic Skills as a priority. Enthusing about Sensology, Sara pinpointed the need to 'help them to learn how to learn' which is fundamental.

Elements 4 and 5 relating to underachievement/or under attainment.

- All staff know their children really well; they are quick to spot gaps in learning and to seek means of addressing the shortfall. The school could not function without a strong team of Teaching Assistants, highly experienced, who do far more than 'support'. Excellent communication both ways ensures that teachers and support staff are well informed on needs and focus on improvement. This continues to be a real strength in the school.

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Elements 6,7, and 8 relating to Teaching and Learning.

- Lessons are well planned; needs are identified quickly. Assessment is thorough and focuses on the individual learning objective (marking is really an acknowledgement for adults of progress made and the next step, as pupils cannot read it). Learning journals are a clear insight into progress made - the one I read in detail, for Alfie was a positive appraisal of his achievements, however small.
- Teaching and Learning is monitored weekly: the style of management encourages regular observation.
- On a guided walk I observed a great diversity of methods and yet all focused on individual learning.
- There is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the school; every opportunity is taken to ensure that learning is enhanced and success is promoted.

Elements 9. Relating to involvement of parents.

- Parental involvement and perception of the school is excellent in spite of the wide catchment area, and the fact that so many children arrive at school by bus or taxi without parent contact on a day-to-day basis. Once again I sat and observed many parents and helpers arrive before school: the welcome is infectious.

There are many other positive achievements that deserve mention, in particular:

- Behaviour was excellent right across the school. One immediately senses the caring nature of the staff.
- Children are quick to share their pleasure with you. I was greatly impressed when one boy - with short term memory loss - told me without hesitation a lengthy story using his own story board to keep him on track.
- Display in the school is both creative and imaginative in supporting learning. Classrooms are vibrant, colourful, captivating - both to stimulate learning and to display excellent pieces of work. Staff go the extra mile to create a sense of awe and wonder (see the gruffalo display as a good example).

Overall, in spite of/ because of all recent changes, the school still gives out the message that it continues to be a leading, highly successful centre of learning. Fairfields School is meeting the criteria for the Basic Skills Quality Mark and I wish it well in its future development and continued success.

Recommendation: Assessment Criteria met. Well done.

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