

Fir Vale School Academy Trust

Owler Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S4 8GB

Inspection dates

10-11 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement across the range of subjects is not consistently strong.
- Students are not developing a range of skills in reading, writing and mathematics in every subject.
- Teaching methods are not always matched to students' individual abilities. More-able students, in particular, are not challenged enough in lessons to do their very best.
- Marking does not always identify how well students are doing and what they need to do to improve their work.

Leaders have not yet ensured that the quality of teaching is consistently good across all subject areas.

The school has the following strengths

- There are examples of outstanding teaching in English and mathematics.
- Behaviour and safety are good because students are overwhelmingly positive about the opportunities the school offers them. Attendance is good because students are happy at school.
- The school's welcoming community was confirmed by Year 6 students' confident and enthusiastic approach to their four days' transition activities.
- Senior leaders have comprehensive plans in place to improve how the school monitors the performance of teachers.
- Governors show commitment in their work and outline a secure understanding of how well the school is doing.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons, 12 of which were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior and middle leaders, groups of students, the Chair and members of the Governing Body, and an external consultant who supports the school's work.
- Inspectors considered the views of the 18 parents who responded to Parent View, the online questionnaire, and an additional four communications from parents. They analysed the results of the staff questionnaire to which nine replies were received.
- Inspectors looked at the school's data on students' progress, lesson plans, minutes of meetings and records relating to behaviour, safety and attendance. They also reviewed the school's checks on how well it is doing and school improvement plans.

Inspection team

Lisa Fraser, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Dr Wendy Bradford	Additional Inspector
Janet Pruchniewicz	Additional Inspector
Dr Osama Adul Rahim	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than average.
- The majority of students are from Pakistani backgrounds; African, White British and students from any other ethnic group and any other White background are the largest other minority ethnic groups.
- The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for supporting those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after, is above average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school has a specialism in business and enterprise.
- Fir Vale School Academy Trust converted to become an academy school in November 2012. When its predecessor school, Fir Vale Secondary School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- At the time of inspection Year 6 students were visiting the school over four days to take part in induction activities in preparation for joining the school in September.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- Twenty-five students in Years 10 and 11 attend off-site alternative provision for part of their learning at a range of providers which include Sprint Training, Recycle Bikes, Sheaf Training and Nacro.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least consistently good across all subjects by:
 - making sure teachers use information about students' progress to inform their planning so that work is hard enough for all the different abilities within the class especially the more-able
 - ensuring that students are given sufficient opportunity and help to develop their reading and writing skills
 - ensuring that teachers mark work regularly and in enough detail so that students know exactly what they need to do to achieve a better grade.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have sufficient expertise to reinforce students' literacy development, particularly students at an early stage of learning English, in all subjects through a consistent whole-school approach
 - supporting subject leaders in establishing consistently good teaching in their subjects
 - sharing the existing good practice in mathematics to establish better teaching across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Achievement requires improvement because inspectors did not see enough evidence of students' good progress across all subjects and year groups in lesson observations and through work scrutiny during the inspection.
- Students enter the school with skills in reading, writing and mathematics which are significantly below the national average. The school's projections for Year 11 indicate students will now make expected progress or better in both mathematics and English, and achieve results which are in line with national averages across the range of subjects.
- Students achieve well in mathematics because teaching is often good and sometimes outstanding. Early-entry in GCSE mathematics is used and the school predicts the number of students making better than expected progress will double the national average this year. Students who have the potential of achieving top grades are given every opportunity to do so.
- In English students' progress is less secure because teaching across all subjects does not effectively help students to develop their skills in reading and writing, including those who are at an early stage of learning English.
- Achievement in science, particularly at Key Stage 3, is too variable because the quality of teaching is not consistently good.
- At Key Stage 4, large numbers now study languages to GCSE level. Inspectors observed good achievement in French. However, students made less progress in other languages because more-able students were not given tasks which provided enough challenge.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve broadly as well as their peers.
- Initiatives such as extra one-to-one support for literacy and numeracy have been made possible through additional funding which is reversing the attainment gap between students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and others. For example, in Year 10, students supported by the pupil premium are now ahead of their peers by a tiny fraction in English and by roughly a third of a grade in mathematics as senior leaders seek to ensure equality of opportunity.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is being used well to support improvements in students' reading ages. As a result, students in the target group have made an average of a year and two months' gain in their reading age in just six months. Students' self-belief has increased markedly because of the school's confidence programme.
- The attendance and progress of a number of students who attend alternative provision for part of their learning away from the school are monitored carefully to make sure they are benefiting from the provision and gaining qualifications.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching requires improvement because it is not leading to consistently good progress in all subjects. During the inspection, not enough lessons were good or outstanding, and some teaching was inadequate.
- Teachers do not always use the information they have on students' progress to plan activities which meet the needs of all because students usually complete the same work. As a result, more-able students are not challenged to give their very best because they find the work too easy.
- Students need more support to develop their reading and writing skills in all subjects. Teachers include literacy-based activities within their planning but inspectors did not see evidence of consistent whole-school approaches to developing students' literacy across the range of subjects. Not all teachers feel they are well-equipped to support students who are at an early

stage of learning English.

- Marking and feedback to students are inconsistent and do not always give students enough information or guidance to identify the next steps in their learning and help them improve.
- Some students are occasionally too passive in their learning and this prevents them becoming effective at learning independently. This occurs when some activities and tasks provided for them do not always encourage them to think for themselves and so they tend to rely too much on the teacher.
- In the best lessons students were motivated, enthused and challenged because they were actively engaged in their learning. In these lessons teachers planned plenty of opportunities for individual, paired and group activities. For example, students made outstanding progress in a Year 10 English lesson when working together to assess their performance in a recent speaking and listening activity which they had filmed. Achievement in a Year 7 mathematics lesson on adding and subtracting with decimals was outstanding because the teacher used a variety of approaches and challenges which ensured that the needs of all students were met.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Students want to do well and relationships with staff and each other are good. Attendance rates are above average because students are happy at school. Students feel the school's rules are fair and simple to understand. Behaviour is good but not outstanding because students do not consistently take the initiative more in lessons and find out information by themselves without always relying on their teachers.
- Mixed-age tutor groups aid students' learning and social development. Visiting Year 6 students were given good support and advice from their older peers during tutor time which helped to boost their confidence about joining the school in September.
- Students say they feel safe and understand the dangers of bullying in all its forms, including that based on racism and homophobia. They say that any instances of bullying are dealt with effectively by staff.
- Care and support for students are good. Some students give examples of when extra classes have helped to improve their confidence or modify their behaviour.
- Rewards systems motivate younger students, in particular, who are keen to save up the stickers they receive for good work in exchange for exciting prizes.
- Students are very positive about Citizenship, Business and Enterprise days, reflecting well upon the school's specialism. On these days, students are given the chance to have a go at different activities and sometimes have the opportunity to lead others in their learning.
- Break and lunchtimes are calm and orderly. Students conduct themselves sensibly between lessons and speak highly of the large number of activities and sports which are available after school.
- Senior leaders' actions to reduce fixed-term exclusion rates have been very successful because these are exceptionally low.
- Some students are not always as punctual to lessons as they could be. Students identified as requiring support through school action plus and those who are supported by the pupil premium have lower attendance rates than other groups.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because teaching is not consistently strong and students are not making good enough overall progress.
- Inspection evidence indicates that the actions of senior leadership are having an impact on improving the school. Information about progress in Year 11 and results from early entry in mathematics are pointing to outcomes which compare favourably with national averages. New systems to manage behaviour have led to a clear reduction in the frequency of fixed-term

exclusions.

- Good use of experienced external consultants is made by senior leaders to validate their judgements. However, assessment of the school's overall effectiveness is too generous. For example, subject leaders have not yet secured consistently good teaching across their departments. Where there is good or better teaching such as in mathematics it has not been used systematically as a model to improve teaching throughout all subjects.
- Teachers' pay progression has been based on meeting performance management targets which link to Teachers' Standards. As a result, senior leaders have been successful in eradicating most but not all inadequate teaching.
- Improved systems have recently been developed to monitor, evaluate and review the quality of teaching and include formal observations of teachers, an examination of data on students' achievement and scrutiny of students' work. These systems have yet to show their full impact because a significant amount of teaching still requires improvement.
- Subject leaders say that training time is well-used to help staff expand their skills, for example through the 'Outstanding teaching programme'. Recent training on 'assertive discipline' has supported teachers to develop strategies to manage behaviour. A coaching programme is helping teachers who require improvement. The school works in partnership with another successful Sheffield school on initiatives to improve teaching.
- Senior leaders acknowledge there is a lack of challenge in some lessons and have plans to implement training so that all teachers develop their understanding of how to stretch more-able learners. Approaches to developing students' reading and writing skills are not yet consistently delivered across all subject areas.
- The curriculum provides a range of GCSE subjects supported by courses that develop employment skills and qualifications. At Key Stage 3 there is very good support for targeted students to develop their reading skills with a number of programmes delivered in specialised lessons.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, evidenced in students' good behaviour and their positive interactions with adults and with each other.
- As an academy, the school is no longer obliged to work with the local authority. Nevertheless, good links have been maintained and the academy has supported others by sharing effective ways of working.
- Arrangements for safeguarding students are exceptionally thorough and meet requirements.

■ The governance of the school:

An external audit of the governing body is not recommended despite the school requiring improvement. Governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and make occasional visits on-site during the day to observe students' progress. Governors have a good knowledge of how pupil premium funding is spent and ensure all requirements regarding safeguarding are met. They are aware of the school's arrangements for the management of teachers' work and understand the link between good teaching and salary progression. The governing body is committed to attending training to ensure that the school is effectively supported.

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	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.
		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.

School details

Unique reference number138925Local authoritySheffieldInspection number410486

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

Type of school Academy converter

School category Non-maintained

Age range of pupils 11–16

Gender of pupils Mixed

Number of pupils on the school roll 861

Appropriate authority The governing body

Chair Usma Saeed

Headteacher Breffni Martin

Date of previous school inspection Not previously inspected

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