

# Fir Vale School Academy Trust

Owler Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S4 8GB

**Inspection dates** 2–3 June 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have high expectations of all staff and students. This good leadership has improved the quality of teaching and raised students' achievement since the last inspection.
- Leaders have an accurate and honest view of the academy's strengths and areas for development, and clear plans for its further improvement.
- All groups of students make good progress, often from low starting points. Students who join the academy with little English are well supported so they learn the language quickly and make good progress.
- Teachers' performance is managed very effectively. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and continues to improve.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through a broad range of extra-curricular activities, clubs, visits and special events. Students have many opportunities to take on positions of responsibility in the academy.
- The academy's curriculum is well matched to the interests and abilities of students. The work-related courses for older students prepare them well for the next stage in their lives.
- Students behave well. They are proud to belong to the academy, and treat its facilities with respect. They work hard in lessons and want to succeed.
- Students feel completely safe in the academy. There are very thorough procedures to keep them safe. Students from many different backgrounds get along very well together.
- Governors are well informed about the performance of the academy, and both support and challenge leaders effectively. As a result, the academy continues to improve.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not yet outstanding. Teachers do not always set work for the most able students that is difficult enough, or expect all students to present work neatly enough.
- Sometimes teaching is not engaging enough to allow students to develop their love of learning or to think for themselves how to tackle tasks.
- Although teachers' marking gives students clear guidance on how to improve their work, teachers do not always check that students have acted on this advice.
- Students make slower progress in Years 7 and 8 than elsewhere in the academy.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed students’ learning in 40 lessons. Eight of these were jointly observed with academy leaders. Inspectors also visited a number of other activities including assemblies and registration time.
- Inspectors evaluated a sample of students’ work from across different subjects and year groups.
- Meetings were held with: the headteacher; school leaders, including teachers in charge of subjects; governors; the Academy’s Improvement Partner and with four groups of students.
- Inspectors observed students’ behaviour in lessons, around the site between lessons, at break and lunchtimes and at the end of the day. They took the opportunity to speak informally to students at various times during the inspection.
- Inspectors considered the 19 responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, together with communications from parents and the results of the academy’s own recent larger surveys of parents’ views. They also considered the 20 staff questionnaires they received.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including: academy information on students’ progress, records of their attendance and behaviour; documents relating to safeguarding; and academy plans for improvement.
- During the inspection, all students in Year 11 were out of school on study leave, preparing for public examinations. This meant that inspectors were unable to observe any lessons in Year 11, but they spoke with a group of students from Year 11, and evaluated a sample of their work.

## Inspection team

Michael Phipps, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Catherine Davies	Additional Inspector
Barbara O’Brien	Additional Inspector
Geoffrey Lumsdon	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The academy is slightly larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium, at more than half of all students, is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Almost all students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Around a half of students are of Pakistani heritage. A rapidly growing proportion, currently one in five of all students, is of Slovakian Roma heritage.
- Over four out of five students speak English as an additional language. This is much higher than average.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs, at almost one in three students, is much higher than average.
- The proportion of students who join or leave the academy at times other than those normally expected is much higher than average.
- In 2014, the academy did not meet the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 11.
- Around 50 students from Key Stage 4 study work-related courses for part of their learning at a range of alternative providers away from the academy. These include: Sheffield Sharks, Sheaf Training, PET-X, Endeavour, Youth Association South Yorkshire and GTA Mechanics.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching further by making sure that:
  - work is always set which is difficult enough for the most able students
  - all teachers check that students have followed the advice given in their marking
  - teaching consistently enables students to display a thirst for knowledge and a love of learning, and to think more for themselves about how to tackle tasks
  - all teachers have equally high expectations of students' presentation of their work.
- Raise students' achievement by making sure that in Years 7 and 8 they make progress which is as rapid as in other year groups.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, well supported by an experienced leadership team, leads with determination and a clear sense of direction. She has high expectations of the performance of all staff and students. As a result, there is an ethos in the academy in which good teaching and good behaviour can flourish.
- Leaders have an accurate and honest view of the academy's strengths and its areas for development. Plans for the further improvement of the academy are clear and focus on the right areas. Leaders make good use of external consultants, including the Academy's Improvement Partner, to gain an independent view of its strengths and priorities for improvement.
- Systems to manage teachers' performance are very robust. Evidence on the effectiveness of teachers is gathered systematically. Teachers' targets are based on students' progress. Any underperformance in teaching is dealt with effectively. Teachers have good opportunities to improve their skills. As a result, the quality of teaching is good and continues to improve.
- Good attention is paid to making sure that students from all backgrounds and starting points have an equal chance to be successful, that there are good relations between all groups of students, and that there is no discrimination.
- Leaders make regular and effective checks on the progress, attendance and behaviour of students attending alternative provision.
- Extra funds from the pupil premium are spent well on staff to reduce class sizes in Key Stage 3, and on support for the attendance of disadvantaged students. These funds also provide a range of extra help for these students, and a modified curriculum in Key Stage 4. As a result, disadvantaged students make good progress, and there are no gaps between their achievement and that of other students in the academy. Gaps with other students nationally are closing rapidly.
- Funds to support students with the lowest starting points are spent effectively, in particular on helping to improve the reading skills of these students in Year 7 and beyond.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well, both in the taught curriculum and in a series of special themed days and activities. Students are taught to be tolerant and respectful of each other's differences. As a result, the academy is a very harmonious community. Students learn about topics, such as democracy and human rights, which help to prepare them well for life in modern Britain. They carry out voluntary work in the community, and have many opportunities to take on positions of responsibility such as form captains, prefects and being members of the school council.
- The academy's curriculum is well matched to the interests and abilities of students, and is constantly under review in the light of the changing student population. There is a good balance of academic and work-related courses. Students receive high-quality careers advice, so they are well prepared for the next stage in their lives. The curriculum is enriched by a good range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, including zoology, film, yoga and art clubs, as well as sporting and academic clubs and an active Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. A recent visit by students to work in an orphanage in Ghana provided them with a memorable and worthwhile experience.
- Staff are appropriately trained in child protection issues, and provide a high level of care to students. The academy's arrangements for safeguarding students are very effective and meet statutory requirements.
- Following the dip in students' achievement in 2014, senior leaders took effective action to strengthen the leadership of some subjects. Leaders in charge of subjects are now very effective in ensuring the quality of teaching, and checking the progress of students in their areas.
- Ambitious targets are set for students' progress, and regular checks are made. If students fall behind, effective support is provided to help them catch up. Leaders are aware of the need to accelerate the progress of students in Years 7 and 8.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The work of governors is effective. Governors have a clear view of the academy's strengths and its areas for improvement. Many are regular visitors to the academy and have carried out learning walks with academy leaders. In this way they see for themselves the quality of teaching. Governors are linked with specific subjects or areas of the academy's work, and meet regularly with leaders of these areas.
  - Governors have a good oversight of teachers' performance management arrangements. They make sure that teachers' salary progression is based on students' progress. They understand how any underperformance in teaching is tackled.
  - Members of the governing body understand what published data on students' achievement tells them about how well the academy is doing. This means they effectively challenge academy leaders when necessary.

- Governors make sure that academy finances are managed well. They know how extra funds, such as the pupil premium, are spent, and understand the impact of this funding on the achievement of disadvantaged students.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- Students told inspectors that they are proud to belong to the academy. They treat its facilities with respect. They drop no litter around the site, and there is no evidence of graffiti. Standards of school uniform are high.
- Students work hard in lessons and want to succeed. They understand why it is important to work hard in school. They arrive for lessons promptly and ready to learn. Sometimes, however, their work is not always presented neatly.
- Students enjoy contributing to lessons, answering questions and offering their views. They cooperate well in lessons, and help each other to learn. When teaching fully engages their interest they display a love of learning and a thirst for knowledge.
- Parents who responded to academy surveys and to Ofsted's questionnaire have no concerns about students' behaviour.
- Attendance rates are broadly average. The attendance of different groups of students in the academy compares well with attendance rates for similar students nationally.
- Leaders check regularly on the attendance and behaviour of students who attend alternative provision to make sure they remain at least good.
- Exclusion rates have risen recently as a result of a number of incidents involving recently arrived students with serious behaviour problems. Inspectors are satisfied that academy leaders use exclusion only as a last resort when all other approaches have been exhausted.

### Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- The site is extremely secure. Very thorough checks are made on all visitors to the academy. Staff supervision of any vulnerable points around the site is effective. Students say they feel totally safe in the academy. Students are taught to stay safe and to take responsibility for their own safety. Parents are confident that their children are kept safe.
- There are few, if any, incidents of bullying. Students told inspectors that they were confident that any incidents would be dealt with effectively.
- Safeguarding procedures are very robust, and in some areas go beyond legal requirements. Staff are very well trained on child protection issues, so all are clear on policies and procedures. Detailed checks are carried out on staff before they are appointed.
- Leaders make regular checks to make sure that students who attend alternative provision are kept safe.
- Students have an impressive understanding of what constitutes unsafe situations, and are well taught, for example, about how to stay safe when using the internet, and the dangers of misusing drugs and alcohol.
- Racism is almost unknown in the academy. Students from many different backgrounds get on well together, and respect each other's different backgrounds and beliefs. One student, speaking for many, told an inspector: 'Outside school we might not mix so much, but once we are inside the school gates we are all best friends, like one big family.'

## The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time is effective in making sure that students make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Relationships between students and teachers are warm, friendly and respectful. This makes a clear contribution to the good learning that takes place. No time is wasted in dealing with any low-level disruption or off-task behaviour. Students told inspectors that they appreciate the time that teachers willingly spend to give them extra help.

- Homework is set regularly and is used well to contribute to students' good progress and learning.
- Teachers ask questions which check students' understanding well, and which make them think hard. This helps them to grow in confidence, and to make good progress in lessons.
- Lessons are well planned. Students are clear on the purpose of activities. There is a consistent focus on developing the skills and knowledge that students will need in public examinations. Students are clear on their target level of achievement, and what they need to do to improve. They have frequent opportunities to assess their own work and that of their classmates.
- Teachers in all subjects give students many chances to develop their levels of literacy in activities which improve their reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. This is particularly helpful for students who are in the early stages of learning English.
- Teachers' marking is detailed and frequent. It gives students clear guidance on how they can improve their work. Although students are encouraged to act on this advice, not all teachers consistently check that students have done so.
- Some teachers do not have high expectations of how students should present their work in a neat and well-organised way.
- Sometimes, teaching is not sufficiently engaging to allow students to display a thirst for knowledge and a love of learning, or to make students think for themselves about how they are going to tackle a task.
- Although teachers plan lessons which take into account the different abilities of their students, the work they set for the most able students is not always difficult enough. Sometimes the most able have to do the same work as others before they are given more challenging tasks.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- Students join the academy in Year 7 with standards of attainment in English and mathematics which are well below average. Many students join the academy with little knowledge of the English language. Some have little prior experience of education.
- Students make good progress from these low starting points. In 2013, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE passes at grade C or above including English and mathematics was broadly average. The proportions that made the progress expected of them in English and mathematics compared well to national average figures. Students made particularly good progress in languages and humanities subjects.
- Students' attainment and progress fell in Year 11 in 2014 in English and mathematics. Academy leaders are aware of the reasons for this, and took rapid and effective action to correct it. Academy data show, and inspectors' checks in lessons and in books confirm, that students' progress in English and mathematics is now good. Students are on course to achieve results in English and mathematics in 2015 which will be above the 2014 national average levels.
- Students achieve very well in a number of subjects. In 2014, their attainment in law, French, Urdu and additional science was well above national average levels.
- In 2014, most students in Year 11 were entered early for GCSE English examinations. They all then resat the examination in the summer in order to improve their grades. Few of the most able students reached the highest GCSE grades. The academy no longer enters students early for any GCSE examinations.
- Disadvantaged students make the same good progress as other students in the academy. In 2014 there was no difference between the attainment in English and mathematics between disadvantaged students and others in the academy. Compared to all students nationally, disadvantaged students in the academy achieved GCSE grades in English and mathematics that were around one GCSE grade lower than national average levels. These gaps in achievement are closing rapidly.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs achieve well. Their needs are assessed quickly and accurately, and they are well supported in lessons by well-trained teaching assistants. Their progress is checked regularly, and if any extra help is needed, it is provided rapidly.
- Students who speak English as an additional language receive very effective support both in lessons and in extra sessions. As a result, they learn the language quickly, catch up well and make good progress. Academy leaders carefully check the progress of students from different ethnic groups and those who join the academy at different times. All make similarly good progress.
- The attendance, behaviour and achievement of students who attend alternative provision for part of their learning away from the academy are checked carefully. These students make good progress on their courses and achieve well. Most then progress to further education, apprenticeships or employment.
- Students make good progress in developing their writing skills as they move through the academy. This is

because teachers in all subjects help them to develop these skills, and give students opportunities to write at length in different subjects.

- Students develop their skills in mathematics across the academy well because the subject is well taught, and they have the chance to practise these skills in different subjects.
- Students develop their reading skills well. Younger students who find reading difficult receive very effective help from a support programme paid for by Year 7 'catch up' funding, so they soon make good progress. Teachers in all subjects help to improve students' reading skills in different lessons as they move through the academy.
- Students make good progress across Key Stage 3 as a whole. Their progress is slower in Year 7 and Year 8 owing to the learning and language difficulties experienced by many younger students, but their progress accelerates rapidly in Year 9 as these difficulties are overcome.
- The achievement of the academy's most able students is good overall, but sometimes the work they are set is not difficult enough. In 2014, the proportion of students gaining the highest GCSE grades was below average in a number of subjects, but was above average in religious studies.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138925
<b>Local authority</b>	Sheffield
<b>Inspection number</b>	462202

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	992
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Usma Saeed
<b>Headteacher</b>	Breffni Martin
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 July 2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	0114 243 9391
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