

Firth Park Academy

Fircroft Avenue, Sheffield, South Yorkshire, S5 0SD

Inspection dates 16–17 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
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.

- Teaching has rapidly improved in the last year so that the vast majority of students make good progress. This is as a result of a relentless drive by new leaders to raise the quality of teaching across the academy. Teaching is good.
- Progress across most subjects, including in English, mathematics and science, has risen sharply in the past year so that students do well compared to their peers nationally.
- The gap in the achievement of disadvantaged students compared to their peers nationally is narrowing quickly.
- The support offered to students with special educational needs and other students who find managing their behaviour difficult is good.
- The pastoral care of students is strong. There is a sense of purpose portrayed by the staff of the academy and replicated by students. The young people here are happy, smartly dressed and keen to attend lessons.
- Bullying is extremely rare. Students say that behaviour over the last year has improved dramatically and low-level disruption in lessons is reducing.
- Staff and parents are overwhelmingly positive about all aspects of the academy. Staff demonstrate a strong passion for further improvement. This drive is mirrored by the Trust, governors and senior and middle leaders.
- The principal has galvanised a robust team of senior leaders who are sharp and focused in their tasks. This is particularly the case for leaders who manage academy data, monitor teaching and support behaviour.
- The academy's evaluation of its own performance is extremely accurate. It sharply identifies areas of continued need. Leaders are tackling these swiftly.
- The promotion of British values and development of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is strong. This can be seen in the way students mix well together and show respect for each other.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The quality of teaching is not good enough across some subjects, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- Some students' attitudes to learning, particularly in Years 7 and 8, are not consistently positive.
- A few teachers do not apply the academy's policies for marking and assessment and tackling low-level disruptive behaviour consistently.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons and parts of lessons, three of which were observed jointly with three senior leaders. Additionally, a joint work scrutiny was carried out with a senior leader.
- Formal discussions were held with three groups of students, a representative from the Trust, governors, senior and middle leaders and a parents’ forum group. Additionally a telephone conversation was held with the Chair of the Governing Body, who was on holiday at the time of the inspection, and a separate conversation was held with the Chief Executive of the Trust.
- Inspectors spoke to students informally during break time and lunchtime and after school.
- Scrutiny of work in books was carried out in lesson observations, but also as a formal exercise to ascertain the progress over time of groups of students. This included the progress of students of different abilities as well as those identified as disadvantaged.
- Inspectors looked at a range of supporting documents, both publically available and those provided by the academy, with regard to safeguarding and child protection, minutes of the governing body meetings, performance management, progress data and external reports.
- Inspectors took into account the 55 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 28 responses to the Ofsted online parent questionnaire (Parent View).
- Inspectors also considered the information from the academy’s own surveys of students and parents, as well as holding a separate meeting with a large group of parents to ascertain a wider understanding of parents’ views.

Inspection team

Colin Scott, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Adam Ryder	Additional Inspector
Sally Lane	Additional Inspector
Mary Lanovy-Taylor	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this academy

- Firth Park Academy converted to become a sponsor-led academy in August 2013. It is now part of the Academies Enterprise Trust.
- This is an average sized secondary academy.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium is over twice the national average. The pupil premium provides additional funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are in local authority care.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is almost twice the national average.
- The proportion of students whose first language is not English is high and over twice the national average.
- In this academy, Key Stage 3 includes Years 7 and 8 and Key Stage 4, Years 9, 10 and 11.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is average.
- There is a sizeable number of students who join or leave the academy at times other than that normally expected and this figure is much higher than the national average.
- A large number of students whose first language is other than English have joined the school in the last year. This figure is now three times the national average.
- The academy makes some use of alternative provision for educational support on a full- or part-time basis for some students. These are: Endeavour Training Limited; Heeley City Farm; In2Change; Pathways; Sheffield Engineering Centre; Sheffield Wednesday Study Support and YASY (Youth Association South Yorkshire).
- The academy has its own unit, called the Bridge, to reintegrate students returning from full-time alternative provision.
- The academy meets 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.

What does the academy need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that all students, but particularly in Years 7 and 8, make more rapid progress, by:
 - challenging teachers to apply the academy's agreed marking and assessment policy to all students' work, so that they are challenged to their very best at all times, are able to reflect on their learning and deepen their understanding
 - ensuring all teachers apply the academy's behaviour systems consistently so that the few instances of low-level disruptions that do occur are eradicated
 - further increasing the achievement made by middle and higher ability students across a range of subjects in Years 7 and 8 and lower ability students in mathematics in Key Stage 4.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The new principal has been part of the academy's leadership team for two years and has held the full position since March this year. He had already started the academy's improvement through developing greater rigour in teaching and leadership prior to starting his new role.
- Since becoming principal, he has gathered and led a team of focused and committed individuals who are clearly driven to succeed and know their roles well. This is particularly the case for senior leaders in charge of teaching, academy data and behaviour.
- Although the academy's results suffered a dip last year in the school performance tables, this was foreseen and was the result of a number of factors. These included certain subjects being studied no longer being included in these tables and also the loss of some key teaching staff. Governors and leaders at the time decided to allow students to continue their studies, even though these subjects no longer counted towards the academy's overall performance figures. This demonstrates the academy's commitment to supporting students' emotional well-being.
- Evidence shows that progress rates have risen sharply in the past year and the quality of teaching has improved greatly and is now good. Students' aspirations are higher than in the past and so the academic courses they are now following are more suitable for them and prepare them well for their further education and employment.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Leaders know where there is expertise and there is regular checking of standards and students' progress. Similarly, leaders are robust in managing support for areas where teachers fall short of expected standards and deal firmly with inadequate teaching.
- The academy has a rich supply of data relating to students' progress and teachers use this well. The leader of academy data knows the information extremely well and is astute in ensuring that it is clear and thorough so that all leaders and teachers are able to understand it easily.
- Senior leaders know the academy well. They are extremely accurate in their view of progress, the quality of teaching and the continuing needs of the academy. Their plans for further improvement have clear end points.
- Staff are overwhelmingly positive about all areas of the academy and give leaders their full support for the way it is led and managed. Parents are also extremely supportive of the academy. A significant minority of parents who responded to Parent View demonstrated some unhappiness with the way the academy manages both behaviour and students' progress. Parents interviewed independently by inspectors were clear and unequivocal in their support for the way their children are supported and the academy leadership.
- There has been a large number of students entering or leaving the academy in the last year. There was also a very large number of students who did not speak English when they arrived. Leaders have worked diligently in ensuring that their integration to the academy is good. The modern foreign languages department has taken a lead in the support for those students to ensure quickly that their grasp of basic language skills prepares them for life in the academy. This is working extremely well.
- Support for literacy and numeracy is strong. Both the English and mathematics departments are using assessment procedures robustly to provide the right support to maximise the progress students make overall.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively to support readers to make rapid progress in their literacy. There are many opportunities for young people to read. It was noted that during the inspection there was a significant number of students who through their own choice were reading books around the yard and in corridors.
- Leaders' actions are increasingly successful in narrowing the gaps in attainment between disadvantaged students and those of their peers nationally and their classmates. In the case of both English and mathematics, the gaps have been closing over time. The pupil premium funding has been used by governors and senior leaders to provide disadvantaged students with appropriate support. Inspection evidence suggests that this continues to be the case and the gaps are narrowing further. However, they do remain wide and the academy recognises this as an area for urgent improvement.
- Academy leaders have worked successfully to make rapid improvements in achievement, behaviour, attendance and teaching this year, supported by all the staff who have responded well to new challenges. Although the academy no longer teaches the very large number of courses previously available, the curriculum is wide and varied and caters well for students' interests.
- The attendance, behaviour and progress of students who are on placement, both full and part time, at alternative provisions are all tracked rigorously. These students attend as regularly, and make the same

good progress, as their classmates. The academy has already begun a process to bring some of these students back to mainstream education and there have been some notable successes in reintegration, such as the use of the Bridge inclusion unit.

- The promotion of both British values and of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is extremely strong. There is an extensive programme to cover democracy, rule of law and tolerance, through, for example, additional learning days, ambassador programmes, and 'thoughts for the week' in form time. These programmes help students to understand what discrimination is, challenge extreme views and help to foster good relations between students and with staff and the local community. Students say they understand how elections work from their experience of voting to elect the academy Head Boy and Head Girl.
- Leaders are challenged robustly and regularly and supported effectively by the Trust, which keeps a watchful eye on the school's performance. The Trust is supportive of the academy, such as helping to reduce a deficit budget.
- Middle leaders know their areas of work well. They are astute in their understanding of the quality of teaching in their subjects, in the impact they have had so far and what they still need to do to improve the academy even further.
- Leaders' work to promote equality of opportunity for all is generally effective. They ensure that over time all students, regardless of background, make better progress than was previously the case. This is shown by the narrowing of achievement gaps between disadvantaged students and non-disadvantaged students, in English and mathematics, over the last few years.
- The academy's raising achievement programme (RAP) aimed at supporting students with emotional, social, behavioural and medical needs, is led extremely well. It provides students with clear direction, stability and purpose to give them the skills to reintegrate into mainstream academy work. There is an extremely clear rationale for referral to its facilities and students who access it are making exceptional progress.
- Careers information and guidance is delivered robustly. Students are clear about their ambition and told inspectors that this begins in Year 8 when they choose subjects to study at GCSE. Students interviewed in Year 11 were unequivocal in their belief that their aspirations have been nurtured and guided by staff who have inspired them to aim to achieve the very best they can.
- The academy ensures that safeguarding procedures are in place, meet statutory requirements and are effective.
- **The governance of the academy:**
 - Governance is effective and governors know the academy well. They meet regularly to ascertain current progress. Governors carry out regular visits and walks around the academy to see the academy for themselves. However, records of meetings do not show that governors always challenge the information they are given by leaders.
 - The governing body monitors the pupil premium funding and has ensured that its use is helping to narrow attainment gaps between disadvantaged students and others.
 - Governors know academy data well. They are clear about where teaching is strong and where students' achievement needs further improvement. Governors support academy leaders to tackle underperformance by ensuring that teachers receive relevant training and through staffing restructure.
 - Governors are robust in challenging teachers and leaders with regard to the quality of their work and do not automatically allow teachers to progress through the pay scales unless clear targets are achieved. In recent years, they have challenged academy leaders well enough in ensuring that teachers reach the required standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Their understanding of different faiths, cultures, background, lifestyles and beliefs is good and they demonstrate empathy for all who may be different from themselves.
- The large number of faiths and cultures across the academy mix and integrate well together in classrooms and on the yard. There are no distinct groups visible in isolation and they all appear happy and content. They are polite and courteous to each other and to staff and visitors.
- A few students' attitudes to learning are not as positive on those rare occasions when teaching does not excite or inspire them to do their very best. Sometimes students, particularly in Year 7, are bored easily and as a result, display low levels of disruptive behaviour and their progress slows. During the inspection, the academy was free of litter, students were smart, punctual to lessons and had the right equipment for

their lessons. An overwhelming majority of both staff and parents believe that behaviour is managed well across the academy.

- Students themselves are taking more of a lead in supporting good behaviour. For example, some are prefects and their classmates identify them as someone from whom they can readily seek help.
- All students interviewed stated that behaviour is not usually a problem and that in lessons their learning is now disrupted much less than it used to be. Inspectors noted during the inspection that behaviour in Year 7 was not as good as that seen in other year groups. On the occasions misbehaviour does occur, students say staff deal quickly with it so that they can continue to work.
- Inspectors were impressed with the calmness of the academy overall and the behaviour observed at break times during the inspection. Students attending the alternative provision also behave well.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Fixed-term exclusions for the last reporting year were high. This was because higher expectations of behaviour and attendance were introduced by the academy in September 2014. As students have accepted the new routines and expectations, the number of exclusions is now low.
- Attendance is rising, but is just below average. However, leaders still believe there is more they can do to improve attendance, despite the negative effect that the high number of students who leave part way through their education has on overall attendance figures.
- Students say they feel safe and are kept safe. Procedures in place to check on the credentials of staff and visitors are robust and applied rigorously.
- Students are supported well in their understanding of how to keep safe when, for example, using online technologies and social media and when using equipment in practical lessons.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching has improved rapidly, particularly in the past year, so the progress students make is now good overall. Inspection evidence indicates that teaching over the current year has impacted positively on the progress students make.
- The good relationships and routines established ensure that students are confident to ask questions of their teachers to deepen their understanding. Similarly, teachers are skilful in asking pertinent and searching questions that add challenge to students and make them work harder. However, this is not always the case and a few teachers are not as skilled in this area.
- Teachers know their subjects well. They plan and teach lessons that are usually pitched at the right level for students' abilities to ensure that they make the progress expected of them. A few teachers do not always engage or inspire students to do their very best, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- The quality of teaching in some subjects, notably English and mathematics, is now resulting in students' much stronger progress than previously seen. Teachers' accuracy in their understanding of students' achievement has been endorsed by external assessments. The good progress indicated by the academy's data and inspection evidence is as a result of the much improved quality of teaching over the last year.
- Teachers know how well students are progressing towards their targets, particularly in Years 9, 10 and 11, and plan lessons that usually challenge and stretch most students to do their best.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy across the academy is strong overall. Leaders see these areas as continued priorities to ensure that students, including those who are new to learning English, have the skills to learn in all subject areas.
- The academy's agreed marking and assessment policy is used well by most teachers. For instance in English, students are absolutely clear about how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students say that they generally receive good feedback in lessons and that most marking helps them to improve their work. However, a few teachers do not apply the policy consistently. Consequently, some students do not know how to improve their work and this hinders their progress.
- The quality of teaching improves as students move up through the year groups and so the rate of progress becomes more rapid.
- Most teachers have high expectations of their students and set high standards for them to reach. They challenge underperformance and do not readily accept work that is not of the highest standard.
- Other adults in the classroom are used well to support students' progress. There is obvious guidance and communication between teachers and any additional staff to ensure that they are used well in the class.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the academy with attainment that is significantly below average. In 2014, examination results fell. This was also due in part to some staffing issues.
- Over the current academic year progress rates have risen dramatically as a result of improved teaching. Attainment in English is now at the expected standard for age and in mathematics, it is very close to that expected.
- The gaps between the progress of disadvantaged students compared to their classmates in the academy and their peers nationally narrowed further in 2014. Current data suggests that this narrowing is continuing for both English and mathematics. However, these gaps do still remain too wide. The academy leaders have accurately identified this as an area for continued development.
- In mathematics in 2014, disadvantaged students were almost a grade behind their classmates and about a grade and a half behind other pupils nationally. In English, they were about half a grade behind their classmates and just over a grade behind other pupils nationally. Current data suggest that while these gaps remain, they are narrowing quickly.
- Since September 2014, staffing has stabilised and progress data this year demonstrate that students are now making much stronger progress in a range of subjects including English, mathematics and science. Progress is stronger in Years 9, 10 and 11 than it is in Years 7 and 8.
- The most able students, given their starting points, achieve well overall. In a number of subjects, for example in English language and English literature, their progress is strong due to robust marking and challenge by their teachers and the standards they reach are above national averages. However, in a few subjects, including design and technology and German, they do not always reach the highest standards of which they are capable.
- The support for lower ability students in mathematics is improving so that they are given more challenge and teachers expect more of them. However, a few teachers are too ready to accept that these students have done their best when sometimes they might not have done.
- The progress of those students whose first language is not English is rapid once they enter the main school, after receiving support for English Language skills by the modern languages department.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are supported well in their learning. Consequently, the progress they make is similar to that of their classmates.
- The students who access alternative provision on a part-time basis for vocational studies are tracked diligently by academy leaders. The progress they make in those lessons is in line with that of their classmates.
- The academy does not enter students early for GCSE examinations.

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

Unique reference number	139334
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	449850

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	976
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Miller
Principal	Dean Jones
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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