

Inspection of Fir Vale School

Owler Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S4 8GB

Inspection dates: 18 and 19 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders want to put pupils on the pathway to success. However, the curriculum is not strong enough to fully realise this vision. Variability between subjects and teachers means that some pupils do not consistently benefit from a good quality of education. For a minority of older pupils, the English curriculum is not appropriately ambitious.

Pupils are friendly, confident and keen to make visitors feel welcome. Pupils behave well in lessons. They generally meet the high expectations set for them. Sometimes, they are too enthusiastic to be involved and shout out. Staff deal with this well when it happens. Incidents of serious poor behaviour have reduced over time.

Difference is celebrated among the school's diverse community. Staff organise 'togetherness' activities. These help pupils to build friendships with peers, who they might otherwise not socialise with. Pupils enjoy their 'elective' activities each Wednesday. For example, pupils can teach dance to younger pupils, learn new cooking skills or participate in sports leadership activities. This builds pupils' character.

Pupils trust staff and feel safe in school. Bullying is tackled effectively. Staff undertake effective work with both the victims of bullying as well as perpetrators.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have improved several aspects of the school. They have addressed previous issues around how well pupils interact with one another and with staff. The conduct of pupils is markedly better than it was in the past. Pupils benefit from a strong personal development offer. However, not all pupils access an appropriately ambitious and broad curriculum. Around a sixth of pupils stop learning about English literature from Year 10 onwards. This limits their exposure to important works of English, such as plays by Shakespeare. As a result, some pupils' horizons are broader than others.

There is variability in how well the curriculum is designed. In some subjects, there is a well-thought-out and ambitious curriculum in place. For example, the mathematics curriculum supports pupils to build their knowledge over time. However, other subject curriculums are not as well structured. Some subject leaders have not ensured that the curriculum helps pupils to remember important content over time. Others have not considered how the curriculum deepens pupils' understanding of important concepts. Very occasionally, teachers do not follow the planned curriculum. This means that pupils have varying educational experiences.

Contrastingly, there is a very strong reading curriculum in school. Most pupils arrive to the school behind in their reading. Some pupils arrive unable to read at all. Staff who teach reading are well trained. They use assessment well to identify pupils'

starting points. The school's 'literacy hub' delivers a range of well-designed programmes to help pupils catch up. This includes intensive support to give effective help to pupils who arrive with little or no English.

Leaders have trained staff on how to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, some information given to staff about pupils with SEND lacks precision. Some advice for teachers does not address pupils' individual needs. Some teachers do not use this information effectively. This means that some pupils with SEND do not achieve as well as they could. Further training is underway to ensure that staff know how to better meet particular learning needs.

Pupils are lively but well behaved. Effective training has ensured that staff have positive interactions with pupils in school. There is a genuine warmth between staff and pupils. Leaders tackle poor attendance robustly. They have redoubled their efforts to ensure that pupils attend school regularly.

Leaders have developed a high-quality personal development offer. The provision to support pupils' pastoral needs is a notable strength. Timetabled ethics lessons give pupils a valuable opportunity to debate big moral questions. An improved careers programme gives pupils useful information about their future prospects.

Staff appreciate the stability that senior leaders have given to the school. Trustees often discuss staff well-being at their meetings. Staff feel that leaders consider the impact that decisions might have on staff workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a well-established culture of vigilance among staff. They receive regular safeguarding updates. This keeps staff abreast of any emerging safeguarding issues. Staff know what might indicate that a pupil could be at risk of harm. When staff pass on concerns, staff responsible for safeguarding take timely action. Pastoral and safeguarding staff meet regularly to evaluate the actions that they have taken to support individual pupils and to put any necessary further support in place.

There is a well-designed programme to educate pupils about how to stay safe in the community and online. For example, pupils are taught about healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way throughout their time at school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- For some pupils, the curriculum lacks sufficient breadth and depth. Some key stage 4 pupils are not exposed to English literature. This means that they have gaps in their cultural capital. Leaders should ensure that their vision for the

curriculum is consistently realised by subject leaders and teachers, so that all pupils access an appropriately ambitious and rigorous curriculum in all subjects.

- There is variability in how well the curriculum is designed and implemented between subjects. Subject leaders have not given sufficient thought as to what important knowledge pupils need to know and remember in their subjects. This means that pupils find it hard to recall previous learning. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum is well structured to support pupils to build and embed important knowledge in their long-term memory.
- Teachers do not adapt the curriculum consistently well for pupils with SEND. Although teachers are given advice on how to support pupils with SEND, this information lacks precision. Some teachers do not use the information that is given to best effect. As a result, some pupils with SEND have gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that staff receive precise information and effective training, so that all pupils with SEND achieve well.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

| | |
|--|---|
| Unique reference number | 138925 |
| Local authority | Sheffield |
| Inspection number | 10241173 |
| Type of school | Secondary Comprehensive |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1034 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Usma Saeed |
| Headteacher | Rachel Smith |
| Website | http://firvale.com/ |
| Date of previous inspection | 6 and 7 March 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school's pupil base is ethnically diverse. Almost all pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Over a third of pupils are of Slovakian Roma heritage and around a third of pupils are of British Asian heritage. Over three quarters of pupils have English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is well above national average, as is the proportion of pupils with SEND.
- A high proportion of pupils arrive or leave the school outside of the normal times of transition.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision, which is attended by a very small number of Year 7 pupils.
- The school meets the requirement of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 11 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior and middle leaders throughout the inspection. The lead inspector met with members of the board of trustees, including the chair. Inspectors also spoke with two of the school's improvement partners and a representative of the registered alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives into these subjects; English, mathematics, history and performing arts. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work.
- Inspectors met with other senior and middle leaders to discuss the curriculum and review curriculum planning. Inspectors visited a range of lessons in other subjects and reviewed work produced by pupils with SEND. Inspectors also visited the school's literacy hub and visited reading support sessions.
- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and a deputy DSL. The lead inspector reviewed the school's safeguarding records and single central record. Inspectors spoke to pupils and staff about their safeguarding knowledge.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for behaviour and attendance and reviewed the school's records relating to these areas. They also spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour and met with pupils who have been issued with sanctions because of poor behaviour. Inspectors also observed breaktime, lunchtime and lesson changeover.
- Inspectors discussed personal development with leaders and pupils. Inspectors also met with pupils who are on the pupil leadership team and visited ethics lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, such as the school's self-evaluation and external reports on the school.
- The views of parents, pupils and staff received through Ofsted's questionnaires were considered as well as the results from surveys undertaken by the school.

Inspection team

Graham Findlay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Michelle Farr

Ofsted Inspector

Jessica McKay

His Majesty's Inspector

Gordon Watts

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2022