

Inspection of a good school: Firwood High School

Stitch Mi Lane, Bolton, Lancashire BL2 4HU

Inspection dates:

7 and 8 March 2023

Outcome

Firwood High School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Learning is exciting at Firwood School. Staff immerse pupils, and students in the sixth form, in learning experiences that they will remember. A winter wonderland at Christmas lets pupils enjoy snow and hot chocolate as they celebrate together. A summer festival welcomes new pupils to the school. Pupils enjoy an abundance of activities, including music, dance and singing.

Pupils love their school. They feel happy and safe. They have strong, trusting relationships with the staff. They know staff have high expectations for their learning and behaviour. Pupils rise to meet these expectations. Pupils behave well and they are proud of their achievements.

Being kind is a core value of the school. Pupils know what it means to be a good friend. They accept and respect each other's differences. Pupils work and play well together. It is rare for any name calling or bullying to happen. However, when it does, staff deal with it well.

Staff use a range of resources and adaptations to their delivery of the curriculum to ensure every pupil is included and has the chance to achieve well. All pupils have a voice. They learn to communicate and express their emotions and opinions. Independence and preparing for adulthood are woven into every area of school life.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. They have thought carefully about the wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of the pupils who attend this school when crafting the curriculum. This means that pupils, regardless of their needs, enjoy learning and achieve well. For example, pupils, and students in the sixth form achieve their personal and academic targets. Students gain nationally recognised qualifications, including functional skills and entry level certificates.

The curriculum gives teachers a well-ordered framework to follow. This means that pupils learn all that leaders intend. However, there is a degree of flexibility within the curriculum that helps teachers to personalise learning, so that each individual pupil learns what they should at the right time. Teachers use repetition to help pupils to practise and embed what they have been taught. Teachers break down pupils' individual education, health and care (EHC) plans into small achievable targets. They use these targets effectively to ensure that pupils build up their learning securely over time.

Students in the sixth form have the opportunity to take part in work experience. This could be in the school bistro or helping in the school office. Some students are able to gain work skills through off-site organisations, including a local food bank. The work experience programme is well established and successful. Some pupils have gained employment in school and in the community.

Leaders work closely with parents and carers, careers advisors, the local authority, colleges and training providers to support students' transition into their next stage of education, employment or training. This process starts in Year 7, when pupils learn about different jobs and possible options for their future lives. Throughout each key stage, teachers promote pupils' independence and life skills, so that they are ready for their next step in life.

Pupils have many opportunities to read in school. Staff immerse pupils in rhymes, songs, drama, stories and non-fiction texts throughout the day to inspire and develop a love of reading. Non-verbal pupils and pupils at the early stage of reading use visual signs and symbols to support communication and word recognition. However, leaders are still in the process of deciding which reading books will best suit the age of the pupils. As a result, some pupils do not build up their early reading knowledge as well as they could.

Pupils behave well. Leaders work closely with pupils' primary schools to ensure that they make a smooth transition at the start of Year 7. Leaders ensure that all staff know pupils well and that any sensory, medical, behaviour or personal need is understood and managed well. Staff know when a pupil may need additional support or a sensory break. Staff follow the school behaviour procedures consistently and this ensures that there is little low-level disruption in school.

The curriculum allows pupils to experience a wide variety of enrichment activities to develop their interests, abilities, confidence and personal development. Pupils enjoy residential trips and take part in team games, water sports and outdoor activities. Some pupils enjoy time on a local farm and other pupils have made birdboxes with a local charity. Pupils celebrate different cultural and religious festivals through music, food and art. For example, pupils experienced Easter around the world and recently celebrated Eid.

Trustees and governors know the school well. Staff appreciate the professional development provided by the trust and school leaders. They said leaders are considerate of their well-being. Staff also feel their workload has reduced and that leaders will listen to any concerns they have around workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are vigilant and quick to report any concerns that they may have about pupils' welfare. Leaders take any necessary actions to secure help for pupils and their families. They work closely with the local authority and external professionals to keep pupils safe.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe including online. They know who to talk to if they have worries and understand key words, such as public and private.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not decided which books will best support pupils at the early stages of reading. This means that teachers are sometimes using books that are not helping pupils to build on the letters and sounds they already know. Leaders should ensure they have appropriate reading books in school and train teachers to use the books to support pupils who are at the earlier stages of learning to read.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Firwood High School, to be good in November 2012.

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

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| Unique reference number | 146410 |
| Local authority | Bolton |
| Inspection number | 10256104 |
| Type of school | Secondary special |
| School category | Academy special converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 199 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 61 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Heather Scott |
| Headteacher | Dawn Evans |
| Website | www.firwood.bolton.sch.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- A new headteacher has been appointed since the previous inspection.
- Firwood High School converted to become an academy in October 2018. When it's predecessor school, Firwood High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- Firwood High School is part of Woodbridge Trust.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- The vast majority of pupils at the school have an EHC plan. The school caters for a wide range of needs, including severe learning difficulty.

Information about this inspection

- 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, senior leaders, subject leaders, the chief executive officer and trustees of Woodbridge Trust, including the chair of the trust. The lead inspector also spoke with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in personal, social and health education, mathematics and physical education. 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 pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including that relating to safeguarding. They also spoke with leaders and staff.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. There were no responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils.

Inspection team

Julie Bather, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Claire Hollister

Ofsted Inspector

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