

Inspection of a good school: Fir Bank Primary School

Grasmere Road, Royton, Oldham, Greater Manchester OL2 6SJ

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 May 2023

Outcome

Fir Bank Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thoroughly enjoy attending Fir Bank Primary School. They feel very much part of the school community, which helps them to feel happy and safe. Pupils told the inspector that staff are kind and friendly and that they treat all pupils fairly.

Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and for their achievement. Adults motivate pupils to learn well. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Children in early years are well prepared for Year 1.

Pupils know that teachers value their opinions. Pupils behave well and put a great deal of effort into all that they do. Pupils explained that they appreciate getting involved in all aspects of school life.

Pupils are confident that staff will resolve any incidents of bullying quickly. They have an age-appropriate understanding of equality and diversity. For example, pupils explained the importance of respecting people's differences and accepting everybody for who they are.

Pupils take part in a range of extracurricular activities, including sports, singing and well-being clubs. Pupils relish opportunities to visit places further afield. They understand how this helps to boost their knowledge. Pupils develop their interests, such as by playing musical instruments and organising talent shows. They have positive aspirations for their future lives.

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

Over time, leaders have continued to improve the quality of education that pupils receive at Fir Bank Primary School. For example, they have implemented a broad and balanced curriculum that is commensurate with the national curriculum. The curriculum enables most pupils to achieve well. In early years, a well-designed curriculum enables children to flourish.

In most subjects, leaders have established exactly what pupils must learn. However, in a few subjects, leaders have not determined the most important knowledge that pupils should learn and the order in which this should be taught. This means that in these subjects, a minority of pupils do not develop the depth of subject knowledge of which they are capable.

In the main, the curriculum is well delivered. Leaders provide teachers with effective training to develop their subject knowledge further. Teachers select appropriate activities to deliver new topics and concepts. Pupils have plentiful opportunities to revisit their prior learning. This helps them to practise and consolidate what they already know and can do. As a result, pupils, and children in early years, are well prepared for the next steps in their education.

Leaders have secure systems in place to check how well pupils are learning new knowledge. Teachers successfully use this information to reshape the curriculum and to decide where they must recap important learning. Teachers are adept at addressing pupils' misunderstandings.

Leaders and staff identify and assess pupils with SEND quickly and accurately. Leaders ensure that these pupils follow the same curriculum as other pupils. They work closely with external specialists and parents and carers to ensure that pupils with SEND learn consistently well.

Reading is a priority for all staff. Across the school, leaders have implemented a range of initiatives to promote pupils' love of reading. For example, 'author of the month' helps pupils to engage in interesting discussions about a wide range of authors, books and genres. Leaders have created an inviting and well-stocked library. All pupils visit this area regularly and they delight in choosing their own books to take home. Pupils read widely and often. They were excited to talk about their favourite stories and poems.

Leaders have recently introduced a new phonics programme to teach early reading. Children begin to learn letters and the sounds they represent from the beginning of the Reception class. Typically, the books that pupils read match the sounds that they already know. This enables most pupils to develop into fluent readers. However, not all staff follow the agreed approaches to teaching phonics with fidelity. This variability means that a small number of pupils find it more difficult to build accuracy in their reading.

Pupils are well mannered and polite. They demonstrate positive conduct during lessons and throughout the school. At playtime, pupils engage well with each other, including when playing team games. Children in early years successfully learn school routines from the beginning of the Nursery class. They quickly learn that if they try their best, they will reap rewards. For example, they save up pennies that they can later redeem for prizes of their choice. Pupils are eager to impress staff and receive recognition for their efforts.

Pupils' wider development has been well thought out by leaders. Older pupils can apply for many leadership roles, such as being school councillors, sports leaders or librarians. Pupils understand that their actions can have a positive impact on the wider community. They raise money for charities and donate to food banks. Pupils are eager to do even

more to support good causes in their locality. Leaders have made secure plans to strengthen pupils' involvement in this endeavour.

Trustees and the local advisory committee work closely together to hold leaders to account for the quality of education that pupils receive. Trustees, committee members and leaders have taken effective steps to reduce staff's workload. They prioritise the morale and well-being of staff. As a result, staff feel very well supported by leaders. They described the school as being like a family to which they are proud to belong.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The school has a strong culture of safeguarding. Leaders regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the systems that they have in place to help to keep pupils safe. Staff receive up-to-date training in child protection. They identify the early signs that may suggest that a pupil is at risk of harm. Leaders work closely with external agencies to provide pupils and their families with the timely support that they need.

Pupils develop a comprehensive knowledge of how to stay healthy and safe. For example, they understand how to get support from trusted adults, should they have any concerns. Pupils learn about the risks that they may encounter while using the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, leaders have not identified precisely enough the most important knowledge that pupils should learn and when this should happen. This hinders how deeply some pupils learn new topics and concepts. Leaders should finalise their curriculum design to ensure that all staff know what to teach and when across all subjects.
- Leaders have not made sure that staff deliver the phonics programme consistently well. From time to time, this hinders how accurately a small number of pupils learn to read. Leaders should ensure that all staff deliver the phonics programme with fidelity.

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, Fir Bank Primary School, to be good in February 2014.

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 | 146813 |
| Local authority | Oldham |
| Inspection number | 10268528 |
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 3 to 11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 232 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Iain Windeatt |
| Headteacher | Rachael McLaughlin |
| Website | www.firbankprimary.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Fir Bank Primary School converted to become an academy school in February 2019. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The school is part of The Oak Trust.
- Since the predecessor school was last inspected, a new acting headteacher has taken up post.
- Leaders do not make use of alternative provision for pupils.
- Leaders provide a breakfast club for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and religious education. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject

leaders and visited a sample of lessons. He spoke with teachers and with pupils about their learning. He also looked at samples of pupils' work.

- The inspector observed pupils from Years 1 to 3 reading with a familiar adult. He also discussed reading with a group of older pupils.
- The inspector spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at school. He took account of the responses to Ofsted's pupil survey.
- The inspector observed how pupils behaved around the school, including at breaktime and at lunchtime.
- The inspector met with the headteacher and other leaders of the school. He met with the joint chief executive officers and the trustees of The Oak Trust. The inspector also met with members of the local advisory committee, including the chair.
- The inspector held a telephone call with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector reviewed school policies and procedures, including those relating to safeguarding. He scrutinised documentation, such as training records. The inspector discussed safeguarding with trustees, committee members, leaders and staff.
- The inspector took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff. He spoke with staff about their workload and well-being.
- The inspector took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. He met with some parents at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

David Lobodzinski, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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