Inspection of Fir Vale School

Owler Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S4 8GB

Inspection dates:	25 and 26 February 2025
The quality of education	**Requires improvement**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Requires improvement**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Requires improvement**
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Rachel Smith. This school is a single academy trust, which means the trust board also has responsibility for running the school. The board of trustees is co-chaired by Usma Saeed and Tina Ball.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend Fir Vale School are part of an outward-looking school, which has forged strong community links. Pupils benefit from strong links with community leaders, groups and families. The school invests in the community, and the community invests in the school. Teachers encourage pupils and staff to treat each other with care and compassion. The school celebrates differences and unites behind what each pupil has in common. They are members of the Fir Vale family.

The school has implemented changes to the curriculum structure, teaching and learning. However, not all pupils have benefited from these changes. They have not led to strong results in Year 11 published outcomes.

Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is calm. However, some pupils report difficulties moving around the school and poor behaviour in transitions between parts of the school day. Staff are available to support pupils at these times. Attendance remains too low for some pupils. A small proportion of pupils do not attend school regularly, which causes them to have gaps in their learning.

The school offers a range of enrichment options in classes and beyond. The pupils enjoy clubs and activities like sports, crafts, hobbies and residential trips. Pupils have representation in school matters. Pupils express their views to staff through the junior leadership team, form representatives and a range of pupil ambassadors. At Fir Vale, staff listen to the voices of the pupils.

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

The curriculum is inconsistent. In some areas, pupils are developing detailed knowledge. For example, in English, they use wide-ranging vocabulary in their writing and speaking. Yet, in other curriculum areas, the school does not fully know how well pupils are learning. Lessons in the school now match the new lesson structure approaches. Staff use school initiatives, such as the 'Do now' and 'Pink task' times. These actions are more routinely implemented but are not yet yielding better subject knowledge for all pupils. Reading is prioritised in all subjects. The school identifies where pupils are at the early stages of reading. Knowledgeable staff provide prompt help to improve their reading. These pupils catch up with their peers.

Skilled staff support pupils who are new to the country. Staff assist and translate for pupils and their families. This helps parents and pupils feel part of the school community. The school know and support pupils with additional needs well. This helps all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), feel a welcome and important part of the whole school community.

Pupils generally behave well in class. However, some instances of disruption do occur. Staff manage disruptions efficiently so pupils can return to learning. The number of pupils who are suspended is high. In addition, while the level of pupil truancy is improving, this remains a focus for the school. If pupils struggle to settle, the school provides them with

additional support. However, the school is keen to ensure these processes do not result in lost learning. Pupils are provided with subject-linked work when they are unable to remain in the classroom.

Attendance is improving for most pupils who have previously been absent too often. However, attendance remains low for a proportion of pupils, which includes some pupils with SEND. Leaders know that this absence from school interrupts learning and hinders social development for these pupils. The school is working with families and pupils in a number of different ways to remove barriers to attending. Some of these initiatives are new. The large pastoral and attendance teams in school are reviewing trends and themes to help them understand how best they can improve the support available for pupils and families.

Pupils experience a rich personal development offer. These include daily tutor sessions, taught times, drop-down days and broader experiences. The school takes practical steps to support pupils should they miss these sessions. The pupils enjoy activities such as culture week, during which they celebrate differences through music, dress and food. This has helped establish a deeper understanding and appreciation of different faiths. Educational visits, ranging from sports fixtures to residential events, extend what pupils learn in the classroom. Pupils engage well with leadership opportunities. Examples of pupils taking on extra responsibilities include cadets, health ambassadors and the youth parliament. These opportunities have helped the pupils grow in confidence, supporting their self-esteem and well-being.

The governors and staff have created a caring ethos. The school connects with the local community and builds trust well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum offer is not fully embedded in all areas. As a result, the school's ambitions for what pupils should know and remember are not realised, and pupils do not achieve as well as they could. The school must, with pace, ensure that the intended curriculum is fully embedded and monitored to ensure the pupils are supported to know and understand more in all subjects.
- Too many pupils are absent too often from school. This means they develop gaps in learning. The school must continue to develop and strengthen its work to remove any barriers to pupil attendance so that all pupils attend school regularly.
- The school does not have strong quality assurance processes. This means that it does not have the quality of information it needs to improve provision. The school should develop better systems for checking the impact of its work.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the definition of children in need of help and protection; pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's pupil premium funding (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138925
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	10346470
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	983
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Co-chair of trust	Usma Saeed
Co-chair of trust	Tina Ball
Headteacher	Rachel Smith
Website	firvale.com
Dates of previous inspection	18 and 19 October 2022, 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. Almost half of the pupils are of Slovakian Roma heritage. Over three-quarters of pupils have English as an additional language.
- The school currently uses one registered alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement 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. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and

management). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation of the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic on the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The lead inspector met with members of the local governing body, a representative from Learn Sheffield and an external school improvement partner.
- During the inspection, inspectors met with other senior and middle leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, personal development, careers, attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including early reading, mathematics, geography, history and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Members of the inspection team looked at a range of documentation regarding the support pupils with SEND receive. Inspectors looked at the quality of the provision for pupils with SEND across the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation including minutes of governance meetings.
- Inspectors looked at a range of information regarding behaviour. Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils at social times.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils and staff formally and informally throughout the inspection. Responses to staff, pupil and parent surveys were considered by the inspection team.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.

Inspection team

Richard Jones, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Matthew Vellensworth	His Majesty's Inspector
Penny McDermott	Ofsted Inspector
Katie North	Ofsted Inspector

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