



# Fir Vale School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 131546  
**Local Authority** Sheffield  
**Inspection number** 293778  
**Inspection date** 14 November 2006  
**Reporting inspector** John Young HMI

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

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|---|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>                     | Secondary          | <b>School address</b>   | Owler Lane             |
| <b>School category</b>                    | Community          |                         | Sheffield              |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>                | 11–16              |                         | South Yorkshire S4 8GB |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>                   | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b> | 0114 2439391           |
| <b>Number on roll (school)</b>            | 760                | <b>Fax number</b>       | 0114 2611640           |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>              | The governing body | <b>Chair</b>            | Tina Bell              |
|   |                    | <b>Headteacher</b>      | Mrs Lesley Bowes       |
| <b>Date of previous school inspection</b> | 19 November 2001   |                         |                        |

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|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b> | <b>Inspection date</b> | <b>Inspection number</b> |
| 11–16            | 14 November 2006       | 293778                   |

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Fir Vale is a popular school with more requests for places than the school can accommodate. The school's student population is ethnically diverse and the vast majority of students speak English as an additional language. Most students live in areas containing significant pockets of deprivation and the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is three times the national average. On entry into school students' attainment is well below average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above the national average. The school has specialist Business and Enterprise status and has developed its own extended schools provision. In addition, the school has gained the Sportsmark award, Investors in People accreditation, as well as the Healthy Schools standard. The school has received the Princess Diana award for peer mediation and is an accredited training centre for the European Computer Driving Licence. Fir Vale school is part of the local Excellence in Cities cluster (EIC).

## Key for inspection grades

|         |              |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  |
| Grade 2 | Good         |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   |

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Fir Vale is an outstanding school and provides excellent value for money. The school has successfully addressed many of the areas for development highlighted by the last inspection. It continues to effectively tackle the deeper rooted and on-going challenges, particularly in relation to ensuring the curriculum and teaching are accessible for all students, mainly those with low levels of literacy and a poor command of English. Fir Vale is an inclusive school and its students are fortunate to benefit from such high quality provision. Evidence of the school's effectiveness can be found in all aspects of

its work and it has excellent capacity to continue this improvement.

The standards reached by students are broadly average but their achievement is outstanding. They make progress at a rate that is much better than would be expected, particularly given their starting points, which are well below average on entry. This is confirmed by very positive added value scores and successful achievement of challenging school targets at both key stages. Given the high proportion of students with

English as an additional language the standard of reading is low and, notwithstanding the good strategies already in place, the school knows it still has work to do in improving standards.

Leadership and management at all levels are highly effective and ensure that the school has clear educational direction and functions well on a day-to-day basis. Rigorous monitoring and accurate evaluation of students, staff and whole-school performance help to further promote students' achievement. Governors are equally effective and undertake their duties very well.

The quality of provision is exemplary in almost every aspect. Students make excellent progress at this school because of their positive attitudes to learning, good quality teaching, the excellent care, guidance and support they receive, together with a well matched curriculum. Provision for students' overall personal development and well-being

is good. They are well behaved, attendance is good and they are very well supported in

their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff make pupils' learning

enjoyable and the positive relationships, high expectations and aspirations that exist amongst staff and students result in a very purposeful learning environment throughout the school. The school has developed its own extended schools provision which provides a range of valuable community services and activities. Parents recognise the value of the school's work and feel their views are taken into account.

Specialist status is having a positive impact on the school's curriculum and extra curricular activities and provides increased choice of subjects and the opportunity for students to take part in extended work experience placements. Teachers are increasingly using aspects of business and enterprise as part of their lessons. The school's specialist status along with the very good extended schools opportunities provided are having a very positive effect upon students' achievement. The school met

the majority of its specialist school performance targets in 2006.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure that all subjects help to develop students' reading skills.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Students' achievement is outstanding when set against their starting points, which is well

below average on entry overall. In both 2005 and 2006 the school exceeded its targets and the contextualised value added score shows that students made excellent progress between Key Stages 3 and 4 in 2005. Similarly, results in 2006, show progress between these Key Stages was also outstanding.

At Key Stage 3 the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or better in the national tests are still below the national average but have risen year-on-year. Significant improvement

has been made in English, with 58% of pupils reaching Level 5 or better in 2006 compared with 49% in 2005. This is impressive when set against a context of over 78% of students speaking English as an additional language and the high number of refugee and asylum seeker students with little or no command of English at entry. However, students' reading skills require further improvement. At Key Stage 4 standards are currently below the national average but also on a rising trend.

The school sets challenging targets and is working effectively with a number of external partners, including the local authority, local EIC cluster and partner schools and colleges to support the achievement of its students.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The personal development and well-being of students are good. There is a pleasant and welcoming ambience as students arrive in the morning. The live piano music is enjoyed by many. This sets the tone for a calm, orderly approach to learning, although punctuality by some students to lessons needs to be improved.

Students act sensibly when they socialise before school and at lunchtimes, behaviour around school and in lessons is good. Students' receive good guidance on the benefits of adopting healthy lifestyles and their adherence to safe practice is good. Students' many achievements are celebrated, for instance on winning the weekly attendance competition. Attendance is much improved and is now above average. Students told inspectors that they enjoy school and many take part in the wide range of activities provided for them. Students' understand and value others' faiths, linguistic and cultural differences. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Students make a good contribution to the community, for instance through community festival links and work with local primary schools. Students are developing into confident and polite young people. All this, plus the excellent curriculum provided, help prepare students very well for their future lives and careers.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Senior managers make accurate judgements when assessing lessons and take appropriate action on the few occasions when teaching is not good enough. The best learning takes place when lessons are well paced, stimulating and challenging. These lessons often have a range of activities and opportunities to learn in a variety of ways. Most students settle quickly and are keen to be involved in their lessons. Many teachers provide opportunities for students to speak and describe their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to make lessons come alive, exciting and relevant for all students. This practice contrasts with the few less successful lessons where mundane tasks cause students to lose interest. The majority of teachers mark books well, giving students clear points for improvement. On occasion, however, the quality of marking is not good enough: it is cursory and does not tell students how to improve their work in order to attain higher standards. The quality of teaching is positively influenced by the high quality of care, guidance and support that students receive: it is the combination of the two that results in their excellent achievement.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 1**

The curriculum is outstanding. It has been expertly planned and the school provides a range of tailored learning opportunities and pathways which meet the varied needs and interests of all its students. The programme is characterised by an excellent range of academic, creative and vocational courses, which make very good use of local partnerships. For example, the 'It's Your Call' initiative is designed specifically for students at risk of dropping out of school and has successfully boosted their achievement and improved their attendance. Similarly, the 'Cellar Space' community project, the 'not school' programme and Sheffield College provision is educating effectively some vulnerable pupils off-site. The school gives a very good emphasis to the development of basic skills and suitable students can access a range of NVQ Level 1 and Level 2 courses. Work experience and enterprise courses give an excellent practical grounding in work related skills.

Students are given very good support and guidance when making curricular choices as they move through the school and very good links exist with a number of external providers and the Connexions service. The school's appointment of an effective information and communication technology (ICT) strategy manager is ensuring that ICT is utilised very well to promote learning across the curriculum. Provision is also enhanced by a variety of well attended extra curricular activities including music, sports, drama and ICT clubs. Extended schools' provision such as breakfast clubs, specialist tuition and study clubs, alongside a range of community events and activities such as adult learning classes, are having a significant impact.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The care, guidance and support provided for all pupils are outstanding. The quality of academic and pastoral guidance is impressive and all staff are involved in supporting and guiding students so that they can achieve their potential. Any concerns are identified quickly and students' work is constantly monitored so that intervention strategies can be put in place. Those youngsters in danger of not coming to school or at risk of underachieving are given every possible help and support, with the school often involving appropriate outside agencies. The school constantly measures and evaluates the success of these and other approaches so that they can provide for and respond to changing needs of their students. The provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is very good. Procedures for the safeguarding of children are known by all staff and, when needed, they operate them effectively. Students receive appropriate and timely advice and guidance on courses of study and career progression. Form tutors are becoming more involved in monitoring students' academic progress, liaising with the Student Support Officers who provide very good pastoral support. This holistic approach to youngsters' welfare contributes very strongly to their excellent achievement. The school has successfully moved to involving parents and carers more in supporting their child's progress by introducing workshops for parents to develop their study support skills. This has proved popular and highly effective.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

Leadership and management of the school are outstanding at all levels. The headteacher is inspirational, and is ably supported by her senior and middle managers in providing very clear educational direction. The impact of leadership and management is evident in the very effective monitoring and evaluation and consequent improvement of the school's performance in key areas of its work. Self-evaluation is systematic and accurate and takes account of the views of all parties, including the local community, parents and the students. The outstanding progress students make is testament to the ability of managers to embed a sense of corporate responsibility amongst staff and to skilfully align their expertise and high commitment to ensure students reach their potential.

The school's commitment to inclusion means that equality of opportunity is promoted very well. Any discrimination is effectively tackled so that all students achieve as well as they can. Procedures for safeguarding children are exemplary and students' well-being is effectively promoted.

Staff are held to account for the quality of their work through performance management, whilst being well supported by on-going training and professional development opportunities.

Links with parents are very good and the extended nature of the school's provision means that many of the perceived barriers between school and the local community have been broken down. Governors undertake their duties very well. Link governors for each aspect of the school's work ensure that governors have a firm grasp of how well the school is performing and they are well placed to provide both challenge and support, which they do effectively. Compliance with statutory requirements is excellent and resources are deployed and used very effectively to provide excellent value for money. The school has excellent capacity to make any necessary improvements.



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## Inspection judgements

|   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | <b>School Overall</b> |
|---|-----------------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 1   |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 1   |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 1   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | 1   |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 1 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 1 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress                              | 1 |

### Personal development and well-being

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners   | 2 |
| The attendance of learners  | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 2 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 1 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 1 |

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Leadership and management

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 1   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 1   |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets   | 1   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 1   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money  | 1   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 1   |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?  | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures?   | No  |
| Does this school require a notice to improve?  | No  |

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for talking to us and making us so welcome on our recent visit. We saw your lessons, looked at your work and read the results of questionnaires completed by you and your parents/carers: they proved very helpful.

Here is a summary of our main findings which I hope will be of interest to you.

- This is an outstanding school which is very well led and managed.
- Teaching is good and you have very positive attitudes to learning.
- The progress you make is exceptional when compared with your starting points.
- You really enjoy coming to school, feel safe and you know who to approach if you have problems, confident in the knowledge that your concerns will be dealt with.
- The curriculum is excellent, is well matched to your needs and interests and you enjoy the extra-curricular music, sports, drama and ICT clubs.
- The quality of care, guidance and support you receive is excellent and this contributes to the good progress you make during your time at the school.
- You get on really well with staff and the school does a good job of supporting your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school is encouraging you to develop workplace skills that will contribute to your future economic well-being.

The staff in your school know what needs to be done to improve things further. We agree with them that they need to:

- ensure that all subjects help to develop your reading skills.

We ask you to do all you can to support staff in making your school even better.