

# Firwood High School

Stitch Mi Lane, Bolton, Lancashire, BL2 4HU

**Inspection dates** 28–29 November 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- It sets the standard for the inclusion and integration of severely disabled young people.
- From low and often very low starting points students make good progress in learning. Parents are delighted with the progress their children make and in their happiness at school.
- The sixth form is outstanding. It prepares the young people exceptionally well for life beyond school, including moving into paid employment.
- A relatively high proportion of students have very challenging behaviour. The school is exceptionally effective in supporting these students.
- Teaching is good. Some is outstanding. Teamwork between teachers, teaching assistants and welfare staff is exceptional. The commitment to students is of the highest order. Students feel safe, and their personal development is outstanding.
- The move to a new building that is fully integrated with a mainstream school was a bold step. It has gone well. Teachers are developing their practice to make the most of the state-of-the-art facilities now available to them.
- Leadership is exceptional. Governance is good. Leaders are clear-sighted, determined and effective in their pursuit of what is best for the students. Very effective leadership is also demonstrated by the assistant headteachers. The school is outward looking and makes a significant positive contribution to understanding disability well beyond the school boundary.
- The school is in an excellent position to improve further and become an outstanding school.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teachers have not yet fully adapted to new ways of teaching made possible within the new building, making best use of its new facilities in art, science, technology, music and physical education.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 lessons, including a session with Year 14 students held at Bolton Town Hall.
- Discussions were held with senior staff, teachers and support staff. Inspectors talked informally with students. Discussions were also held with members of the governing body and with therapists who work at the school.
- Parents' views were established by an interview with a group of parents, through the 5 responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View), and by reference to the results of a recent survey of parents carried out by the school.

## Inspection team

Brian Padgett, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Paul Edmondson

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The school provides for students with complex learning difficulties. A high proportion has challenging behaviour. The main categories of need are severe learning difficulty, profound and multiple learning difficulty and autistic spectrum condition. Many students have additional medical and special education needs.
- The school moved to new, purpose-built accommodation in April 2012. It shares its site with Bolton St Catherine's Academy. The school shares several facilities, such as Reception and the restaurant. The headteacher and Chair of the Governing Body of the academy are members of the school's governing body.
- Students enter Firwood High from a number of local authority special and mainstream schools. The local authority is responsible for placing students at the school. Most students are boys and are of White British heritage. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average and five students are in the care of the local authority. The school receives the additional government funding known as the pupil premium for these students.
- The school has achieved many awards and accreditations including, most recently, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Quality Standard awards for parental engagement (gold), cultural diversity (gold), and its Research Charter Mark.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching from good to outstanding by further developing the teaching of individual subjects, to make best use of the new facilities and of teachers' subject expertise.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with a wide range of abilities, from the lowest levels of knowledge, skills and understanding to those usually seen in children entering primary schools. A proportion of students have challenging behaviour, some of an extreme nature, which makes learning even more difficult for them.
- The vast majority of students make good progress, at expected or above expected levels. There is little or no variation in the progress made by different groups of students. Rather less good progress is made by students with complex learning needs and with very challenging behaviour, as their disabilities sometimes mean they are not in the best position to begin to learn.
- Effective learning takes place in all subjects and areas of the curriculum. However, progress in communication skills, including reading and writing where appropriate, is most sought after, as is progress in personal and social development. In these areas of learning, students make substantial improvement, including those with very challenging behaviour.
- More-able students, including some who attend lessons in the adjoining academy alongside mainstream students, gain accreditations and qualifications equivalent to a pass at GCSE.
- In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students prepare for the world of work. Through vocational studies and work experience, within school and with outside providers, students gain the skills they need to function and succeed in the outside world, such as to travel independently. The most-able students in Year 14 undertake a particular programme, based in the Town Hall, which focuses specifically on skills for employment. A half of these young people secure paid employment. Feedback from employers concerning students' attitudes and contribution to the workplace is very positive.

### The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers plan interesting and relevant lessons, often of a sensory nature. Their planning is based on a clear understanding of students' disabilities and learning needs, referenced to the student's individual education plans and to their stage of development within the subject.
- The new facilities provided within the new building have opened up many possibilities for teaching and learning, in particular, for the specialist teaching of subjects in purpose-built classrooms. This represents a significant change for teachers and students alike. The school is, quite rightly, approaching change carefully, as many students find changes in routine disorientating.
- Relationships between students and staff are very strong. These comprise relationships with teachers, with teaching support staff and with welfare support staff. All staff demonstrate the greatest levels of dedication to the students. They love their work and understand its importance. As a consequence, the school is a welcoming and joyful place.
- Teachers have high expectations of students. In the majority of lessons they push students to achieve their very best and do not accept second best. They are firm and clear in their expectations. Teaching support staff play a very effective role in promoting learning. They know and understand students exceptionally well, and judge a student's slightest nuance and response to stimulus and know, therefore, when learning has taken place.
- Relationships between teachers and students change as students move into the sixth form. There is a subtle shift from direct teaching to facilitating learning and putting the students in the driving seat. The school has specialist status in applied learning. Staff are expert in supporting young people to apply their skills to real situations and to meet and work with people in the adult world of work. This was superbly exemplified in the school's café, 'the Bistro', which is operated by the students, and in the Project Search programme, where more-able Year 14 students prepared to enter paid employment.

**The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Regard for their children's safety and well-being is a paramount concern of parents. The parents are used to fighting for what is best for their children. The fact that parents have complete confidence in the Firwood staff is a good indicator of the school's effectiveness. Students feel safe. They enjoy coming to school.
- The behaviour of the majority of students in lessons and around the school is very good. They are positive, open and welcoming of visitors. A group of students work within the academy and choose to wear the academy uniform. They mix freely with students in the academy. Within joint spaces, such as in the restaurant, it is difficult to identify Firwood students from those of St Catherine's. Parents were initially worried whether their children would suffer discrimination when the school joined with a mainstream school. This has not happened; their fears have been allayed.
- The school has developed considerable expertise in supporting students with very challenging behaviour. The staff are skilled and highly trained in managing behaviour. If necessary, the curriculum is adapted for students. Some students are at an enhanced level of the autistic spectrum, with behaviour that is extreme. The school meets the needs of these students without the need of long-term residential care, and this is a major success. Through undertaking research, observation, analysis of observations, the construction of action plans and the wide involvement of other professionals and therapists, the school successfully meets the challenge presented by these pupils.
- Attendance is excellent. Despite unavoidable absences for medical reasons, attendance at the school is higher than in most mainstream secondary schools. Data for persistent absence and for short-term exclusions is similarly positive.

**The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The headteacher and senior leaders of the school demonstrate an exceptionally clear sense of direction and problem-solving ability in their leadership of the school. Their vision of what the integration and full inclusion of students with complex learning difficulties should look like is realised in the new school and its co-location with St Catherine's Academy. Leaders' concern with the quality of students' life beyond school, especially with obtaining paid employment where possible, has resulted in practices that have enabled the school to lead on research, train others, develop productive partnerships and to evolve the curriculum.
- The monitoring of teaching quality and of students' performance is rigorous. Teachers are subject to senior management 'drop-ins' into lessons and teachers are held accountable for students' progress through performance management. Honest school self-evaluation leads to coherent, concise improvement plans.
- Leadership roles are well distributed amongst staff, who show a willingness to take on extra responsibilities. The leadership of parental engagement, of behaviour and for the sixth form are good examples where assistant headteachers have developed aspects of the school's work very effectively. More generally, all teachers and staff have a strong sense of ownership for improvement, which makes Firwood an outward-looking and innovatory school.
- The promotion of equality of opportunities is excellent. The school is deeply involved in promoting disability awareness in other schools. The joint working between Firwood and St Catherine's is of exceptional quality, involving the two-way flow of staff, students and facilities.
- The curriculum is of excellent quality, with potential for even further improvement as the school develops the use of its new facilities. The curriculum is broad, balanced and made particularly relevant for the students by adaptation; for example, to make lessons sensory and to focus on communication skills. The curriculum for students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form emphasises building skills for the future, promoting enterprise, independence, meaningful work experience and, for the most able, preparing for paid employment. There are many enrichment

activities over lunchtime and after school for students to enjoy.

- Safeguarding arrangements are thorough and robust.
- The pupil premium has been used effectively to provide extra computer tablets for students' use and to contribute to the fitting-out of the sensory theatre.
- The local authority provides a reasonable level of support for the school through commissioned services.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body provides good oversight of the school. It was closely involved in the design of the new school and in ensuring the interests of students and the parent community were met in what proved to be a very successful transfer. It is supportive of joint working; for example, with the local authority and Remploy to secure employment for disabled young people. There is very close working with the academy, with the Chairs and headteachers represented on both governing bodies. Overall, the governing body is well-informed, well-organised and business-like.
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## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	105278
<b>Local authority</b>	Bolton
<b>Inspection number</b>	400772

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	95
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	35
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mavis Abel
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jonathan Steele
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 April 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	01204 333044
<b>Fax number</b>	Not applicable
<b>Email address</b>	watkinson@firwood.bolton.sch.uk

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