

Firwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105278
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	301474
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Saleem Hussain

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	89
6th form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mavis Abel
Headteacher	Dr Jonathan Steele
Date of previous school inspection	8 December 2003
School address	Crompton Way Bolton Lancashire BL2 3AF
Telephone number	01204 333044
Fax number	01204 333045

Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Firwood caters for students who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties and students with autistic spectrum disorder. Some students also have significant behavioural difficulties. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. One quarter of students are from minority ethnic groups. A significant number of students are at the early stages of English language acquisition. Many students take free school meals. The school has specialist status in learning and cognition and has gained the Healthy Schools Award and Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This outstanding school is particularly effective. Representative views from parents include, 'you couldn't wish for a more caring school, staff have brought out the best in my child and given her the confidence to learn very well, despite her difficulties'. Though standards are low, achievement is outstanding given the severity of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Achievement is excellent across the school because the quality of teaching is outstanding. All students of school leaving age successfully complete a range of external accreditations. Accreditation includes areas such as communication, numeracy, and information and communication technology (ICT). The headteacher's vision on inclusion has spread across the school community. The school's success is underpinned by particularly effective relationships with parents and the wider community. Links include a mainstream secondary school where one of Firwood's Year 10/11 classes is based. Other students are also able to participate in carefully planned inclusion activities. Personal development is outstanding because students receive the very best care, support and guidance from highly dedicated and skilled staff. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Leadership and management have developed a stimulating and exciting curriculum which enables all students to flourish and achieve as well as they can.

Students love school and the challenging learning opportunities they have. Students adopt healthy lifestyles particularly well through the healthy schools initiative and there is a very high level of participation in activities such as hydrotherapy, swimming and dance. The nomination for sports person of the week encourages students to take exercise within their limits. Students work within a friendly atmosphere where the attitudes and behaviour of other students is outstanding. Consequently, students feel very safe and secure as they learn. Any challenging behaviour is managed very effectively. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding. The school council's contribution to recent staff recruitment was remarkable. Applicants for senior management positions were asked questions like, 'how would you make our lessons more interesting?' Many students are involved in the Bolton Music Festival every year and there is much fund-raising for good causes. The school admirably fulfils one of its key aims of preparing students for the future. The curriculum includes many chances to learn about personal care, money, further education and jobs. Economic and industrial understanding days are frequently held and older students can gain valuable work-related experiences in the community.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. Curriculum leaders work together very effectively and ensure that students get the most out of a seamless provision which helps them build on their learning progressively. Governors make an excellent contribution to school development. Self-evaluation at all levels is accurate, penetrating and insightful. Any underperformance is identified quickly through rigorous monitoring. Subsequent intervention is very effective and ensures that improvement takes place. The school has improved markedly since the last inspection and is now outstanding in all aspects. This demonstrates excellent capacity for improvement. In view of the exceptional outcomes, the school provides outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are particularly effective. Provision is excellent and the curriculum provides high levels of challenge for students of all abilities. Achievement is outstanding.

Students gain many accreditations by the time they leave the sixth form, including in subjects such as 'community', 'home management' and 'the world of work'. Personal development is excellent and students blossom into mature and thoughtful citizens. Students develop a strong sense of responsibility. Prayers in assembly are often led by sixth form students and many help younger students by acting as play leaders.

What the school should do to improve further

There are no significant areas for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Parental comments include, 'the school has identified skills that my child has that even I didn't know about, and I'm amazed at how much the smallest achievement is celebrated.' Though standards are low because of students' learning difficulties, achievement is outstanding. Specialist school status has impacted very strongly on the development of communication skills. Communication and language development is always a strong focus in learning. The spoken word is accompanied by skilled signing or the use of symbols, pictures and aids which enable students to understand and be understood. Through outstanding support in the classroom from bi-lingual staff, students with English as a second language also make excellent progress. In the current school year, all students of school leaving age have successfully completed accreditations in different modules, meeting challenging targets. Many of the oldest students gained a 'practical skills' accreditation and developed skills further through college or work-related experiences.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is very effective and leads to outstanding personal development. Exceptional relationships between students and staff foster trust, respect and self-confidence. All daily routines are designed to promote confidence and as much independence as possible. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students' enjoyment of school life is reflected in outstanding rates of attendance. Students take immense pride in their work and delight in each other's achievements. The school council is a very influential group. It helps students to develop high levels of awareness about making decisions and good citizenship.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Particular strengths in teaching include managing behaviour, teaching basic skills, presentation which secures the interest of students from the outset, chances to learn through practical experiences and a brisk pace in the work. Consequently, students are engaged very well in learning, produce much high quality work and

achieve especially well. Teaching assistants make an outstanding contribution to the success of lessons through very skilful support, taking full account of students' individual needs. A typical example of high quality teaching was seen in literacy where students learnt especially well about how horror and mystery is created in a story. Students shrieked with excitement and anticipation as the story unfolded through expressive storytelling by adults. Work included making biscuits to show the facial expressions of characters and this added to the memorable learning experience. Assessment and marking of work is outstanding and underpins students' exceptional progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. Excellent provision in numeracy and literacy helps students to gain many basic skills and prepare especially well for the future. The curriculum is broadened greatly through the excellent link with a local secondary school where many students enjoy lessons including physical education, ICT, art and music. Students also enjoy swimming and hydrotherapy at other venues in the community. Older students attend college courses in work-related learning, in areas such as retail, catering, construction skills, and hair and beauty. Several students obtain work experience in offices, garden centres, supermarkets and other settings. Visits out of school include art galleries, theatres and museums and help to enrich learning. Year 7 students recently went to a country park as part of their studies in nature and this deepened their understanding of habitats.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Excellent academic guidance enables students to achieve as well as they can. Representative comments from parents included, 'all staff are wonderful, including the unsung heroes who look after the intimate care of our children, I have nothing but praise, I've never had to worry about the care, health, safety or education of my child'. Arrangements to ensure child protection, and health and safety are in place and regularly reviewed. Teaching assistants stay with their class group through the day to ensure they always have a well known adult with them. Excellent links in the community include medical practitioners, therapists and advisory groups. These links are very effective in ensuring the care and well-being of all students. An achievement assembly is held each week and this is very effective in raising students' self-belief and aspirations. Students especially value the student of the week award.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The impact is seen in students' excellent progress. The leadership of the school is successfully focused on achievement and promoting the personal development and well-being of all students. Excellent monitoring and evaluation of performance

enable the school to develop particularly effective strategies to support learning. Self-evaluation is particularly effective. A common sense of purpose is evident across the school. Inclusion is at the heart of the school's work. The school is very successful in developing chances for students to experience mainstream activities. The school deservedly has an excellent reputation in the community. Parents are very appreciative of the school's work. Courses in subjects such as signing are helpful in promoting parental involvement in their children's learning. Resources such as electronic whiteboards and communication aids are very effectively used to support learning. The governing body is very supportive and acts as a 'critical friend' to the school. The school has fully addressed the issues identified at the last inspection and made many significant improvements.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	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	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

Inspection of Firwood School, Crompton Way, Bolton, Lancashire, BL2 3AF

Thank you for all your help during the inspection of your school and for making me so welcome. I really enjoyed my visit.

All the students at your school learn exceptionally well. Your school is outstanding because you are happy and you make excellent progress. I know that your parents or carers are delighted because you achieve so well. Your curriculum is among one of the best I have seen. The school provides outstanding care, support and guidance for you. I enjoyed your assembly about the work of the school council and the achievements of other students. I was impressed with the school council, in that the council was involved in appointing new senior staff recently and asked applicants some testing questions.

You all have outstanding attitudes to learning and your behaviour is very good. Attendance is excellent. Your attitudes towards healthy living are outstanding and I was also impressed by how well you adopt safe practices. Students with responsibilities do great jobs. I know that you are all concerned about the community you live in and you do a lot of fund-raising for those less fortunate than you are. Your personal development is excellent. I was pleased to see that teaching is outstanding and all adults help you to learn really well. I can see that the school is preparing you particularly well for the future. I know that you will carry on working hard and making the most of all your exciting learning chances.

Leadership and management of your school are outstanding. Your school is in very good hands. The headteacher, staff and governors are working incredibly hard to make sure you carry on doing especially well. The school's leaders have done a marvellous job in developing chances for many of you to join lessons in the mainstream secondary school. The full report about the school says all the things in this letter. The school knows exactly what to do to continue to improve so I have not made any further recommendations.

I know that you will carry on doing your best and achieving wonderful things. Keep up all your super work and thank you once again for making me so welcome.