

Firwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105278
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	336466
Inspection dates	19–20 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Marian Thomas

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	92
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Mavis Abel
Headteacher	Dr Jonathan Steele
Date of previous school inspection	11 July 2007
School address	Crompton Way Bolton Lancashire BL2 3AF
Telephone number	01204 333044
Fax number	01204 333045
Email address	steelej@firwood.bolton.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 12 lessons and saw 11 members of staff teach. They held meetings with two groups of pupils, the Chair of Governors, teaching and support staff as well as senior leaders and a parent. They observed the school's work, and looked at curriculum plans, children's progress data and safeguarding documentation. They also took into account the responses received from 32 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the progress made by pupils of all ages in the school
- how effectively teachers plan lessons for different groups of pupils
- how well the curriculum is adapted to meet the needs of all learners.

Information about the school

Firwood School caters for pupils who have severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties as well as pupils with autistic spectrum disorder who reside in the borough of Bolton. Many students also have significant behavioural difficulties. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. Approximately a quarter of students are from minority ethnic groups. A small minority of students are at the early stages of English language acquisition. A few students are in the care of the local authority. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above average. The school has gained Specialist School Status in Learning and Cognition and High Performing Specialist School Status in Applied Learning. It has also gained the Healthy Schools Award and Sportsmark. The school is soon to be co-located with a local Academy high school.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Firwood is a good school which has many strengths. The outstanding care, guidance and support which it provides for all pupils and the success with which their complex special needs are met underpin their good progress, both personally and academically. Parents and carers really appreciate the work of school staff in supporting their children. One commented: 'Firwood is a special school for special children run by special people'. The headteacher and senior leaders have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and generally ensure the quality of provision is at least good. Self-evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate and rigorous, and findings are acted upon to good effect. The school ensures barriers to learning are minimised. Since the last inspection the school has achieved a second specialist school status in applied learning. Partnerships with local organisations are very well established and pupils have an excellent understanding of the local community. In addition, global links to promote pupils' understanding of life in a multi-ethnic community are securely in place. Such strengths and improvements demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further. Pupils make good and often outstanding progress in their personal development and grow in confidence as they move through school. They thoroughly enjoy school and are extremely clear about how to stay healthy. Their behaviour is generally good and they feel safe. However, some pupils' behaviour becomes a little boisterous at times in the playground which can occasionally upset others. This is largely due to a lack of opportunity for constructive play in the main play area. Through specialist school funding, excellent links with outside agencies have been developed. This, coupled with effective staff training, ensures pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Teaching is good in the majority of classrooms and is based on clear assessment of pupils' learning needs. All groups of pupils, including those on the autistic spectrum and pupils who are looked after by the local authority, make equally good progress overall. However, in a small number of lessons the pace is too slow and teachers' planning does not always accurately reflect the needs of all learners. As a result, a number of pupils make less progress in these lessons.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' achievement:
 - by monitoring teachers' planning effectively to ensure it accurately reflects the needs of all pupils

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- by increasing the pace of learning in a few lessons to make the best use of learning time.
- Provide better play equipment in the large playground to engage pupils in purposeful play and improve behaviour at break times.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Pupils settle quickly in school because of the friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Staff assess pupils' learning needs effectively and engage them in learning. They set achievable targets for pupils in all key stages and these help them to achieve in all curriculum areas. This was demonstrated particularly well in an outstanding French lesson for pupils with severe autistic spectrum disorder (ASD). The lesson required pupils to answer questions in French and shake hands with staff. This was a remarkable achievement taking into account the severe emotional and behavioural needs of the exceptionally challenging pupils. The success of this lesson was attributable to the excellent knowledge of staff and the strength of teamwork.

All pupils who attend school have a statement of special educational needs. All have significant learning difficulties and some have a diagnosis of ASD. As a result, attainment for the majority of students is well below national expectations. Because the needs of individual pupils are recognised and well supported, all groups make similar progress. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and 5 engage well with learning because staff effectively build up pupils' self-esteem and provide a good range of academic and vocational courses. Consequently, pupils leave with a range of accreditations. Last year's school leavers successfully gained accreditations in numeracy, information and communication technology, personal skills, practical work skills, communication, leisure and home management.

Pupils feel safe and they think staff are supportive and help them. They enjoy school immensely. Pupils recognise the importance of eating healthy meals. For example, they were knowledgeable about which foods were healthy and which were not and used this information to advise the inspection team at lunchtime. Pupils really enjoy the sporting opportunities offered and appreciate the part sport plays in a healthy lifestyle. They have been successful in a range of sports including girls' wrestling.

Pupils make an excellent contribution to the community both in and outside school. They listen to and appreciate the needs of others and act as advocates for the schools' highly successful disability awareness training programme. This has increased their understanding of the needs of others. Their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is seen in the way in which they react to each other and take care of the environment.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

In classrooms across the school, behaviour is managed well. The behaviour of the most challenging pupils is exceptionally well-managed. This is due to an excellent behaviour management policy and very effective staff training, and ensures a conducive learning environment. Information and communication technology is used well in lessons to support learning and involve pupils in making choices. Most lessons are of good quality and as a result, pupils' progress is good overall in all areas of the curriculum. Teachers generally use assessment information well to inform pupils of their targets and they deploy support staff very effectively. However, the planning of some lessons lacks detail and does not meet the different needs of pupils within the class as effectively. In a small minority of classrooms, pupils with differing needs are given the same task and more able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged and so the pace of learning slows. Sometimes, the last part of the lesson is too short and learning finishes too soon. This reduces pupils' learning time and slows their progress.

The curriculum is excellent. It is well organised and is imaginatively enhanced by many visits and activities away from the classroom. A recent visit from an artist created a playground mosaic. Residential visits to varied locations help develop pupils' independence. Innovative partnerships with other local schools have resulted in visits and cultural exchanges. In Key Stage 4, a range of academic and vocational courses are

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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offered. These include courses on independent living and life skills. Together they contribute exceptionally well to students' development and future economic well-being. As a result of outstanding care, guidance and support, pupils feel there is always someone who will listen and help. One pupil with special educational needs expressed this well by saying: 'I feel very happy when I'm here. Everyone helps me'. A careful and thorough assessment is undertaken when pupils arrive at the school, which is then used to target support effectively. Vulnerable pupils are exceptionally well supported and this is helped by the excellent links with outside agencies. Transition arrangements are excellent, ensuring pupils smooth transition to the next phase in their lives.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The reflective leadership of the headteacher moves the school forward and ensures good outcomes for pupils. He is well supported by an effective and enthusiastic leadership team. A detailed assessment system ensures careful monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress. However, school leaders do not always monitor teachers' planning well enough to ensure lessons consistently meet the learning needs of all pupils.

The school has formed an excellent partnership with a secondary school with whom they are soon to be co-located. This partnership is driving improvement further. The school's governing body has implemented strong procedures to ensure the health and well-being of all pupils. Members offer valuable support to the school and challenge to senior leaders. Policies and procedures ensure all government safeguarding requirements are met and that practice is of a good standard. Leaders and managers have ensured that the school is a highly inclusive community. Equality of opportunity and the tackling of discrimination within school are excellent. Through its specialist school status, the school has built successful and innovative links with the local community. Links with the global community are also strongly developed through links with five schools in Pakistan. This gives pupils an excellent understanding of life in a multi-ethnic society.

The school very successfully engages all parents and carers. The work of school staff ensures they are kept well informed about their child's successes. Strong links with home are in place and as a result, parents value the work of the school. Excellent partnerships with a wide variety of agencies contribute significantly to pupils' well-being and progress. These include the school's direct involvement in research into new learning routes for pupils with special educational needs.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

Provision for sixth form students is sited within the main school building. This helps students to make a smooth transition. Staff work hard to address students' significant learning needs through an innovative curriculum which develops students' academic and independence skills well. Opportunities to practice skills for independent living are provided through partnerships with social service respite provision. Students who attend learn how to look after a home as well as developing a better understanding of personal hygiene. The school's leadership has dealt well with recent changes in the 14 to 19 curriculum. Through funding from their specialist status for applied learning, the school has developed an innovative partnership with a firm of employment consultants. Working with school staff, they aim to increase significantly the number of young people gaining employment on leaving school. Although the partnership is at an early stage of development, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils accessing work placements. Students clearly enjoy their time in the sixth form as they develop skills and accreditations which prepare them well for the next phase in their lives.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

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Views of parents and carers

Of the 32 questionnaires returned, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the school met the needs of their children well. A number made positive comments about the strength of support given to them and their children. Several praised the approachability of all staff and the way in which they listened to and acted upon parental concerns. These views matched those of the inspection team.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Firwood School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 32 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 92 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	25	78	6	19	0	0	1	3
The school keeps my child safe	23	72	9	28	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	23	72	8	25	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	63	11	34	0	0	1	3
The teaching is good at this school	24	75	8	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	69	8	25	0	0	1	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	59	13	41	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	63	12	38	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	23	72	7	22	1	3	1	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	16	50	16	50	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	63	11	34	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	23	72	8	25	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	23	72	8	25	0	0	1	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



21 April 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Firwood School, Bolton, BL2 3AF

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we visited your school. It was lovely to meet you all and to hear how much you enjoy coming to school. A special thank you to those of you who gave up lunchtime activities to talk to us and to those of you who helped us choose healthy food at lunchtime.

We agree with those of you that told us you think school is good. These are the things we liked the most:

- the kind and considerate way that you act towards each other and visitors to your school
- your excellent understanding of life in other countries and cultures
- your very good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles.

To make your school even better we have asked your headteacher and all the adults at your school to:

- make sure all of you are able to learn as much as possible in every lesson
- ensure you have more activities and things to do when you are in the playground to make playtimes more fun.

We wish you all the best for the future and know that you will all continue to work as hard as you can.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marian Thomas

Lead inspector

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