

Fir Vale School

Owler Lane, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S4 8GB

Inspection dates

6–7 March 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The school is recovering well from the shock of a critical incident.
- The new headteacher and staff have worked effectively to establish a calm and orderly environment. This has been achieved through necessarily high levels of supervision and exclusion.
- Leaders are raising standards of behaviour and tightening school procedures. However, the school has not yet established good behaviour. More needs to be done to promote the school's values and expectations to raise pupils' aspirations.
- Attendance is low and too many pupils are persistently absent.
- The curriculum does not make effective enough provision for low-attaining pupils and those with weak basic skills in English language and literacy. Leaders have plans to improve this.
- The quality of teaching is inconsistent. A few teachers do not manage behaviour in classrooms effectively enough. Some lessons do not meet the needs of the most able and least able. The quality of teachers' feedback varies so some pupils do not know how to improve. Standards of presentation in pupils' work are not consistently good.
- Subject leaders are not equally effective in ensuring good teaching and learning and good progress by pupils.
- In 2018, the GCSE outcomes were below average because the most and least able did not make enough progress.
- The governing body and school leaders have not engaged successfully enough with parents to support the education of Slovakian Roma pupils.

The school has the following strengths

- The new headteacher has brought about rapid improvement in the standards of behaviour. She leads by example and has won the confidence of pupils, staff and governors.
- Leaders know what to do to improve teaching and the curriculum and are acting quickly to bring this about.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve behaviour and punctuality, and reduce the need for exclusions over time by incrementally raising expectations and tightening school procedures.
- Increase attendance and reduce the persistent absence of Slovakian Roma pupils by working more closely and effectively with their families.
- Improve the quality and consistency of teaching, learning and assessment, and increase the progress and attainment of the most able and least able, by:
 - providing effective professional development
 - improving teachers' management of behaviour
 - ensuring that learning tasks meet the needs of the least able and challenge the most able
 - making sure that all lessons are interesting
 - improving the consistency and quality of teachers' feedback so that pupils know how to improve
 - improving the presentation of pupils' work
 - improving the quality and consistency of homework.
- Develop the curriculum so that it:
 - meets the needs of the least and the most able pupils
 - improves the outcomes for Slovakian Roma pupils
 - increases the literacy of pupils with weak basic skills in English
 - increases pupils' engagement, attendance and achievement
 - strengthens pupils' social skills
 - promotes British values and community cohesion
 - increases pupils' aspirations
 - develops pupils' understanding and experience of the world of work.
- Improve the consistency with which subject leaders bring about improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in their subject.
- Strengthen leaders' analysis and evaluation of improvement actions.
- Develop the school's relationships with the Slovakian Roma communities to promote parents' support for their children's education.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The headteacher is demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvements. Her determined actions have had a positive impact in a short time. She has quickly gained the confidence and respect of pupils, staff and governors.
- The headteacher has an accurate understanding of the school and its socio-economic context. She knows what needs to be done and has acted rapidly and effectively to make improvements. She has raised standards of behaviour. As a result, exclusions have risen because some pupils have been unwilling to comply with higher expectations.
- The headteacher leads strongly by example. Her visibility around the school promotes the standards she has set. Her presence encourages staff and pupils to apply school procedures consistently.
- The leadership of teaching and learning has had limited impact in improving weaker teaching. Senior leaders have identified aspects of teaching accurately but planned actions to improve teaching have not yet taken place. Senior leadership is in flux and has been strengthened with temporary appointments.
- Professional development has not been effective enough in ensuring consistently good teaching and effective management of behaviour in lessons. Staff are beginning to work collaboratively to develop the quality of teaching.
- The new Fir Vale learning standards provide an effective guide to improve the consistency of teaching. This is at an early stage of implementation. Activities for starting lessons are being used consistently. Application of the school policy on marking and assessment is inconsistent.
- The effectiveness of subject leaders is variable. As a result, teaching, learning and assessment are inconsistent.
- Leaders' use of data and the quality of monitoring and evaluation are not always sharp and precise.
- The curriculum does not fully meet the needs of all pupils. In 2018, the school entered two thirds of the pupils for EBacc subjects, much higher than the national average. As a result, pupils with typical knowledge and skills attained well in academic subjects. However, no pupils with low prior attainment achieved a grade 4 across all EBacc subjects. Leaders are rightly planning to introduce more practical subjects for low-attaining pupils, linked to post-16 opportunities in the local college.
- A programme of study covers the key areas of personal social and health education (PSHE). Assemblies reinforce these issues with guest speakers and one-off events. Leaders have correctly identified the need to improve the teaching of the PSHE curriculum.
- Specialist careers advice from an external agency provides effective support and information for individual pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The most able are mentored by university undergraduates to raise their aspirations. Pupils lack opportunities in the PSHE curriculum to gain information

about the full range of career pathways and apprenticeships, to develop employability skills, and experience the world of work.

- More needs to be done to promote the school's British values and behaviours and to strengthen community cohesion. The strategy for improving pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is not mapped out clearly enough. Diverse extra-curricular activities add to pupils' educational experience.
- Pupil premium funding has had a limited impact on improving the outcomes, behaviour and attendance of disadvantaged pupils. It has not improved the progress, attainment, attendance and behaviour of disadvantaged pupils of Slovakian Roma heritage.
- Most parents who responded to the Ofsted online questionnaire would recommend the school. Engagement with the Slovakian Roma community has not developed enough parental understanding and support for the school's work to educate their children. Recent initiatives to hold a Slovak church service in school on Sundays, sometimes attended by senior school leaders, and the appointment of more Roma speakers to the school staff have been well received by Slovakian Roma pupils.
- The provision for pupils with SEND is well supported by staff training about different types of special educational need. Staff accurately assess and communicate pupils' individual needs. A nurture group for pupils with high needs prepares them well for the day ahead.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is being used effectively to encourage reading, develop pupils' reading skills and improve their basic skills in numeracy. The impact of these programmes has been monitored effectively. New programmes have been introduced and the school is about to appoint a literacy leader to further develop this important area of work.
- Leaders have recognised the stress on staff caused by the critical incident and the demands of managing behaviour. Leaders have provided extra support for staff well-being and have introduced a sickness management procedure to reduce staff absence.
- Leaders and governors have made good use of the support offered by Learn Sheffield, the local authority and local school leaders to overcome recent difficulties.

Governance of the school

- The governing body has a wide range of expertise and demonstrates strong commitment to the school and community. However, the governing body lacks representation from parents and from the Slovakian Roma community.
- The governing body acted quickly and effectively to replace the headteacher who left. Governors are actively supporting the improvements introduced by the headteacher. They regularly check the procedures for safeguarding.
- A recent review of governance has contributed to the governing body's reflection and learning about events leading up to the critical incident. Governors have identified the need for more informal discussion with pupils and staff to identify concerns and to anticipate any difficulties.
- Governors have regular meetings with subject leaders about teaching and learning. They understand the data about pupils' attainment and progress. They provide good

support and challenge on outcomes, teaching and the curriculum. They understand the challenges faced by the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Staff are appropriately trained in the full range of safeguarding issues. Staff know what to do if they have any concerns about a pupil. Key staff meet regularly to consider safeguarding concerns. They coordinate their responses to issues and work collaboratively to support pupils and their families. Staff pay good attention to the mental health and well-being of individual pupils. Staff make sure pupils at alternative provision are safe.
- The site has a high level of security to prevent external intrusion. A recent local authority review of safeguarding identified minor actions for improvement which have been implemented. Leaders have introduced a new system for recording and communicating about safeguarding matters which is at an early stage of implementation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is inconsistent within and between subjects.
- In some lessons, teachers' ineffective use of the school's behaviour systems contributes to off-task behaviour and reduces pupils' learning. Teachers do not always challenge the use of derogatory language in lessons and around school.
- Some pupils do not engage in learning in some lessons because the range of activities is too narrow and uninteresting.
- In some lessons the challenge for the most able pupils is effective, for example in the use of higher-order, subject vocabulary. However, challenge for the most able is lacking in other teaching.
- In some classes, the content, resources and teaching style of the subject do not meet the needs of pupils with low prior attainment or with weak skills in English language.
- In some teaching, for example in science, the feedback from teachers and other pupils informs pupils well about how they are progressing. Pupils respond well which helps them to improve. However, in other teaching the use of feedback is not as effective and does not support pupils' progress.
- A few teachers do not check that pupils understand the text or the task. They do not identify why pupils do not get answers right and they do not correct their lack of understanding.
- The use of homework is inconsistent across the school.
- Many teachers use their strong relationships with students to engage them in learning.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge well in the planning and delivery of lessons.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Some pupils lack capacity to control their behaviour. Some lack confidence and aspiration to push themselves academically. Lack of skills in English and literacy limit some pupils' confidence in learning. Some pupils are articulate and erudite and develop strong personal, social and academic skills.
- The personal, social and health education curriculum does not promote pupils' social, emotional and mental health effectively enough.
- Advice and guidance on careers and post-16 options do not provide enough information to pupils or parents about different options and pathways. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop employability skills and experience the world of work.
- Effective provision meets the emotional needs of vulnerable pupils and pupils with SEND well. The internal exclusion unit is a calm and purposeful environment. The analysis of data to refine and target extra support for pupils' behaviour and well-being is underdeveloped.
- Leaders regularly check the welfare of pupils at alternative provision, including their attendance and academic progress.
- Pupils generally feel safe. However, they do not feel safe when fights occur. Pupils believe that the stricter behaviour policies have increased their security. They know which adults to report any concerns to. Pupils learn about the risks of being online and talk knowledgeably about how to stay safe. Pupils are aware of the dangers of knife crime, radicalisation and extremism.
- Pupils say that bullying is usually dealt with effectively. Most parents who responded to the Ofsted online survey said that the school deals effectively with bullying.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Last year, a school policy of reduced and low exclusions contributed to a deterioration in standards of behaviour, including a serious incident and a breakdown of order in school. To tackle poor behaviour, the new headteacher has rightly increased the use of exclusion to reset standards of behaviour. This has had a positive effect.
- Truancy was high. As a result of close supervision of pupils between lessons truancy has been much reduced, but it persists.
- The number of exclusions for violence and aggression has halved in the last two months. Exclusions for defiance have significantly reduced. The type of misbehaviour resulting in exclusion has decreased in seriousness. Now, most exclusions are for not

following the schools' expectations. This represents an important step forward in a journey to establish high standards of behaviour.

- The rapid improvement in behaviour demonstrates the success of leaders' strategies to win the compliance of pupils to the school's expectations. However, behaviour still requires much improvement.
- A few pupils occasionally show a lack of respect for each other and staff. A few ignore requests to moderate their conduct. As a result, in the current year, permanent and fixed-term exclusions are high. Most pupils who have been excluded are of Slovakian Roma heritage.
- Some pupils are rowdy and boisterous as they move around school.
- In a few classes, pupils talk over the teacher, chew gum, or get up to leave before the lesson ends. Low-level disruption regularly slows the learning in a few classes.
- High levels of positive staff supervision on entry to school have brought about a significant reduction in the numbers who are late to school. However, too many pupils are late to school and for lessons.
- Attendance has been low and has declined this school year, especially for Slovakian Roma and disadvantaged pupils. Rates of persistent absence this school year are high. One third of the pupils have been absent for the equivalent of half a day each week. The attendance of Pakistani, Yemeni and Somali heritage pupils, who make up the majority of pupils, is good. The attendance of Slovakian Roma heritage pupils is poor. The school's effective actions to reduce truancy and improve punctuality represent early steps to improve attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- The progress current pupils are making is variable because the quality of teaching and the management of classroom behaviour are inconsistent.
- Slovakian Roma pupils make weak progress and their attainment is low. This group of pupils are not well prepared for their next stage of education, training or employment.
- The progress made by Year 11 pupils in the GCSE exams has been below average in two out the last three years, including for disadvantaged pupils.
- In 2018, the least able pupils made weak progress in GCSE English and mathematics, especially the disadvantaged. This was because the curriculum had not been adapted well enough to meet the needs of pupils with weak basic skills or with limited English language skills. In the current Year 11, subject leaders for English and mathematics have introduced more support for learning subject terminology and more use of pictorial material to help develop conceptual understanding.
- In 2018, across all subjects, the most able Year 11 pupils did not make enough progress from their starting points at key stage 2. In English GCSEs, the most able were not able to demonstrate originality in their writing because they had become too dependent on following teachers' guidance for their writing. Current Year 11 pupils are writing more independently.

- In 2018, in GCSE modern and foreign languages, the progress and attainment by pupils of all abilities were below average because of weaknesses in teaching.
- In 2018, Year 11 pupils with middle prior attainment made good progress in GCSE English, mathematics and science.
- In 2018, two thirds of pupils were entered for EBacc subjects at GCSE, which is relatively close to the government ambition for EBacc entry and much higher than the current national average. As a result, the progress and attainment in the academic EBacc subjects by pupils with middle prior attainment were higher, overall, than the national averages for pupils with middle prior attainment.
- The proportion of low-attaining pupils entered for EBacc was also above average. By contrast, they made weak progress and their attainment was below the national averages for low-attaining pupils.
- Some extra support for pupils with SEND, or with literacy needs, is very effective. In other lessons, teachers do not provide enough support for pupils with SEND.

School details

Unique reference number	138925
Local authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	10086819

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

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	1030
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Usma Saeed
Headteacher	Rachel Smith
Telephone number	0114 243 9391
Website	http://firvale.com/
Email address	enquiries@firvale.com
Date of previous inspection	2–3 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is high.
- Almost all pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is high.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- Half the pupils are of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of pupils of Slovakian Roma heritage has increased to one third.
- A high proportion of pupils arrive or leave the school at other than the normal times.
- The previous headteacher started in September 2017 and resigned at the end of September 2018. A new headteacher took up post in November 2018.

- The school uses six alternative providers: Endeavour, Hadfield, Sheffield College, Yassy, GTA, Becton and Pathways.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across subjects and year groups. Some observations were carried out jointly with senior and subject leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and reviewed samples of pupils' books.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their experiences at school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, staff with pastoral responsibilities and teachers. An inspector met with members of the governing body and a representative from Learn Sheffield. He also spoke by telephone to the school's school improvement partner.
- Inspectors evaluated a wide range of school documents, including the school's monitoring and evaluation, and records and analysis of pupils' progress, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors took account of 64 survey responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, nine written responses and one letter. In addition, inspectors took account of 26 responses from staff to the Ofsted online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Bernard Campbell, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
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Richard Crane	Ofsted Inspector
Aejaz Laher	Ofsted Inspector

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