

Smithdon High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121157
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	363934
Inspection dates	6–7 July 2011
Reporting inspector	Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	860
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Little
Headteacher	Jonathan Goodchild
Date of previous school inspection	28 April 2010
School address	Downs Road Hunstanton, Norfolk PE36 5HY
Telephone number	01485 534541
Fax number	01485 532251
Email address	office@smithdon.norfolk.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. In total, 47 lesson observations were undertaken of 47 different teachers. Several observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders. Inspectors observed many aspects of the school's work and looked at a range of documents including students' work, the school's self-evaluation, student tracking data and arrangements for safeguarding. In addition, analysis was undertaken of inspection survey responses from 111 parents and carers, 88 students and 72 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work and looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Since the last inspection, has there been significant acceleration in students' progress and have suitable steps been taken to address widespread underachievement?
- Has there been sufficient improvement in the quality of teaching?
- Have the school's leaders, including the governing body, worked effectively at all levels to secure rapid and sustainable improvement?
- How rigorously and effectively does the school make use of assessment data to drive improvement and evaluate the impact of its work?

Information about the school

Smithdon is an average-size secondary school with specialist status in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). It draws students from across Hunstanton, as well as from a wide area beyond the town. Almost all students are of White British heritage; very few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national figure; the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average.

During the inspection only students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 12 were in school. When the school was last inspected it was given notice to improve, because significant improvement was required in order to improve students' achievement and strengthen the impact of leadership and governance.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Although Smithdon High School has made progress since its last inspection just over a year ago, the improvements have not been sufficiently rapid and its overall effectiveness remains inadequate. Assessment information indicates that standards are rising. However, there was no significant increase in attainment at GCSE in 2010, and standards in the sixth form declined. The overall effectiveness of the school's sixth form is inadequate.

Procedures for monitoring the school's work are systematic, and self-evaluation is honest, but the failure to secure necessary improvements in teaching is evident in the findings of the most recent whole-school review, which mirrored closely the observations of the inspection team. Despite improvements, standards remain too low and students make inadequate progress because teaching is not good enough. The variable quality of teaching remains the concern most frequently raised in parental questionnaire responses. Some teaching is good or better, but too many lessons fail to engage the students because assessment information to plan suitably challenging and interesting activities is not being used. Too much marking is ineffective. When teaching is weak, the inattentive and disrespectful behaviour of a few students occasionally disrupts the learning and progress of others. Almost half of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire said that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. However, improved systems for managing behaviour ensure that the school is calm and orderly. Many students lack the self-confidence or aspiration to excel, but their behaviour is satisfactory because most conduct themselves well, respond to the school's expectations and work conscientiously.

The school provides satisfactory levels of support and guidance and promotes the well-being and safety of its students by taking particularly good care of the most vulnerable individuals. Students' personal development is consequently satisfactory. Students say that they feel safe and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. They make a positive contribution to their school, particularly through the student council, and generally develop the aptitudes and wider personal qualities needed for the next stage of their education and for later life.

The headteacher has led the school with considerable fortitude, particularly in the face of significant staffing difficulties. Since the last inspection, he has focused the school's efforts even more strongly on improving achievement, but Smithdon is on a long road to recovery after several years of underperformance and weak provision. Until recently, assessment

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lacked rigour and self-evaluation was over-generous. Senior leaders have addressed these shortcomings, and changes to the governing body now ensure that governors play their part in the school's self-evaluation. However, the school's sharper self-evaluation has only served to highlight further inadequacies in provision and in the ineffectiveness of some leaders and managers. These weaknesses mean that agreed procedures are not applied consistently by all staff and that improvement is not embedded. Despite appropriate external support, particularly from the School Improvement Partner, the barriers to rapid improvement have proved too hard to overcome within a short period of time. The school requires additional support to steer its further recovery because it has not demonstrated the capacity to secure the necessary improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of students' learning, accelerate their progress and raise standards by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching and increasing the proportion of good and outstanding lessons
 - planning interesting learning activities that actively engage all students
 - improving the quality and impact of assessment and marking
 - promoting more positive attitudes to learning so that students are keen to succeed and proud of their achievements.
- Improve provision and outcomes in the sixth form by:
 - making effective use of assessment information to raise students' aspirations, review their progress and guide their improvement
 - ensuring that the curriculum and teaching meet the needs and aspirations of the students
 - providing clear strategic leadership and effective day-to-day management.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at every level deliver improvement by:
 - modelling best practice in their own work
 - fulfilling their strategic roles
 - monitoring rigorously and evaluating effectively to plan further development.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Achievement is inadequate. Results in the most recent GCSE, AS and A-level examinations in 2010 showed no significant improvement. The proportion of students achieving at least five A*-C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, rose to 41%, but was well below the school's target. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average, but by the end of Key Stage 4 standards are low compared with national figures. Achievement is inadequate because too many students do not make the progress expected, although the progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly satisfactory because support for their learning is effectively planned and targeted.

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Predictions last year were over-optimistic because assessment lacked rigour. This has been rectified and current projections for 2011, based on systematic review of students' performance, indicate notable improvements at Key Stage 4. The most significant increases are in English and mathematics where robust interventions, for example through booster sessions with specialist teaching assistants, have accelerated the progress of targeted students and narrowed the gap to the school's targets. Notwithstanding these improvements, students make too little progress because teaching is not good enough to mitigate the legacy of underachievement from recent years.

Around the school, students' behaviour is orderly and considerate. In lessons, most are compliant and conscientious. When given opportunity, students show maturity in working together, for example when Year 9 students were refining their ideas about characters in 'Educating Rita'. However, these positive attitudes are not securely developed. In many lessons students lack the confidence or resilience to tackle challenging tasks, even when working collaboratively, and their expectations of their own achievement are often too low. In a few lessons the immature behaviour of a small number of individuals disrupts learning.

Students contribute positively to the life of the school and its wider community, for example through the work of the student council and the Hunstanton Youth Council. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle but do not necessarily demonstrate this in choosing to eat healthily or in their take up of after-school activities. They say that they feel safe in school and are confident that staff will help them if they have any concerns. The school's specialisms make a positive contribution in ensuring that students achieve basic levels of competence in the skills that they need for the next stage of their education, for example in ICT. Almost all students who left the school last year continued in education or were able to find employment or training.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is improving, but its quality varies widely and too much is ineffective. In general, teachers use their subject knowledge to plan suitably challenging lessons with a specific focus on learning. Lessons often start well because teachers' expositions are good, and they often make effective use of new technology to explain the work. The most effective teachers model the principles of the new teaching and learning policy by building positive working relationships and communicating the highest expectations of students' behaviour and achievement. Their liveliness injects pace and enjoyment: carefully prepared pair and group work extends and consolidates students' understanding, particularly when teaching assistants are well deployed. However, in too many lessons students disengage from learning, either because work is dull or they have to sit and listen passively for too long. Effective assessment underpins the best teaching, notably when teachers skilfully question pupils and demonstrate best practice in marking. However, too much questioning is aimlessly ineffective and too much marking is either perfunctory or unrelated to subject-specific learning outcomes. A lack of ambition is evident in exercise books when teachers do not make clear what they expect students to achieve in their subject or how to improve.

The curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of most students. It is continuously reviewed and revised to provide suitable pathways for students with different aptitudes and abilities, including a few vocational options, some at the local college. Students have a

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reasonable range of extra-curricular options, including sports, music and large-scale dramatic productions, which they enjoy. The school's well-established pastoral systems ensure that suitable attention is given to aspects of care and guidance so that students, including potentially vulnerable individuals and those who have particular learning needs, are properly supported. The school makes sensible use of external agencies to support students and promote their well-being.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	4
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	3

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's strategic leadership and day-to-day management have been strengthened by restructuring the senior team. Robust systems for monitoring the school's performance have been developed, based on the effective use of assessment data and a planned evaluation cycle. The headteacher has driven improvement with energy and determination, but his work has not had sufficient impact on the everyday experiences of the students. Middle leaders have been suitably involved in the process of self-review, but this has highlighted shortcomings in their capacity to deliver improvement, particularly as some do not provide a good role model in their own teaching, their use of assessment or management of students.

Governance was judged inadequate at the last inspection but changes to personnel, combined with a comprehensive review of governing body's systems and procedures, have strengthened the role and influence of the governors. Governors are suitably involved in monitoring the school's performance. The governing body seeks the views of parents and carers and balances well the need for challenge and support.

The school understands the individual needs of its students and takes steps to achieve equality of opportunity for all groups. The regular exchange of information between school and home ensures that parents and carers are informed about their children's progress and well-being.

Community cohesion is promoted adequately through the curriculum. The school takes advantage of particular initiatives, such as one teacher's links with a Nepalese school or 'pen pals' in Turkey, to enhance students' understanding of people's different contexts and backgrounds. Arrangements and policies for safeguarding are satisfactory; they are in line with government requirements and are reviewed appropriately by the governing body.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	4

Sixth form

Over the past three years, achievement in the sixth form has slipped, and results in 2010 were well below national figures. Given their starting points, a significant number of students did not make the progress expected, particularly at AS level. Mathematics and health and social care have a good track record of success, but achievement in too many other subjects is inadequate, which is reflected in poor success rates and low retention. Sixth-form leaders have failed to halt this slide because planning is not sufficiently strategic or sharply focused and day-to-day management is not effective.

Students have a wide selection of academic courses, but they are not guided well enough in making their choices and have comparatively few vocational options. Moreover, teaching and learning styles are not adequately adapted to small group sizes. Some sixth-form teaching is good and some students speak enthusiastically about how they enjoy their lessons. However, too often teachers do not consider how students will learn, and activities are over-reliant on teacher-led discussions, which frequently lack focus, structure or challenge. Assessment data are readily available and students know what they should achieve, but this information is not routinely used to set high expectations and drive improvement. Sixth-form students are good ambassadors for the school. They develop sensible attitudes to their own well-being and take seriously their formal roles, for instance as sports leaders, but their wider role and responsibilities within the school are underdeveloped.

The school has rightly identified the improvement of sixth-form provision as a key priority, and has taken suitable steps to strengthen its leadership and management.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	4
The quality of provision in the sixth form	4
Leadership and management of the sixth form	4

Views of parents and carers

Although far fewer parents and carers returned questionnaires than at the last inspection, the responses were more positive in every respect. This reflects, in part, the improvements made by the school over the last year. Most parents and carers who returned the survey said that their child enjoys school and feels safe; a large majority are happy, overall, with their child's experience at the school. Some parents commented specifically about the school's recent improvements, but most additional comments were critical of aspects of teaching, often linked with concerns about the failure to tackle unacceptable behaviour in lessons. Inspection evidence supports the view of a small minority of parents that teaching is not good enough, however the school has taken steps to reduce disruptions in lessons and inspectors observed only isolated incidents of poor behaviour. The inspection found that the links between school and home are satisfactory. However, it is clear that more could be done to communicate the school's successes, so that parents and carers are aware of improvements, and also ways that they might support their own child's achievement and progress.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Smithdon High 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 111 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 860 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	24	68	61	11	10	5	5
The school keeps my child safe	24	22	79	71	8	7	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	28	25	68	61	12	11	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	23	21	64	58	18	16	4	4
The teaching is good at this school	15	14	64	58	23	21	5	5
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	17	62	56	22	20	5	5
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	8	73	66	21	19	5	5
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)	24	22	62	56	10	9	6	5
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	16	66	59	14	13	4	4
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	14	13	42	38	32	29	14	13
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	15	62	56	17	15	8	7
The school is led and managed effectively	18	16	63	57	12	11	13	12
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	21	19	66	59	16	14	6	5

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 all 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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



8 July 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Smithdon High School, Hunstanton, Norfolk, PE36 5HY

Thank you for the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We enjoyed talking to you and seeing your work. Your views, and those of your parents and carers, were helpful in confirming many of our findings. We are pleased that:

- most of you say that you enjoy school, that you are safe and learn a lot
- the school cares for you and supports you so that you develop the skills and personal qualities that you need when you leave school.

Lots of you told us that teaching varies widely and that too many lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. We agree that there are not enough really good or outstanding lessons to help you to make good progress and which enable you to enjoy your learning. You know your targets, but teachers are not always clear what you need to do to improve and marking is not helpful enough. We have asked the school to improve your learning and progress by:

- ensuring that lessons are more challenging and interesting, and that marking is consistently helpful and effective
- improving provision in the sixth form
- making sure that all leaders and managers in the school are effective in guiding and checking improvement.

The examination results in 2010 were disappointing, both at GCSE and in the sixth form, but there is evidence that standards are now rising. The school has made some changes since last year's inspection and these are already having a positive impact on the progress that you make, particularly in English and mathematics. However, inspectors judge that the school has not improved quickly enough and that it now requires special measures. This means that it gets extra support to accelerate its improvement.

You all have a key role to play because your achievement is very dependent on your own attitudes and effort. We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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