

# Smithills School

Smithills Dean Road, Bolton, BL16JS

## Inspection dates

26-27 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>3</b>
	This inspection:	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievement requires further improvement, particularly in English where their progress lags behind other subjects.
- More-able students are not receiving sufficient challenge to enable them to meet their full potential.
- Not enough teaching is consistently good or better. Variable practice across classes and subjects is hampering more rapid improvement.
- Boys are let down by poorer literacy skills and currently do not achieve as well as girls.
- There is variation in the quality of feedback and marking which prevents students in some classes from making better progress.
- Good practice is not embedded in a number of underperforming subjects, such as modern foreign languages, where teaching is weaker.

### The school has the following strengths

- In the last year, the dynamic leadership of the new headteacher has transformed the ethos of the school with an emphasis on academic success and personal achievement.
- Senior leaders and governors are now well placed to accelerate improvement.
- Achievement in mathematics is well above the national average and achievement in other areas is also accelerating, particularly in the lower school.
- The restructured curriculum provides a good basis for future academic success.
- This is an improving school where accountability and culpability are now part of the everyday culture.
- The recently established monitoring programme linked to a comprehensive programme of development and support is improving the quality of teaching and learning.
- Behaviour, attendance and attitudes to learning have improved dramatically over the last year.
- There is a real sense of renewed pride in the school and the progress that is being made.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons taught by 40 teachers, including eight that were observed jointly with senior staff at the school. One lesson was not graded because of the short period of the observation.
- Inspectors spoke to members of the governing body, two representatives from the local authority, as well as staff and students in all year groups from the school. They also heard some students read and talk about their reading.
- A range of documents was scrutinised, including information relating to the pupil premium and to teachers' performance, minutes of governing body meetings, schemes of work and documentation from a cross section of subjects, monitoring and evaluation records and the tracking of students' progress.
- Inspectors analysed the 23 responses to the online questionnaire,( Parent View), completed by parents. The inspectors also scrutinised the most recent school survey on the views of parents, conducted in 2011.
- Inspectors analysed 66 questionnaires from staff at the school, including non-teaching staff.

## Inspection team

Leszek Iwaskow, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector

Patrick Geraghty

Her Majesty's Inspector

Clarice Nelson-Rowe

Additional Inspector

Janet Peckett

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## Full report

### Information about this school

- Smithills is a larger than average size comprehensive secondary school.
- Students travel from across a wide catchment area and come from a wide range of backgrounds.
- Approximately 40% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a third has a first language other than English. This is well above the national average.
- A quarter of students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium which is above the national average.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is above average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is broadly average.
- The school has a performing arts specialism and is renowned for its school Senior Brass band which have held the status of World and National Champions since 1997.
- Smithills holds a number of awards including the Artsmark Gold, the International School Award as well as the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust Community Cohesion Gold award.
- The school meets current government floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The current headteacher took up post in September 2011.

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

- Raise attainment and accelerate progress by:
  - ensuring that the momentum for improvement in English is maintained and that strategies for developing language and writing across the curriculum are consistent in contributing to progress across all subjects
  - developing clear strategies to support and challenge the highest-attaining students
  - setting high expectations across all subject areas and classes of what students can achieve, especially the boys
  - improving teaching in weaker performing classes and subjects, such as modern foreign languages, in order to improve outcomes for students
  - making sure that feedback and marking is regular and informative and supports students in their next steps in learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that a greater proportion is at least good by:
  - ensuring that lesson planning focuses on learning outcomes for students and not just on teaching methodology
  - using questioning more effectively to challenge and engage students and encourage them to develop their reasoning and extend their thinking
  - providing clear instructions and modelling and make better use of information and communication technology to enable students to access tasks and better engage in their learning
  - making sure that the tasks set challenge and engage students rather than occupy and demotivate
  - ensuring that lesson observations place a greater emphasis on what students are learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students enter school with prior attainment that is, on average, below that found nationally. In 2012, 68 % of students gained A\*-C grades in mathematics which is slightly above the national average and reflects good progress. In mathematics there has been steady improvement over time.
- Attainment in English remains below average and boys, in particular, make poorer progress than their peers and that is why achievement cannot yet be regarded as good.
- Standards at the end of Year 11 have been low but have shown improvement in the last two years with half the students now attaining 5A\*-C grades including English and mathematics. There remains a wide variation across subjects which is further complicated by the small numbers taking some academic options.
- The restructuring of the curriculum from September 2011 means that students are now able to take a greater range of academic subjects at GCSE. There is discrete teaching of subjects in Years 7 and 8 which is intended to provide a more solid platform for future success at GCSE and meet the needs of learners better. This has not yet had time to feed into outcomes in Year 11, particularly for the more able students.
- Lower-attaining students, including those supported through school action and school action plus and those known to be supported by the pupil premium make progress comparable to similar students nationally. Higher ability students are not making the progress expected, although structures have been established this year to better meet their needs and projections show these are beginning to have an impact.
- Currently girls make markedly better progress than boys, who are often let down by poor literacy skills. Current data for students in the lower school illustrates improved rates of progress for all groups in English, mathematics and science which should continue to improve achievement at GCSE in the future.
- The development of literacy skills across subjects is variable but is beginning to have an impact. The focus is primarily on writing. Reading remains underdeveloped in lessons although there is effective practice in the intervention and nurture groups in Year 7. Students are encouraged to read for pleasure but few choose to do so.
- Effective provision in the Delta Centre (behaviour intervention unit) for students with behavioural issues and focused support for those students newly arrived from abroad ensures a good success rate which enables these students to integrate quickly into mainstream classes. The recently arrived students make good progress in the acquisition of basic language.

### The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching over time requires improvement. The current relentless drive to improve teaching and learning is having an impact and just over half of the lessons observed were good or outstanding. While the quality of teaching has improved there continue to be variations in the quality between and within subjects, especially in modern foreign languages and English.
- A comprehensive programme of staff development, coaching and sharing of good practice is raising awareness of what constitutes good teaching. Lesson planning has improved and many teachers have acquired a broader range of generic teaching approaches.
- Where teaching is less than good, teachers tend to focus on techniques and lesson structure rather than on the learning. In these lessons, there is often insufficient challenge, particularly for the most able students.
- Weaker teaching occurs when lessons are too teacher-led and where questioning is shallow and the answers are obvious. In these lessons, as teachers move from activity to activity, there is too little time for students to consolidate their learning. This is often evidenced by

unfinished work as teachers do not gauge the rate at which students will complete their task and they are moved onto the next one too quickly.

- In weaker lessons, students struggle where instructions are unclear or where teachers do not model work effectively to enable them to access the task. Information and communication technology is still not being used as effectively as it could be to engage with students through skilful exposition and appropriate visual resources in order to bring learning to life.
- There is also too much variation in the quality of feedback to students. Some is effective and demonstrates good practice but there is often too much misuse of praise rather than on clear guidance for improvement. In particular, the overuse of 'excellent' and 'brilliant' during lessons becomes less meaningful if used incorrectly or too frequently.
- Where teaching is good or outstanding, there are high expectations of what students can achieve. This is reflected in high quality interaction between the teacher and students as well as among students. For example, in a psychology lesson the questioning required high level responses and involved all students in the class. Students were developing good speaking and listening skills through collaborative discussion and debate and probing questioning deepened their knowledge and understanding of the need for ethical approaches to research.
- There is good evidence to show the impact of action to support the development of literacy across the curriculum in order to raise attainment and close the gap, particularly for boys. Key vocabulary and a focus on improving writing were evident in many lessons and were used particularly effectively in science. However, dictionaries and thesauruses are not a common resource evident during most lessons.

#### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- Students and staff agree that behaviour has significantly improved in the last year. The greater majority of students behave well both in lessons and around the school and have an increasingly positive attitude to learning. Very few lessons are now disrupted by poorer behaviour and these are frequently linked to lessons where there is weaker teaching.
- Bullying is not perceived as a significant issue by the majority of students. They cite some incidents, mainly name-calling, but report that these are appropriately dealt with. Increasing use is being made of the electronic SHARP system to report incidents confidentially and this has had a positive impact on reducing incidents and making students feel safe and secure.
- Over the last year attendance has improved and is now better than the national average. This has been achieved through a structured approach linked to improving the quality of teaching. All staff are made aware of the links between attendance and the quality of provision. Students' views are that 'attendance is better because lessons are better'.
- Exclusions have reduced significantly. The Delta Centre, where students receive counselling and personalised support, has been used effectively to improve behaviour and reduce exclusions. Many students, at risk of exclusion, return successfully to lessons after intensive support in the centre.
- Punctuality to lessons has also improved. Lessons are rarely disrupted by late arrivals. Inspectors found students to be respectful, polite and courteous.

#### **The leadership and management** are good

- Since a monitoring visit by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors in June 2011 identified that the school was making inadequate progress there have been significant changes which are now accelerating school improvement. The appointment of a new headteacher, a re-organisation of the leadership structure linked to greater accountability at all levels, effective partnership and support from the local authority and more active involvement of governors have all contributed to a change of ethos which now fully supports the drive towards academic

excellence and personal achievement.

- A new and rigorous monitoring programme has been established to assess classroom provision, identify effective teaching practice and challenge underperformance. This is closely linked to a comprehensive programme of support and professional development and has been instrumental in improving teaching and learning in many areas. This process is critically reviewed on a regular basis and improvements initiated and there is now a clear understanding of the need to ensure that judgements are sharper and more consistently focussed on what the students are learning.
  - Standards and achievement are improving. The pupil premium funding is being used and targeted more effectively to impact on student attendance, behaviour and outcomes. There is a strong focus on closing the gap for boys as well as improving literacy skills.
  - There is a developing performance management system that has a strong focus on rewarding best practice, classroom performance and improving outcomes for students. This links well with the school objective of becoming an outstanding school in the near future. Training to date has been effective and senior leaders, supported by governors, are using performance management and professional development to support and challenge teachers whose work has been judged as weak so increasing the proportion of good and better teaching.
  - The curriculum has been restructured to make it fit for purpose and provide greater academic rigour. There is now a focus on more academic subjects whilst still retaining vocational options for those for whom these are appropriate. A wide menu of visits, including abroad, as well as sports, arts and especially music activities develop students' social and cultural awareness.
  - The relationship with and support provided by the local authority has been positive. This has been particularly fruitful in advice on monitoring procedures as well as training in lesson observations and work scrutiny.
  - Improved behaviour, attendance and greatly reduced exclusions reflect the growing aspirations of the students as well as the increasing effectiveness of new discipline procedures.
  - The school has a developing and improving partnership with parents. Much is being done to re-engage with parents through regular updates on students' progress, newsletters and through the school website. This is well supported by the performing arts through the high quality concerts and performances which present a positive image of the school to the community and beyond.
  - Despite re-structuring and increasing rigour and challenge, staff morale is high with a significant proportion responding positively to the inspection questionnaire. There is a real sense of re-newed pride in the school and a real confidence that the school is moving forward 'towards academic excellence rich in opportunity'.
  - The new structures and initiatives which have been introduced over the last year are proving effective and have been a significant factor in improving learning and achievement in many areas of the school. However, there has been insufficient time to fully embed good practice in a few weaker areas such as modern foreign languages. Nevertheless, the significant success achieved so far in changing the direction the school was travelling in, from decline towards success, is testimony to the quality of leadership and indicates a strong capacity for further improvement.
  - **The governance of the school:**
    - is good. Governors support the school effectively, challenge the senior leadership team and are holding the school to account. They are committed to the shared vision for academic excellence and opportunities for all
    - communication between governors and school has become more positive and governors now have a clearer picture of strengths and weaknesses as well as the progress of initiatives
    - statutory duties are undertaken effectively and safeguarding requirements are fully met.
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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 pupil's 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 pupil's 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>	105260
<b>Local authority</b>	Bolton
<b>Inspection number</b>	400771

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 -16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1259
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ian Carter
<b>Headteacher</b>	Alec Cottrill
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	30 September 2009
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