

Smithdon High School

Downs Road, Hunstanton, Norfolk, PE36 5HY

Inspection dates 29–30 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Significant improvements seen in some subjects are not found in others and there is not yet a track record of sustained success.
- The sixth form requires improvement because recent patterns of achievement in the sixth form have varied between subjects. Some courses have represented a heavy investment but students' success in gaining qualifications has been limited.
- There is too little high-quality teaching. Often teachers' planning does not make certain that all pupils learn well enough throughout every lesson, and concentrates on tasks rather than what will be learnt.
- Examination results in science, the humanities, technology and some arts subjects are too low.
- Middle leaders are too varied in their contribution to the school's improvement.
- Some teachers do not place high enough demands on how pupils themselves will contribute to the learning process, both in and out of lessons.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have determinedly tackled the poor performance of some staff over the last three years.
- Teachers are developing a strong sense of learning together as they improve their teaching.
- The school is a happy and friendly community. Pupils get on with each other well and with their teachers and behaviour has improved.
- Governors provide rigorous challenge to leaders and staff.
- Achievement in English and mathematics has improved significantly in the last two years, and teaching in these areas is good.
- The school is making good use of partnerships to provide choices in its curriculum.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 lessons or parts of lessons. There were two joint observations with middle leaders. Inspectors also visited four tutorial sessions for different groups of students.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, two members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority. Inspectors spoke with staff at the college with which the school partners.
- Students' views were sought throughout the inspection, including during lessons and break times.
- Inspectors took account of evidence from staff discussion groups in previous monitoring visits.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents. These included the school's recent data on progress, policies, planning documents and monitoring information.
- Inspectors paid close attention to the school's information on attendance, behaviour and all aspects of safeguarding.
- Parents' and carers' views were taken into account through the nine responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) during the inspection.

Inspection team

Adrian Gray, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ruth Frith

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- This school is smaller than is typical for an 11-18 secondary school.
- The school has a lower proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and for which it receives pupil premium than is typical, but the rate is higher in the younger year groups.
- There are very few pupils from minority ethnic groups and also very few who speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action plus or a statement is a little below the national average; the proportion supported through school action is similar to the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- A small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 attend education and training off-site, including at College of West Anglia. Some post-16 courses are also provided off-site through this partnership.
- The school is situated in an attractive but isolated coastal area of Norfolk. Pupils come from a number of relatively small settlements. Because of its isolation, the school has found it difficult to attract applicants for teaching posts.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that pupils make at least expected progress in all subjects and in line with similar schools by 2014, by:
 - supporting teachers to develop lesson objectives that are focused on pupils' learning
 - providing training for teachers to improve planning and teaching for pupils of different abilities
 - increasing the challenge for pupils of higher ability
 - raising expectations of what pupils will contribute to lessons, including in written and oral work
 - improving the use of teachers' questioning so pupils have to respond to each other
 - ensuring that there is secure and expert subject leadership in all subjects
 - reducing the number of classes having two teachers or where learning is disjointed due to the two-week timetable
 - providing teachers with training so that they can help improve pupils' literacy and understanding of unfamiliar technical terms.
- Continue the improvements in science so that achievement matches that in English and mathematics by 2014 by:
 - clarifying the main science learning that will be developed in each lesson
 - helping pupils to understand better the how their learning in science is moving forward
 - making greater use of pupils' mistakes and misunderstandings to develop scientific learning.
- Improve progress and achievement in the sixth form by July 2013 by:
 - ensuring that only teachers with a proven specialist experience teach post-16 courses

- ensuring that teaching challenges all students
- ensuring that early action is taken to avoid students getting low grades on AS courses
- exploring more cost-efficient ways of maintaining courses with very low numbers of students.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- When pupils join the school they are, on average, attaining at a slightly lower level than the national average. In the past, they have left the school still at a lower level than is found nationally.
- GCSE results improved in 2012, reflecting a higher-ability year group but also much improved teaching. Results now compare well to national figures in English and mathematics. Pupils also did well on work-related courses. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more good GCSE passes including English and mathematics has doubled in the last five years. The school has made cautious use of early examination entry in key subjects where teaching is effective. The school is now focusing on raising the overall proportion of higher GCSE grades, which has been too low.
- Results in science are still too low. This is the legacy of past weak teaching and inconsistent subject leadership. There is a similar pattern in humanities and arts subjects, but learning is now improving in most of these areas.
- Overall, pupils are now making progress from age 11 to 16 that is much more in line with national patterns and even exceeding them in some subjects. In most lessons, pupils make at least sound progress though teachers' planning is not always clear enough to get the most out of the activities.
- Students who opt for courses that are work related, including some taught at the College of West Anglia, do well.
- The small number of students known to be eligible for free school meals did not achieve as high standards in overall points or make as much progress as similar pupils nationally in 2011. The school is now very active in providing additional support for all pupils at risk of falling behind, including those eligible for the pupil premium, and has run several projects, including some which seek to engage parents.
- In the sixth form, the achievement of students has varied too much, with poor success in some courses and good results in others. Improved entry procedures are now ensuring there is at least adequate progress. The school now intervenes more quickly to guide students on their choices.
- There is improved use of assessment to support learning. Almost all pupils know their target grades, and the school is learning how to increase these as progress accelerates. However, learning is not always well supported when assessments merely give a mark to a piece of work and the pupils are not told how they can reach the next stage in their learning.
- Learning is more effective when pupils find lessons interesting. Pupils are more positive about revised approaches in science, and respond well in many subjects when teachers engage their enthusiasm.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are well supported in the classroom and in the school's work to widen the curriculum.
- Achievement is sometimes held back by pupils' weak literacy skills. Some pupils are careless in

how they write, and do not take enough responsibility for basic spelling, punctuation and presentation. They are not skilled at handling unfamiliar words and teachers do not always help them to access technical terms.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although the weakest teaching has been almost eliminated, there is too little that is good or outstanding. Teaching relies very heavily on a sound but limited range of approaches. Teachers do not plan enough challenging activities that extend pupils' thinking.
- In the best lessons, teachers promote good learning so that all pupils are fully engaged in their work. These teachers explain what pupils will be learning and check their understanding regularly. The activities are interesting and help teachers to see what pupils have understood and what they have not. These teachers also use questions to prompt deeper thinking.
- Assessment is much improved and is now regular. Helpful marking in some lessons tells pupils what they need to do to improve their work. All pupils know their target grades and, in the best classes, can explain what specific improvements they are working on. In a few classes they can only make general comments, such as 'I need to add more detail.' Pupils are often asked to assess each other's work, which works very well where they are given a clear set of learning criteria. It works less well where they simply add up test marks.
- Teaching prompts good learning when it directly addresses pupils' mistakes and misunderstandings. Some teachers are not yet confident enough to take advantage of these opportunities. In a few lessons assessment techniques are not yet sharp enough to spot where some pupils have not grasped an issue. In one lesson, a teacher realised that pupils had not understood a task and was able to provide an effective response that significantly improved their learning.
- A minority of the teaching requires more rapid improvement. The most evident weaknesses are where teachers do not set out exactly what skills are to be developed or what learning is to take place during the lessons. In some cases, pupils have too little knowledge to engage well with the tasks set. In some classes, teachers talk for much too long. Teachers do not make sufficient allowance for the full range of pupils' abilities, so that objectives are targeted at the middle of the class and it is unclear what is expected additionally of higher-ability pupils. This is evident in some lessons in the main school and the sixth form.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- Movement around the school and at break times is good. Pupils show respect for each other and enjoy their social opportunities. They present themselves well, are polite in lessons, and speak well to each other and adults. Pupils do not regard bullying to be a problem. In lessons pupils showed reasonable awareness of issues related to race, disability and sexuality.
- The numbers of permanent and fixed-term exclusions have reduced significantly. Pupils who are provided with appropriate alternative education routes respond well and maintain their interest in their school-based work.
- Almost all teachers have high expectations of behaviour, including in how pupils manage risks in practical situations. As a result, behaviour in lessons is good, though in two lessons pupils were seen to be reluctant to work to the appropriate standard.

- Some pupils' attitudes to learning remain relatively passive. In a few lessons pupils did not ask for help, even when they did not understand a task, and some were reluctant to speak out when questioned. In other sessions, including some tutorial work, teachers worked hard to encourage more confident contributions by pupils. Pupils are not confident at discussing issues with each other in groups or in whole-class situations.
- Attendance has improved and the school has achieved some significant improvements in the attendance of individuals. Attendance this term is above that of the previous year and persistent absence has fallen. There are good arrangements to check the attendance of pupils educated off-site.
- The school is helping new pupils in Year 7 to integrate quickly through starting their full immersion in the school in the last full week of the summer term while they are still in Year 6. Safeguarding arrangements are fully appropriate.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- Leadership and management require improvement because the improvements in teaching and achievement are not consistent across subjects and throughout the school. The headteacher is active around the school, continues to teach so that he can participate first-hand in developments in learning, and has shown determination in tackling the school's needs.
- The headteacher, deputy headteacher and other senior leaders have worked to develop better teaching. They have done this against a backdrop of falling rolls, problems in recruiting to key middle leadership roles, and much staff absence for unavoidable reasons. They have created a culture of raised expectations. They have also encouraged staff to visit other school in order to develop professional learning.
- The senior team has maintained a robust approach to staff performance over the last three years. The governing body is increasingly demanding rapid resolution of the remaining weaknesses in teaching. Teaching is observed regularly and the progress of pupils in different classes is analysed. Capability procedures have been used to improve some teachers' performance and several staff have chosen to leave or been made redundant. This has had the effect of reducing the previously high proportion of weak teaching and has also focused more attention on staff whose teaching requires some improvement. Performance management is linked to the national teaching standards.
- Senior leaders have attempted to strengthen middle leadership through restructuring. This has been partially successful. Some middle leaders are effective, but some subjects still have only weak or inexperienced leadership, which means teaching in these is not improving fast enough. The joint leaders of science have begun to make the department more focused on engaging pupils and developing their interest in the subject.
- The school has sought to provide a broad curriculum with a range of choices. Some decisions have not been entirely successful, because they overstretched the school's capacity to deliver courses of the quality required. The school is now more realistic, for example in concentrating technology provision in its stronger areas and reducing the proportion of pupils taking triple science. Additional curriculum opportunities have been provided for pupils at risk of falling behind.
- Leaders have engaged with other local providers to enhance the curriculum for 14-16 year olds and post-16 students. Plans to form a link with an academy chain are being thoughtfully pursued

in order to choose the best partnership for the school. Although the curriculum is good overall, provision is sometimes weakened where classes are taught by two teachers and the two-week timetable sometimes causes discontinuity in learning.

- The school has maintained its small sixth form as part of a vision to provide access to extended education in an isolated area. The sixth form has been poorly managed in the past, has not been a priority for the governing body, and some courses have been consistently disappointing because of weaknesses in teaching. Results in some subjects, such as business, psychology and physical education, have been too low, but the school is now addressing these issues.
- With few students on some of those courses, the sixth form currently does not reflect good value for money. Leaders have recognised this. Changes have been made to the leadership, enrolment and student guidance arrangements, but these came too late for the 2012 results to benefit.
- Spending connected with the pupil premium is displayed on the school's website. Most of this is spent on additional in-school support, but there is not yet a clear analysis of its impact on the target group of pupils.
- The local authority has actively contributed to the school's project board and has been involved in brokering of a number of partnerships. These have included supporting the links with the College of West Anglia and the West Norfolk Partnership, which is instrumental in the 'Achievement for All' project. It has played a key role in discussing the future shape of post-16 provision, and how this relates to the local economy. The local authority's human resources team has provided valued support in managing staff issues, although the school feels disadvantaged by the slow speed of some capability procedures.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides rigorous challenge to the headteacher and other senior leaders and records this through detailed minutes. It is well aware of the quality of teaching and is committed to its further improvement. Governors are actively engaged in the performance management of the headteacher, and in the arrangements for the appraisal of other staff. Key governors use the school's performance data to hold leaders to account. Governors have increased the number of visits and other activities during the school day, so that the level of monitoring has improved. This increased involvement with the school means the governing body has its own independent view of the school's improvement. The governing body has been less effective in monitoring the sixth form and is not clear enough about the way the school spends the funding received through the pupil premium.

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 pupils' 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 pupils' 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

Unique reference number	121157
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	399584

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	773
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Little
Headteacher	Jonathan Goodchild
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2011
Telephone number	01485 534541
Fax number	01485 532251
Email address	office@smithdon.norfolk.sch.uk

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