

# Smestow School

Windmill Crescent, Castlecroft, Wolverhampton, West Midlands WV3 8HU

## Inspection dates

18–19 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Requires improvement</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Requires improvement</b>
16 to 19 study programmes	<b>Good</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is variable across key stages and subjects. They make slow progress in several subjects during their first three years in the school.
- Pupils have weak basic skills. Leaders' efforts to address these weaknesses are having too slow an impact.
- Teachers' assessments in key stage 3 do not identify when pupils are falling behind with their work. Consequently, leaders do not know if pupils or groups of pupils are falling behind and these pupils are not helped to catch up.
- Teaching requires improvement across several subjects in key stage 3. Teachers' expectations are too low and they do not plan activities that are well matched to pupils' ability.
- There is too much low-level disruption in lessons, especially, but not exclusively, in key stage 3. Teachers do not apply the school's behaviour for learning policy consistently.
- Governors do not understand published achievement, attendance and exclusion information about the school. Consequently, they cannot effectively hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

### The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders have acted effectively to improve several areas of weakness. For example, considerable improvement is now evident in pupils' attendance in all years and outcomes at the end of key stage 4.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' personal development. Pupils are well prepared for life beyond school.
- The sixth form is good. Strong leadership, expert teaching and excellent attitudes to learning have resulted in good outcomes.
- Pupils feel safe and are safe in school. Pupils are well cared for and they appreciate the high levels of support that adults give them when they need it.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching in key stage 3, so that pupils in all years make consistently strong progress, by ensuring that all teachers:
  - have high expectations of the quantity and quality of work that pupils produce in lessons
  - plan activities that challenge the most able pupils and support pupils who find the work difficult
  - use questions to make pupils think hard and deepen their understanding of their work
  - apply the school's marking and feedback policy consistently
  - provide opportunities to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy.
- Improve behaviour so that low-level disruption of lessons reduces and the number of repeated fixed-term exclusions reduces to the national average, by ensuring that teachers:
  - are well trained in managing pupils' behaviour
  - consistently apply the school's behaviour for learning policy.
- Strengthen leadership by ensuring that:
  - governors are trained to understand externally published information about achievement, attendance and exclusions so they are able to hold leaders properly to account for the school's performance
  - teachers' assessments in key stage 3 identify when pupils and groups of pupils are falling behind and trigger action that helps them catch up
  - there is a school-wide, consistently applied strategy for improving pupils' literacy and numeracy.

An external review of governance should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership might be improved.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Governors, staff, parents and pupils share the headteacher's vision for an inclusive school that is 'a caring, considerate and compassionate community where individuals are treated with care and respect'. Pupils feel safe and secure because teachers and other adults provide care and support, especially to those who need it most. Most parents who responded to Parent View agreed that their children are happy and well looked after in school.
- The school's new senior leadership team has a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have well-focused plans in place and considerable improvement is evident in many areas of previous weakness. For example, boys' GCSE outcomes were strong in 2016. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved greatly, as has their academic progress.
- Leaders use the pupil premium effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. Strategies include extra help with school work and well-focused pastoral and family support. Consequently, previously declining GCSE attainment has been reversed and high levels of absence have been much reduced. Differences between the attainment and attendance of disadvantaged pupils and the attainment and attendance of others nationally remain, but are diminishing.
- The curriculum is well planned and provides an appropriate range of subjects. Leaders regularly review the range and content of subjects as well as the time allocated to each. Leaders make changes when they believe this would benefit pupils. For example, recent changes to key stage 3 English are beginning to improve pupils' literacy. Pupils in the school's key stage 4 centre for inclusion and achievement (CIA) have a reduced curriculum and a greater emphasis on basic skills and this helps them to succeed.
- The formal, taught curriculum is well supplemented by a wide range of extra-curricular clubs, activities and visits. Leaders carefully track who is attending these activities and they encourage reluctant pupils to become more involved. Most pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they appreciated the range of enrichment activities available to them in school.
- Promoting pupils' personal development is a key aim of the school and one in which it is successful. A programme of personal development days throughout the year supplement subject teaching and extra-curricular activities. Together, these contribute to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of what it means to be a citizen in Britain today. They are well prepared for life outside school.
- In previous years, some pupils who were at risk of permanent exclusion studied away from the school site for the entire week. They did not achieve well. Leaders reviewed this practice and, since September 2015, all such pupils complete a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science and computing in the CIA and a vocational course elsewhere. This new arrangement has proved successful. In 2016, these pupils all achieved appropriate qualifications and moved to further education or training when they finished Year 11.

- Teaching is improving and it is now strong across much of key stage 4 and all of the sixth form. Leaders provide appropriate training and support for teachers because they know where teaching is strong and where it needs to improve. Recruiting high-quality teachers has proved challenging in recent years and numbers of applicants for posts are often very small. Leaders have targeted the school's strongest teaching at key stage 4 and the sixth form and, consequently, the quality of teaching in key stage 3 is weaker than elsewhere in the school. Improvement in key stage 3 is evident, but inconsistency remains in teachers' application of, for example, behaviour and assessment policies.
- Middle leaders form a hardworking and committed group of professionals. They understand and support the school's priorities and they are increasingly contributing well to improvement in their areas. For example, better teaching and higher standards are evident in English in all years and science in key stage 4. Although French remains a weaker area, leaders have accurately identified the underlying issues and have plans in place to tackle them.
- Tracking of pupils' attainment is effective in key stage 4. Regular assessments compared to GCSE targets help leaders to identify pupils who are falling behind with their work. Teachers then provide them with extra help to catch up. Leaders' approach to checking on pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9, since the removal of national curriculum levels, has not been effective. Here, teachers' assessments do not enable leaders to spot when pupils or groups of pupils are falling behind with their work. As a result, some pupils fall behind and are not helped to catch up. Leaders are fully aware of this problem and are currently planning a new approach.

### **Governance of the school**

- Governors have limited understanding of the externally published data which is used to judge the school's performance. For example, during the inspection, governors were unaware that the school's exclusions are well above the national average for secondary schools. Consequently, they have not challenged school leaders in this area. Governors are over reliant on leaders to provide them with information and to explain its meaning.
- Education Central Multi Academy Trust (ECMAT) has failed to ensure that its local governing body has sufficient knowledge to carry out its duty to hold the school's leaders to account. ECMAT has been slow to address weaknesses in governance. For example, its own review of governance in September 2015 identified the need to 'establish a scheme of delegation'. At the time of inspection, there was no scheme of delegation on the school's website.
- When they understand data, governors are very able and willing to hold leaders to account. For example, when presented with data about the number of detentions in school, governors challenged leaders about the high number of repeat offenders.
- The governing body possesses several strengths. Governors play a very active part in school life. They visit the school regularly and understand well many day-to-day issues. For example, on the first day on inspection, several governors were in school helping with the personal development day.
- Governors discharge their statutory duties with diligence. They carefully monitor the school's budget; they check that safeguarding arrangements are robust and they

ensure that performance management focuses on improving the quality of teaching.

## Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have successfully created a culture of keeping pupils safe throughout the school. Staff understand the school's detailed policies and procedures and their responsibility to keep pupils safe. Members of staff receive regular training and updates about safeguarding and, as a result, they are confident to make referrals if they have any concerns. Leaders deal with all such referrals speedily and appropriately, keeping detailed and secure records.
- Almost all pupils who spoke with inspectors confirmed that they feel safe in school. Even those who spoke about poor behaviour in lessons were clear that the low-level nature of the disruption means that it does not make them feel unsafe. Almost all parents who completed Parent View confirmed that their child feels safe in school.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Requires improvement

- The overall quality of teaching is variable across the school. It is weaker in Years 7 to 9 because leaders have directed the school's strongest teaching to key stage 4 and the sixth form. Consequently, across several subjects in key stage 3, including mathematics, science, French and computing, many pupils make slower progress than they should. Teaching is much stronger in key stage 4 and the sixth form.
- In key stage 3, teachers do not consistently expect pupils to work hard and do their best in lessons. The quality of work in pupils' books is very variable. Pieces of work are too often incomplete or poorly presented. Teachers do not routinely challenge poor work.
- Teachers in key stage 3 do not consistently plan lessons that take into account what pupils already understand, know and can do. As a result, the most able pupils find the work too easy, while less able pupils struggle to understand what they have to do.
- In several subjects in Years 7 to 9, teachers' questions do not encourage pupils to think deeply. Questions tend to invite brief, cursory responses that do not help to develop pupils' understanding of their work.
- Teachers do not consistently apply the school's marking and feedback policy in key stage 3. Consequently, teachers' feedback often does not help pupils to improve their work. For example, in French books, pupils repeatedly made the same errors in constructing sentences because their teacher's feedback had not previously addressed their misconceptions.
- The teaching of mathematics is variable across the school. In key stage 3, it does not effectively promote pupils' deep understanding of their work, focusing rather on learned rules. For example, inspectors observed pupils who knew that 'two minuses make a plus', but applied this rule incorrectly because they did not understand it. Numeracy is not well developed in subjects other than mathematics and so pupils' weak arithmetic skills are not being effectively tackled across the school.
- Weaknesses in pupils' literacy are being addressed through weekly reading lessons across all year groups and improving reading ages are evident as a result. However,

poor planning of some of these lessons and inconsistent application of the school's chosen scheme mean that many pupils are making slower progress than they could, given the considerable investment in time and resources.

- Teaching in some subjects in key stage 3, including art, geography and physical education is consistently strong. Teaching in English has also improved considerably. Here, high expectations and careful planning enthuses and challenges pupils to do their best. Pupils rise to the challenge, make good progress and enjoy their learning.
- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is effective. Teachers carefully track pupils' progress towards challenging targets and they step in to give extra help when pupils start to fall behind. Pupils in key stage 4 who spoke with inspectors said they valued the additional support and extra lessons they are given as examinations draw near.
- Teaching in the sixth form is consistently strong. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to plan engaging and challenging activities that are well matched to students' ability. Excellent relationships mean that teachers give pupils high-quality feedback and guidance. Positive attitudes to learning mean that students act on their teachers' guidance and make good progress.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive effective support from teachers and teaching assistants. Extra time devoted to improving reading is used well for these pupils because it is well planned and tailored to each individual's needs. Pupils with sight problems are well supported in normal lessons by expert adults and good resources.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The curriculum is carefully planned to ensure that pupils have a good understanding about how to keep themselves safe from a wide range of potential dangers including those that might occur when using the internet or from people who hold radical views. Regular 'personal development days' provide time for such issues to be explored in depth. The morning of the inspection's first day was such a time. Inspectors observed high-quality sex and relationships education, mature discussion of radicalisation and expert presentation from the police about the dangers of gang membership and knife crime.
- Pupils understand different types of bullying and they know what to do if they experience any. Pupils told inspectors that bullying is rare in school and they expressed confidence in adults to deal with any that occurs. Several pupils told inspectors how much they appreciated the support from members of staff when they experienced difficulties.
- High-quality careers education ensures that pupils are well informed about their next steps as they approach the end of Year 11 or Year 13. For example, on the inspection's first day, all pupils in Year 11 had a mock interview and visited an on-site careers fair with representatives of local colleges, universities, employers and training providers. Careers advice is impartial and pupils in Year 11 are not pressurised to move into the sixth form. Almost all pupils move to education, employment or training when they

leave Year 11.

- The small number of pupils who study for part of the week away from the school achieve well because teachers give them high levels of support, both when they are in school and when they are attending alternative providers. These pupils' personal development is effective as a result. School staff regularly visit pupils at their vocational placements. In 2016, all of these pupils moved to education or training when they left school.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Inappropriate behaviour disrupts learning in too many lessons, especially, but not only, in key stage 3. It is evident when lessons are not well planned: teachers lack expertise in behaviour management or fail to apply the school's behaviour for learning policy. Inspectors observed poor behaviour in mathematics, science, computing, history and French. Pupils talked while the teacher was speaking, they shouted out and were not attentive. In a few lessons, some pupils did little work or work of poor quality.
- The proportion of pupils who have been temporarily excluded once or more often has risen for five consecutive years and is well above national figures. In response, leaders have reviewed the school's behaviour policy and new procedures are in place this year. There is early evidence of a considerable reduction in exclusions as a result.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors presented mixed views about behaviour in lessons. Pupils in key stage 3 said that their lessons were regularly disrupted, whereas pupils in key stage 4 felt that disruption was rarer. Inspectors' observations confirmed pupils' views. Most parents who responded to Parent View believe that pupils are well behaved, but almost a quarter disagreed.
- In lessons where teaching is strong, across Years 7 to 11, pupils are well behaved. They are keen to do well; they work hard with enthusiasm and take pride in the work they complete. Inspectors observed exemplary behaviour in many lessons throughout the school, and behaviour was impeccable in all sixth-form lessons.
- Behaviour around the school between lessons, at break and at lunchtime is good. The school is calm and orderly. Pupils are sensible and courteous to each other and to adults.
- Attendance is above the national average and improved further during the last academic year. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils, which has been low for several years, improved sharply last year and further improvement is evident this year. Consequently, differences between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and that of others are diminishing.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision for part of the week attend regularly and their placements help them to reengage with education. Several received temporary exclusions last year, contributing to the school's rising exclusion figures. However, none were permanently excluded and all made good progress over the year.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is variable across key stages and subjects. It is too slow in key stage 3 because teaching in several subjects, including mathematics, science, French and computing, results in many pupils achieving less well than they should. Better teaching and effective intervention in key stage 4 helps pupils make up lost ground, but overall, progress from Year 7 to Year 11 is slower than it could be.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar, slow, progress as their peers in Years 7 to 9. Over recent years and up to 2015, disadvantaged pupils' GCSE attainment had declined steadily and differences between their outcomes and those of others had grown. However, GCSE results for 2016 indicate that leaders have stemmed and reversed this decline through effective use of the pupil premium. Disadvantaged pupils' attainment has risen and differences, although still existing, have narrowed considerably.
- Many pupils have weak basic skills when they join the school. A school-wide programme to improve reading over the past year has seen pupils' reading ages rise. However, inconsistent application of the school's chosen programme means that progress has been slower than it might have been. There is no programme to address pupils' weak arithmetic skills beyond mathematics lessons and consequently these are not improving quickly enough.
- Provisional GCSE results for 2016 indicate that declining areas of progress from previous years, especially for boys and disadvantaged pupils, have improved. Pupils' overall progress was in line with national figures, and there was little difference between the progress of boys and girls.
- The most able pupils make similar, too slow, progress as their peers in key stage 3 because of inconsistent levels of challenge and teacher expectations. However, they respond well to better teaching and extra help in key stage 4 and so make reasonable progress by the end of Year 11. In common with their peers, these pupils are capable of making better progress than they currently do.
- GCSE results for 2016 show that pupils made strong progress in several subjects including art, English literature, geography, biology, chemistry, i-media and health and social care. Pupils made weak progress in textiles, drama, music, business studies and French. Outcomes in English, which have previously been weak, improved, especially for the most able pupils taking separate language and literature courses.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress, and better progress than their peers in key stage 3. Personalised literacy support helps pupils who need to improve their reading. Extra help from teaching assistants supports pupils in lessons and enables them to tackle tasks, even when classroom teaching is weaker.
- Outcomes in the sixth form have improved rapidly, from a low base, over the past two years. Results in all subjects are at least in line with national figures. Boys and girls achieve similar outcomes and disadvantaged students' outcomes have improved so that their progress is similar to that of other students. However, the proportion of students achieving the very top A-level grades remains a little below national figures.



## 16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The sixth form is well led and has many strengths. Leaders understand its few weaknesses and have effective plans in place to secure further improvement. High expectations, excellent relationships and strong teaching have resulted in good outcomes in the last two years.
- All requirements of the 16 to 19 study programmes are met. Academic and vocational subjects are available and students are guided onto courses that match their interests, aspirations and academic ability. All students who spoke with inspectors said that they enjoy their studies and were glad they chose to remain in the school's sixth form.
- Students have access to a broad and appropriate range of activities that supplement their academic studies. For example, all students are encouraged to undertake a work experience placement that is closely matched to their future career aspirations. Sixth formers support younger pupils in the school with their reading.
- The high-quality careers education evident in the main school continues into the sixth form. Consequently, all students who completed their courses in 2016 moved into higher education, employment or apprenticeship. However, several students do not complete the first year of their course because opportunities to begin an apprenticeship arise during the year. Although this reflects poorly on the school's published retention statistics, leaders do not stand in the way of students who choose this option.
- Students provide excellent role models for younger pupils. They are articulate and mature, and conduct themselves in an exemplary fashion. Attendance in the sixth form is high and students' attitudes to learning are excellent.
- All learners who start the sixth form without a GCSE grade C or above in English or mathematics are required to follow a course to improve their standard. Success rates on these courses are variable and leaders are aware that this is the weakest aspect of sixth-form outcomes.

## School details

Unique reference number	140586
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10025202

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	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	964
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	170
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jas Kaur
Headteacher	Martyn Morgan
Telephone number	01902539500
Website	<a href="http://www.smestow.org">www.smestow.org</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:enquiries@smestow.org">enquiries@smestow.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school does not comply with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish about governance.
- The school does not meet requirements on the publication of information about governance on its website.
- The school is an average-sized secondary school. It became an academy in January 2014 as part of the Education Central Multi-Academy Trust.
- An average proportion of pupils is eligible for the pupil premium.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average.
- The school includes a resource base for visually impaired students who are fully integrated into the school. The base currently contains four pupils.
- The school's performance meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- A small number of pupils study for part of the week at the Switch Project and Re-Entry.
- A partnership arrangement exists for post-16 provision where some students are educated at Aldersley High School, The Kings C of E School, Highfields Science Specialist College and St Peter's High School.
- The school's senior leadership team was restructured in September 2015.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and some of these observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors talked to pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They met with three focus groups of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils at morning break and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors heard pupils read and talked to them about the books they enjoy.
- Inspectors considered 38 responses to Parent View, Ofsted’s online questionnaire.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders, a group of six governors including the chair and the vice chair of the governing body, and a representative of ECMAT.
- Inspectors scrutinised several documents, including the school improvement plan, minutes of governing body meetings, and the school’s records about pupils’ behaviour, attendance and attainment.

## Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Bianka Zemke	Ofsted Inspector
Christine Bray	Ofsted Inspector
Dan Owen	Her Majesty’s Inspector
Sajid Gulzar	Ofsted Inspector
Bernice Astling	Ofsted Inspector

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