

Smithills School

Smithills Dean Road, Bolton, Lancashire BL1 6JS

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Inadequate
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Leaders have not done enough to raise standards of achievement. Consequently, outcomes for pupils have remained low for too long.
- Outcomes were low in 2016. The achievement of the current cohorts of pupils is not rising rapidly or consistently enough.
- The progress of the most able pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, is low. The school has not done enough to improve outcomes for these pupils.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make insufficient progress from their starting points.
- Achievement in several key subjects, including English, mathematics, French and geography, is too low and shows little sign of improvement.
- The quality of teaching is not good enough to enable pupils to make the faster progress necessary.
- Some teachers have low expectations of what pupils should achieve. Targets set for pupils are often insufficiently aspirational.
- The school’s professional development programme has not had sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching.
- A minority of pupils have poor attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is not managed well by some teachers.
- The school has not monitored the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities closely enough.
- The school’s self-evaluation and improvement planning do not focus sufficiently on the impact of actions to meet whole-school priorities.

The school has the following strengths

- The school’s pastoral care for its pupils is strong. Pupils are happy at Smithills and feel they are well looked after.
- Relationships between pupils from many different backgrounds and ethnicities are strong. Pupils get along very well with one another.
- The school integrates pupils who arrive from abroad very well and helps them to learn English quickly and effectively.
- The school offers its pupils good-quality careers education and guidance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding pupils are very effective.

Full report

In accordance with section 44(1) 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 in the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - reviewing the targets set for pupils in all year groups and all subjects to ensure that they offer sufficient challenge to raise achievement significantly
 - taking urgent action to identify and remedy underachievement in key groups of pupils, especially the most able, the most able disadvantaged and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - taking urgent action to improve pupils' progress in English and mathematics.
- Improve the quality of teaching by:
 - ensuring that teachers use assessment information accurately and effectively to better meet the needs of all pupils and groups of pupils in their classes
 - ensuring that all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can and should achieve
 - ensuring that where weaknesses are identified in teaching these are addressed promptly and rigorously through additional support and challenge.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by:
 - improving the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities
 - ensuring that teachers use agreed behaviour systems consistently to manage any poor behaviour in their lessons
 - taking action to improve the commitment of the minority of pupils whose attitudes to learning hinder their progress.
- Improve the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that improvement planning and school self-evaluation focus on the impact of actions and priorities to improve the school.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Inadequate

- The actions taken by leaders since the school opened have not been effective enough to raise achievement to acceptable levels.
- Evidence gathered on this inspection showed that improvements in the progress being made by current pupils are fragile and are not sufficient to enable pupils to make the progress they should. Leaders are not doing enough to raise achievement in English and mathematics, as well as in several other subjects across the curriculum.
- Leaders have not ensured that targets for pupils in all subjects are challenging enough to enable them to make faster, more sustained progress. This lack of ambition for what pupils can achieve is preventing a number of departments from overcoming the legacy of pupils' previous poor achievement.
- School leaders have not done enough over time to improve teaching. Leaders said that they had invested heavily in professional development for teachers in recent years, but they acknowledged that this programme had not had the impact it needed to have. They felt that teachers had been overloaded with training and development. As a result, leaders have overhauled the system this year. All teachers now have opportunities to take part in action research projects. Inspection evidence showed that these are not yet having an impact on improving pupil performance.
- Leaders now monitor the typicality of teaching through activities such as short visits to lessons to look at learning, longer lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. The findings of their monitoring are linked to teachers' appraisal targets. Leaders provide support and challenge to teachers whose performance needs to improve, but sometimes this process takes a long time and is not consistently effective.
- Senior leaders have sought to empower and develop subject leaders, for example by increasing their involvement in monitoring the quality of teaching. Subject leaders are now held to account firmly for the performance of their departments. Some subject leaders are inexperienced, however, and leadership in some subjects has not succeeded in raising achievement sufficiently.
- Pupil premium funding is used appropriately and has had an impact on supporting vulnerable pupils and keeping them in school, but its effect on raising achievement for disadvantaged pupils is inconsistent. School leaders could not produce evidence of the impact of work done to support the most able disadvantaged pupils. Year 7 catch-up funding has had some impact on improving pupils' literacy, but there has been little effect on raising their proficiency in numeracy.
- The curriculum offers pupils a wide choice of subjects but the poor quality of teaching overall and the lack of ambitious targets limit its impact on pupils' achievement. The school does not yet offer its most-able pupils the option to study three separate sciences, which a few parents felt would restrict their child's preparation for and access to A-level science courses. The school uses its 'session zero' form time effectively to promote pupils' knowledge and understanding of British values and personal, social,

health and economic education.

- Pupils at key stages 3 and 4 are provided with objective advice, information and guidance regarding their future careers. This includes a programme of visits and visitors so that pupils develop an understanding of the broad range of careers open to them.
- There is a variety of extra-curricular activities on offer, including visits abroad, performing arts events and clubs such as chess, languages and computer coding. Pupils welcome and enjoy these opportunities and many pupils participate in them. The school's brass bands have a worldwide reputation for excellence.
- Since Smithills converted to become an academy, the sponsor has supported the senior leaders in monitoring the school, helping to plan form time, coaching leaders and working with governors. Governors and staff have welcomed this enhanced support.
- The principal and his senior colleagues have successfully engendered a strong ethos of pastoral care for pupils. Pupils feel happy at the school and say that they are well cared for. Relationships between pupils from different backgrounds are strong and supportive and pupils get along well with one another.
- The school regularly accepts a number of pupils from abroad and its proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is growing. These pupils generally settle quickly in the school and are helped to improve their English effectively.
- It is recommended that the school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.

Governance of the school

- Governors have presided over a period in which outcomes for pupils have been too low for too long, so their effectiveness has been limited.
- Governors interviewed had a good knowledge of how pupil premium funding was spent last year, but their understanding of the impact of this funding was vague.
- The governing body includes a number of people with significant experience of education. They challenge the principal and his colleagues about school performance. They have enhanced the rigour of the performance management process, so that teachers and leaders are increasingly held to account. Governors make the decision not to approve pay rises where teachers' performance is not good enough.
- Governors have a good working knowledge, some of which is acquired through their links with various departments, of the main performance issues facing the school and its key priorities for further development.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements.
- The school's safeguarding policies and practices are strong. Smithills actively promotes a culture of vigilance where pupils' safety and welfare are paramount. All staff have been trained in safeguarding and child protection and they know what to do if they feel that a child is at risk and whom to talk to.
- The school has rigorous checking procedures in place for child protection and it follows

up any issues thoroughly with the appropriate agencies. Most staff have had training on 'Prevent', the government's programme for preventing radicalisation and extremism, but a few staff new to the school in September 2016 have still to be trained on this.

- The school ensures that all staff and visitors to the school are thoroughly checked before they enter the premises or work with pupils. Governors are trained in safeguarding and in the safe recruitment of new staff.
- The school works effectively with parents and external agencies to safeguard pupils.
- Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe regarding issues such as e-safety. The school has filters in place to prevent inappropriate internet usage.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Inadequate

- The quality of teaching over time has not been strong enough to raise achievement to acceptable levels. Evidence gathered on this inspection showed that teaching is still not strong enough overall to bring pupils' achievement up to expected standards. There is insufficient teaching that has a good or outstanding impact on pupils' outcomes.
- Leaders have not succeeded in improving teaching consistently over time. They acknowledge that some of the training done with teachers in recent years did not have the desired impact and so they have revised the programme this year. It is too early to see the impact of this work.
- Staffing instability in some departments resulted in too many classes being taught by temporary teachers last year and too many in-year changes of teacher. In some cases, this has resulted in a legacy of serious underachievement which teachers need to overcome for their pupils. However, some of the teaching seen on this inspection, and some of the work seen in pupils' books, was not strong enough to realise this. This was particularly the case in Year 11 mathematics. The English department still uses a number of non-specialist teachers.
- Too much teaching fails to challenge pupils and this limits their progress, especially that of the most able pupils. Pupils with different starting points often tackle the same work at the same level of difficulty. Teachers' expectations of what pupils should achieve are sometimes too low. Teachers do not use assessment information well enough to plan the next stages of pupils' learning.
- The school is in transition between different target-setting systems as the national system of grading GCSEs changes. The joint use of the former system and the new one has confused pupils and, in some subjects, has resulted in targets for pupils being set too low and with little ambition.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons, but on occasions pupils lose concentration where teaching fails to grasp their interest. Some teachers only involve a few pupils in their questioning, so others do not participate effectively. Questioning does not consistently extend pupils' knowledge or deepen their thinking.
- In a small minority of lessons, the low-level disruption caused by a few pupils hinders their learning.
- The quality of work teachers expect of their pupils varies, sometimes even within the same class. Some pupils are allowed to get away with work which is scruffy or

unfinished. The majority of pupils, however, take pride in their work.

- Teachers' feedback varies in its impact. There is some effective practice in history, where pupils take careful note of their teachers' feedback to refine and improve their work.
- There are pockets of stronger teaching in the school. In food technology, the teacher's high expectations of her pupils shone through in the concerted effort they all made to identify the sugar content in various foodstuffs and in their instant response to her requests for attention. The teacher questioned them intensely to ensure that they fully understood; her precise questioning deepened their learning. In Year 7 dance, all groups of pupils practised a different routine with enthusiasm, demonstrating independence and ownership of their learning.
- Following support from a specialist languages college, the teaching of modern foreign languages in the lower school is improving.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils generally feel safe in school, and they know how to stay safe. They told inspectors that there is little bullying and that staff will deal with it effectively when it arises. Pupils said that there is little racism or homophobic bullying and school records confirm this.
- Pupils relate well to one another and respect each other's differences. Given the wide range of ethnicities and other backgrounds which pupils come from, this is impressive. The school is a harmonious environment.
- The school is inclusive and succeeds in integrating its many new, in-year arrivals well. This is especially the case with pupils who arrive from overseas. These pupils settle quickly into the school and receive good support to help them learn and improve their English.
- The school's 'pathways' facility is used well to support pupils who may be at risk of exclusion. Pupils spend short periods of time in the unit, where they have smaller group tuition and can learn to amend their behaviour.
- The school provides good careers education, advice and guidance to its pupils. This is broad and balanced for all year groups. Pupils have the opportunity to listen to visitors from business and enterprise and to go on university visits. The number of pupils leaving the school who are not in education, employment or training is small.
- The school is successfully promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Inspectors observed an interesting, interactive assembly about entrepreneurship. Students learn about British values, for example, democracy, and the school is a tolerant and harmonious institution. They are taught about healthy eating and healthy lifestyles. Many pupils enjoy opportunities to take part in extra-curricular performing arts activities.

- A small number of pupils attend registered alternative provision so that their specific needs can be better met. This is well monitored by school staff, including the attendance of the pupils, and the school receives regular progress reports. Staff say that the pupils often return to Smithills with their confidence boosted.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Most pupils behave well and work positively. They generally arrive at lessons willing and ready to learn. However, the apathetic attitudes of a minority of pupils hinder their progress.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are generally positive. However, pupils who spoke to inspectors said that low-level disruption occurs in some lessons and inspectors saw a few examples of this themselves. In some of these lessons, teachers did not use the school's behaviour management systems effectively.
- The great majority of pupils behave sensibly and in an orderly fashion at social times and when moving between lessons. Pupils move promptly to lessons without needing to be reminded to do so by staff.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly and are generally courteous and respectful. However, some pupils do not take enough pride in their work and teachers sometimes do not set high enough standards for the quality of work they expect from pupils.
- Fixed-term exclusions rose in 2016. The school staff say this is because of the stricter approach leaders took to disciplinary matters.
- The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now close to the national average overall, despite issues with a school population that is often in flux. The school has not monitored the attendance of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities closely enough.

Outcomes for pupils

Inadequate

- In 2015, pupils' attainment and progress were significantly lower than national averages in a number of key aspects, despite some improvement since the previous year. In 2016, the school's Progress 8 score (the new government measure by which secondary schools' progress is assessed) was low.
- Performance in English was poor in 2016 for the third year in a row. Boys' attainment and progress, although improving in a number of areas, were still lower overall than those of girls.
- There has been insufficient impact of the pupil premium funding on pupils' achievement. In mathematics, the progress of disadvantaged pupils has continued to decrease over four years. Wide gaps still remain between the performance of disadvantaged pupils in school and that of other pupils nationally.
- Leaders and governors say that key factors in the decline in 2016 include the arrival of large numbers of pupils from overseas and significant staffing reductions caused by

budgetary pressures. Nonetheless, the fact remains that, by the end of the 2015/16 academic year, outcomes for pupils had been low for three years. Leaders have not done enough to improve achievement.

- Pupils who left the school in 2016 were not well prepared for the next stages of education, training or employment, because too few made the expected progress in English and mathematics.
- Senior leaders told inspectors that the progress being made by current cohorts of pupils is stronger and that outcomes in 2017 will be much better. However, their evidence for this is not convincing.
- In English and mathematics, school data shows that all classes in the current Year 11 are performing below their targets and that progress and attainment for all sets are low. Leaders told inspectors that English and mathematics subject leaders are being very cautious about their assessments because of uncertainty nationally over the impact of the new examinations and grade boundaries. However, the school's data shows that, even if this is the case, pupils have a huge amount of ground to make up from current low baselines if they are to achieve as expected. Weak teaching in mathematics and work of variable quality in pupils' books in both English and mathematics indicate that the foundations for pupils to achieve much more strongly this year are not secure.
- The school's tracking data shows that the progress of the most able pupils in the current Year 11 is uneven. At the school's first assessment round of the year, most-able pupils in English and mathematics were making significantly less progress than expected. There is significant underachievement in geography and modern foreign languages. Teaching is often not challenging most-able pupils sufficiently.
- In Year 11, there remain wide differences between the performance of the disadvantaged pupils and that of their non-disadvantaged peers, which leaders acknowledge. No disadvantaged pupils were making the expected progress in geography at the time of the inspection. Disadvantaged most-able pupils are achieving better than other most-able pupils in history and mathematics, but in additional science and English the performance of the most able disadvantaged cohort is very poor compared with that of other high-ability pupils. Leaders had not identified the disadvantaged most-able cohort as a group causing concern.
- There are pockets of underachievement across the curriculum which are not being addressed rigorously enough. School leaders identified concerns with boys' achievement and the progress of the disadvantaged cohort in a number of subjects. They recognise in their school self-evaluation that some of the improvements they were making have not been sustained.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are well supported in school but their progress is weak. Leaders acknowledge that the progress of this group of pupils needs to improve. There is evidence, however, that the school is using its Year 7 catch-up funding effectively to improve pupils' literacy.
- Inspectors found some evidence that pupils in Years 8 to 10 are starting to make better progress but improvements are fragile. Teaching across the school is not yet good enough to raise achievement substantially. Senior leaders cannot explain why middle-ability pupils in Year 10 are underachieving in both English and mathematics.

- Pupils who speak English as an additional language generally make better progress than their peers.
- Science has consistently been the best-performing subject in recent years. Some subject leaders in other departments have been working with the leader of science to learn from the department's effective practice.

School details

Unique reference number	140500
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10019767

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	968
Appropriate authority	The Bolton Multi Academy Trust
Chair of governors	Ian Carter
Principal	Alec Cottrill
Telephone number	01204 842 382
Website	www.smithillsschool.net/
Email address	office@smithillsschool.net
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school is of average size.
- The school's pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is twice the national average, and the school regularly accepts pupils from overseas. The biggest group is White British.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is three times greater than the national average.
- The proportion of pupils known to be disadvantaged is higher than the national average.

- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is close to the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standard, which is the minimum expectation for pupils' progress across a number of subjects including English and mathematics.
- The school uses Lomax Recruitment, Redbox Training and Harmony Youth Project to offer a small number of pupils alternative education provision.
- The school converted to become an academy in January 2014 and is the sole member of the ConcertED multi-academy trust. The sponsor has seconded a representative with senior leadership experience to the school to support other leaders this year.
- The school has faced budget reductions in recent years which have resulted in a large number of staff leaving.
- The school is a member of the Bolton Learning Alliance, through which it links with other schools. Smithills is receiving support for modern foreign languages from Cheadle Hulme High School and for geography, art and design, technology and computer science from St James' Teaching School.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in a range of lessons. They visited form time and an assembly and observed pupils' conduct at break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and scrutinised a sample of work provided by senior leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, subject leaders, class teachers and with governors. They met representatives of the sponsor, ConcertED.
- Inspectors met with four groups of pupils formally and spoke with many more pupils informally. They took account of the 55 responses to the online pupil survey.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of documents. These included the school's internal data which tracks pupils' achievement, development plans and evaluations of the school's progress, minutes of governing body meetings, school policies, safeguarding procedures and records showing how the school supports vulnerable pupils. Inspectors also scrutinised the school's website.
- The team took account of the 14 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and of the 12 free text responses received from parents. They also considered the 12 responses to the staff online questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clive Hurren, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Stott	Ofsted Inspector
Rochelle Conefrey	Ofsted Inspector
Jan Rowney	Ofsted Inspector

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