

# Smith's Wood Academy

Windward Way, Smith's Wood, Birmingham, West Midlands B36 0UE

## Inspection dates

1–2 May 2019

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>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils' published outcomes at the end of key stage 4 were weak in 2018. This was particularly the case in English, mathematics, science, history and geography.
- The quality of teaching varies across the school and not enough is good. Teachers too often plan activities that are too easy or too hard for pupils. They do not consistently check that pupils understand their work.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), although improving, has weaknesses. Teachers' planning does not consistently take into account these pupils' needs. Additional support is not as effective as it ought to be.
- Although attendance has improved considerably this year, it remains well below the average for similar schools. Too many pupils do not attend regularly.
- There remains too much low-level disruption of lessons. A minority of pupils do not have good attitudes to learning and some teachers do not manage behaviour as well as they should.
- A minority of pupils do not have confidence in staff to deal effectively with problems, including bullying, when they arise. However, pupils are safe in school.
- The school does not promote pupils' literacy skills as well as it should. Some staff do not always use correct spoken and written English. Staff do not consistently address the errors that pupils make.

### The school has the following strengths

- The school has improved rapidly since it opened as an academy in April 2017. Determined leadership from the headteacher, well supported by senior leaders and the Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust (FMAT), has resulted in considerable improvement in teaching, behaviour and attendance. Consequently, current pupils' progress is improving rapidly.
- The curriculum is thoughtfully planned and contributes well to pupils' personal development. It is particularly effective in helping pupils to understand how to stay safe and live healthy lives.
- Outcomes are strong in several subjects. These include languages and most vocational subjects.

## Full report

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

- Improve teaching so that pupils make good progress in all subjects by ensuring that teachers consistently:
  - plan activities that are well matched to pupils’ abilities and that take into account what they already know and understand
  - check pupils’ understanding of their work in lessons.
- Improve pupils’ behaviour and welfare by:
  - continuing to improve attendance, especially of pupils with SEND, towards the national average
  - continuing to reduce the incidence of low-level disruption in lessons
  - ensuring that all pupils have confidence in staff to deal with issues such as bullying.
- Improve provision for pupils with SEND by ensuring that:
  - new leadership of this area is quickly embedded and effective
  - strategies that have already been planned are implemented speedily
  - all teachers use information about pupils’ needs when planning lessons.
- Address weaknesses in pupils’ literacy skills by ensuring that staff consistently:
  - use correct written and spoken English
  - promote pupils’ use of correct spoken English and accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar in their writing.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- This school has improved considerably since it opened as an academy. A little over two years ago, the school was dysfunctional and, since that time, many parents and carers have chosen to remove their children from the school. The headteacher provides determined and thoughtful leadership. She is well supported by senior leaders. Together, they have overseen significant improvements to all aspects of the school, most notably to teaching, behaviour and attendance. The school provides an acceptable standard of education. However, there remains much to be done in each of these areas before it provides a good standard of education for its pupils.
- The school received a one-day inspection of behaviour and attendance in March 2018. At that time, inspectors concluded that the school's behaviour policy was too inflexible and that leaders did not apply a sufficiently strategic approach to managing behaviour and attendance. Consequently, the school's use of exclusion was very high and attendance was very low. Leaders and governors responded swiftly and energetically to this inspection, restructuring pastoral leadership and systems and revising the school's approach to supporting pupils. The impact has been considerable, rapid and positive. Behaviour continues to improve and the school's use of sanctions, including exclusion, has fallen dramatically. Attendance has improved considerably since March 2018. These areas are now well led, with a strong, strategic and evaluative approach.
- Senior leaders know the school very well. Their self-evaluation is concise, accurate and honest. It does not shy away from acknowledging the areas that need to improve in the school. Plans to address weaknesses are clear and well focused on key priorities, with appropriate actions in place. Leaders and governors regularly check on the impact that improvement strategies are having. Wherever possible, they measure the degree of improvement that is evident. They then review and amend plans and actions in the light of what they have found. Consequently, improvement strategies are proving very successful. Although the pace of improvement varies to some degree, all areas being addressed by leaders are improving, and several are doing so rapidly.
- Leaders are very clear about what they want the school's curriculum to provide for pupils. Specifically, they intend it to prepare pupils for life after school by equipping them with appropriate qualifications, attitudes and cultural experiences and knowledge. They have thoughtfully reviewed the curriculum and made changes this year that they expect will contribute to further improving behaviour and raising standards. Pupils now begin examination courses in Year 9 rather than in Year 10. It is too soon to be able to evaluate the impact of this change but there is some early evidence of better behaviour from pupils in Year 9. Historical difficulties in recruiting science teachers mean that pupils currently do not spend enough time studying science. Leaders are aware of this and are seeking to remedy the situation in the near future.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is strong. Leaders have put in place a comprehensive and well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme that is taught through weekly lessons, assemblies and 'enrichment days'. The programme is tailored very well to the needs of Smith's Wood's pupils. Leaders regularly make changes in the light of issues that arise in school or within the

local community. It is particularly effective in helping pupils to understand how to be safe and what it means to be a healthy, responsible member of society. For example, recent areas that have been taught include online safety, healthy relationships, radicalisation, grooming, knife crime and equality and disability.

- Smith's Wood is now an inclusive school. It was not two years ago. Staff increasingly know pupils well, including their individual needs. Leaders work closely with many outside agencies to provide bespoke support for pupils and families who need it, for example with mental health, after bereavement and with emotional resilience. Pupils and parents increasingly value this support.
- Senior leaders have a clear long-term strategy to improve teaching. Although at a relatively early stage, it is already proving effective. Leaders have put in place a common structure for lessons and teachers apply it with considerable consistency. Leaders provide extra support for new members of staff and for any teachers who need extra help. They carry out regular checks on teaching and, consequently, have an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses. The school has several newly qualified teachers who are very well supported as they embark on their teaching careers. These teachers, and the great majority of those who completed their inspection questionnaire, said that the school uses continuing professional development well to help them improve their teaching.
- Middle leaders form an effective and hard-working team, fully committed to seeing the school continue to improve. They value the considerable support and guidance that senior leaders provide and are increasingly taking responsibility to evaluate the effectiveness of their subjects or areas. They are an important reason that the school has improved over the last two years.
- Leaders use the pupil premium effectively. In common with other areas, improvement plans are clear, well focused and regularly evaluated. Most pupils in the school are disadvantaged and are increasingly benefiting from better teaching, improved support and more opportunities. Consequently, these pupils and others are attending more regularly, behaving better and making better academic progress.
- Provision for pupils with SEND has been a weakness of the school. It was rightly criticised in the inspection of March 2018. Since that time, it is much improved but still not of good quality. Leaders, supported by FMAT, have put in place clear plans to address weaknesses. However, staffing issues have meant that some actions have not yet been implemented or are yet to prove effective. For example, although teachers are now provided with information about pupils' needs, some do not use this information well when planning lessons. Similarly, although extra intervention lessons are in place, some of these are not effective in helping pupils to catch up. New leadership of this area has very recently been put into place.
- An increasing proportion of the pupils who join the school in Year 7 have weak literacy skills. The school is not addressing these as well as it should. Some strategies that have been put into place, including reading in morning mentor time and 'library lessons', are not having the desired impact. There is currently no whole-school approach to improving pupils' literacy skills.
- FMAT is playing an important part in helping the school to improve, after having had less impact in the school's first year as an academy. It now provides effective support in several areas, including SEND provision, behaviour, teaching and leadership. Newly

qualified teachers and middle leaders value the opportunities that FMAT provides to meet with colleagues in the trust's other schools.

## **Governance of the school**

- Members of the governing body know the school well, including its strengths and weaknesses. They possess considerable expertise, for example in education, governance, safeguarding and local community issues.
- The governing body is well focused on the school's key priorities. Its members understand their roles well and provide good support and strong challenge to leaders. They carry out their statutory duties diligently. For example, they check that safeguarding arrangements are effective and scrutinise the impact that additional funding, such as the pupil premium, is having in school.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding has an appropriately high priority. The area is well led. Staff have been well trained and are alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help. Policies and systems are clear and understood well by staff, who readily report to senior leaders any concerns they have about pupils. Leaders deal with concerns speedily, involving a wide range of outside agencies when appropriate, to ensure that pupils get the right support.
- Since the school opened as an academy, parents have rightly expressed many concerns about the school, including about behaviour, bullying and support for vulnerable pupils. Several parents have withdrawn their children from the school as a result. In each of these areas, there has been considerable improvement over the last two years. Inspectors concluded that safeguarding arrangements are effective and pupils are safe in school. Leaders know that issues with behaviour and bullying remain. For example, a minority of pupils who spoke with inspectors said that staff are too slow to deal with issues such as bullying or fallings-out and that such issues are not resolved effectively as a result. However, most pupils who spoke with inspectors said that bullying is rare. They also expressed confidence in adults to deal with bullying and other issues that arise.
- Although only a small number of parents completed Parent View, almost all who responded said that their children are safe in school. The great majority of staff who completed their inspection questionnaire agreed that pupils are safe in school. A minority of staff disagreed, mainly citing poor behaviour as the reason for lack of safety.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Requires improvement**

- Teaching has improved considerably since the school opened as an academy. There is much strong practice spread across almost all subjects. However, too much weaker practice remains, and this is why inspectors judged its overall quality to be less than

good.

- Weaker teaching is characterised by teachers' planning that does not take sufficiently into account pupils' abilities or individual needs. Tasks are sometimes too easy for pupils and they learn less than they should as a result. In contrast, tasks are sometimes too difficult, and pupils are unable to begin them without considerable assistance. Teachers' use of information about pupils with SEND is mixed. Some teachers plan activities that support these pupils well. Others take little or no account of pupils' needs when planning lessons.
- Some teachers do not check effectively that pupils understand what they are learning. They make the error of assuming that, because a concept has been taught or because one or two pupils understand it, then all do. Consequently, teachers' planning does not always build well on what pupils already understand and know. New ideas are introduced too quickly before pupils have mastered the previous learning needed to understand the new concept.
- Teachers' promotion of literacy is not consistently effective, although there is some strong practice. At times, a minority of teachers do not model the correct use of English when they speak and/or in their writing. There is not a common approach to addressing pupils' errors in spoken and written English. Consequently, pupils repeat errors in their work because they do not know that they have made a mistake.
- Leaders have introduced clear expectations of the structure of lessons and how teachers are to provide feedback to pupils. Almost all teachers apply these expectations and pupils value the consistency of approach that is now evident across the school.
- Most teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge, especially when they are teaching within their subject specialism. They use this well to explain things clearly to pupils. Relationships are generally positive and most pupils value their teachers' expertise and support.
- Teaching is consistently effective in several subjects, including languages, most vocational subjects and art. It has improved most strongly in English and mathematics. For example, leaders have successfully recruited specialist teachers of mathematics and the department is now fully staffed. This was not the case prior to this year.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development is a strength. As highlighted earlier in this report, a very well-planned PSHE programme contributes well to pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and live healthy lives.
- The school's work to promote pupils' welfare is improving strongly. Positive impact is evident in several areas, for example in supporting pupils who experience issues with mental health or pupils who struggle to cope in a large secondary school setting. However, although pupils are safe in school, a perception remains in a minority of pupils that issues such as bullying are not dealt with well enough by staff. These pupils

are much less likely to report concerns or seek support as a result.

- The school provides a thorough and well-planned careers education programme in all years. Leaders compare their provision with national benchmarks of good practice and put in place clear plans to address any relative weaknesses. For example, leaders recognise that engaging with parents is a particular challenge at the moment. The programme has a clear aim of raising aspirations, including increasing the proportion of pupils who go to university when they are 18. Almost all pupils move to further education or training when they leave school at the end of Year 11.
- The school uses alternative provision placements for a small number of pupils in most year groups. Most attend school for part of the week and the alternative provider for the rest of the week. A very small number attend alternative providers for the entire week. Placements are carefully chosen and checked prior to any pupil attending. Leaders review each placement each half-term and parents receive a written report. Leaders keep a close eye on each pupil's attendance, behaviour and progress. Consequently, most placements are successful in engaging pupils in learning. Several pupils have returned to school full-time, having undertaken an alternative provision placement.
- Children looked after are supported very well in school. They have strong relationships with staff, who keep a regular and careful eye on how each pupil is getting on.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Most pupils behave well in lessons. They are attentive, work hard and are keen to do well. However, despite improvement, low-level disruption remains a feature of too many lessons. At times, this is because tasks are not well matched to pupils' abilities and pupils become distracted when they are unable to attempt tasks. At other times, it is because a minority of pupils do not have good attitudes to learning and some teachers do not manage behaviour as well as they could.
- At breaktime, lunchtime and between lessons, the school is generally calm and orderly. Some pupils do not regulate their own behaviour well but a high staff presence helps to chivvy pupils into lessons and deals with boisterous behaviour when it happens.
- School records confirm that incidents of more serious misbehaviour, such as physical altercations, do occur but their prevalence is reducing and they are now rare. Inspectors observed no such incidents during the two days of the inspection. Consequently, leaders' use of exclusion, which was very high indeed, has reduced by almost 75%. Permanent exclusions, which were also very common, have also reduced considerably. The use of internal isolation has fallen by approximately 70%. The rapid and dramatic reduction in the use of these sanctions has not had an adverse effect on behaviour. It continues to improve steadily as staff become more skilled in managing behaviour and vulnerable pupils receive the support they need. Despite these improvements, the school's use of fixed-term and permanent exclusion is still higher than average.
- Attendance, which was very low indeed in 2017/18, has improved considerably this year. However, it remains well below the national average and the average for schools

in similar contexts. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved more than that of others but remains a little lower than that of non-disadvantaged pupils. The attendance of pupils with SEND remains too low. It is skewed by the very poor attendance of a small number of pupils, mainly in Years 7 and 8. Staff are working hard to support these pupils and their families. Early signs of some improvement are evident as a result.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Requires improvement

- Because the school opened as an academy in April 2017, it has only one set of published outcomes, for summer 2018. These showed pupils making weak progress in most subjects by the end of Year 11. Outcomes were weak in English, mathematics, science, history and geography. This was the case for almost all groups of pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND.
- Inspection evidence, including observations of teaching, evaluation of work in pupils' books, discussions with pupils and scrutiny of the school's assessment information, confirms that current pupils are making better progress than previous cohorts. Older pupils still have gaps in their knowledge because of previous weak teaching but they are no longer underachieving substantially. Younger pupils, in Years 7 to 9, have fewer gaps in their knowledge. They are now making better progress from their starting points.
- Improvement is evident in almost all subjects. It is especially evident in English and mathematics because teaching has improved most in these subjects. Pupils' progress in science is improving but is hampered by insufficient curriculum time being provided for the subject. In a small number of subjects, including history, outcomes remain a cause for concern.
- Current disadvantaged pupils are making similar improving progress as other pupils in the school. This means that their attainment remains well below that of non-disadvantaged pupils nationally but the gap is closing. They are now benefiting from better teaching and increasingly well-planned extra support.
- Pupils with SEND make weaker progress than other pupils because of weaknesses in provision over recent years. However, this is an improving picture as provision for these pupils improves.
- Published outcomes are strong in several subjects, including languages, health and social care, sport and art. Inspection evidence confirmed that current pupils continue to do well in these subjects.



## School details

Unique reference number	143895
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10102548

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	986
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Simon Small
Headteacher	Katy Craig
Telephone number	0121 788 4100
Website	<a href="http://smithswood.co.uk/">http://smithswood.co.uk/</a>
Email address	office@smiths-wood.solihull.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The school opened as an academy in April 2017 and is part of FMAT.
- The school's local governing body, known as its academy association, has responsibility for setting the school's strategic direction and creating and reviewing policies, objectives and targets. It approves and reviews the school's budget and holds its leaders to account for the school's performance.
- FMAT's board of directors oversees the academy association and the work of the trust.
- The school is larger than the average-sized 11–16 comprehensive school. Its sixth form closed in August 2018.
- More than half of its pupils are disadvantaged. This is well above average.
- The great majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Few pupils speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is broadly average.

- The school makes use of alternative provision for approximately a dozen pupils. The alternative providers are TLG Kingstanding, TLG Yardley Wood, EBN1, EBN2, Blackwater Academy, IMedia, Riverside and WorkLearn UK.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in lessons, and a small number of these observations were conducted jointly with the headteacher.
- Inspectors talked to many pupils about their learning and their attitudes to, and opinions about, school. They observed pupils at breaktime and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors visited an assembly and several morning mentor periods.
- A wide range of documents were scrutinised, including information relating to governance, attendance, behaviour, safeguarding, pupils' progress and the checks made on the quality of teaching.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, the chair of the academy association and the chief executive officer of FMAT.
- Inspectors took account of parents' views by considering the 16 responses to Parent View, including 10 free-text comments. The lead inspector spoke over the telephone to a carer and considered a letter from a parent.
- Inspectors considered the 77 responses from staff to Ofsted's inspection questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Alun Williams, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Thomas Walton	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
David Buckle	Ofsted Inspector

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