

# Smestow School

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

## Inspection dates

15–16 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
16 to 19 study programmes	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have struggled to manage a large staff turnover in the last three years. Until relatively recently, they have been unable to make suitable high-quality appointments, including to leadership roles.
- In the past, pupils lacked specialist input and, as a result, often repeated work and had been poorly prepared for public examinations. This situation has improved considerably this academic year and the school is currently fully staffed.
- In 2017 and 2018, pupils did not make enough progress in the majority of subjects, including English, mathematics and humanities. There are improvements evident in the progress of current pupils.
- In lessons, some pupils disturb the learning of others. This is because some teachers do not apply the school's behaviour policy consistently.
- The quality of teaching overall is not good enough. Not all teachers have high enough expectations of their pupils. They allow pupils to work slowly on undemanding activities. Pupils make less progress than they should.
- The sixth form requires improvement. The school's staffing issues have also affected the quality of teaching and progress in the sixth form.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make less progress and attend less regularly than other pupils in the school and nationally. New initiatives have recently been put in place to address this, with some improvements beginning to be evident.

### The school has the following strengths

- The executive headteacher is having a substantially positive impact, has dealt with the staffing issues and is developing the leadership team.
- The school's approach to safeguarding is very effective. A caring and dedicated team of staff works closely with parents, carers and pupils. Pupils agree that they feel safe in school and most pupils behave well.

## Full report

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

- The trust and local governing body must ensure that the senior leadership team, which comprises a significant number of recent appointments, is well supported in developing and embedding the skills required to lead Smestow School effectively.
- Leaders should ensure that all pupils and students in the sixth form make good progress by:
  - supporting heads of departments to rapidly address gaps in learning that have occurred during periods of staffing instability
  - improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils by prioritising actions that are most likely to bring about rapid improvement.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by making sure that all teachers:
  - consistently apply the school's teaching and learning guidance, taking account of pupils' and students' needs and starting points
  - have high expectations of the quality of pupils' and students' work and provide activities that engage and challenge them to work hard throughout lessons
  - consistently apply the school's behaviour policy to eliminate low-level disruption.
- Improve the attendance and punctuality of pupils and students, particularly disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND, by:
  - building on existing approaches that celebrate and reward good attendance
  - improving the attendance of pupils and students who are persistently absent
  - reviewing approaches to challenge and sanction lateness to lessons.
- Improve outcomes for pupils with SEND by ensuring that:
  - systems for identifying these pupils are effective and consistently applied
  - teachers are better trained to meet the needs of pupils with SEND
  - the progress made by pupils with SEND is carefully tracked and appropriate interventions and changes to the support arrangements, including their curriculum, are made where necessary.

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

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Requires improvement

- Almost all senior leaders, including the executive headteacher, have been appointed to their roles within the last two years. Dealing with day-to-day staffing issues has limited leaders' strategic effectiveness. The majority of systems and processes necessary for the effective running of the school have been implemented relatively recently. The trust is now providing additional leadership support for heads of department and senior leaders.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate, and its improvement plan has appropriate and realistic goals for the coming months. New heads of departments are working quickly to improve the quality of teaching resources and ensure that gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are filled. Year 11 pupils commented positively to inspectors on the additional support they have received to help them prepare for external examinations.
- The curriculum meets the needs of most pupils. It offers a broad range of subjects, including vocational courses, and leads to appropriate post-16 courses. However, very few pupils study a modern foreign language or the separate sciences at GCSE. Leaders have changed the option process for current Year 8 and 9 pupils to encourage greater take-up of these subjects. Leaders are also making changes to the curriculum for pupils with SEND to ensure that it will better meet their needs from this September. This includes ensuring that all pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan have access to a broad and challenging curriculum.
- Pupils and parents, in the Ofsted questionnaire and in discussions and communications with inspectors, recognised recent improvements and the changes that are now evident in most aspects of the school's work. However, they also raised concerns over historic issues, such as staffing changes, falling standards, poor behaviour and poor communication from the school.
- Systems to identify pupils with SEND are not securely based on evidence of need. As a result, a large number of pupils with SEND have been identified without teachers understanding how they should adjust their teaching and learning approach to support them. This has limited these pupils' progress. Recently, a senior leader has begun to oversee this work and is introducing more coherent systems and training for all staff in supporting pupils with SEND.
- Leaders' use of the pupil premium funding to support the achievement of disadvantaged pupils has not previously been effective. In 2018, disadvantaged pupils made significantly less progress than other disadvantaged cohorts nationally. Leaders have appointed a pupil premium champion and are introducing a number of initiatives to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils, with some early improvements.
- Leaders support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively. Good cultural references are drawn out in some lessons. Pupils from different backgrounds cooperate well with one another in lessons and at social times. The school offers a wide range of opportunities to demonstrate British values. The school educates pupils about social issues that are visible in the wider community, including challenging knife crime and drug use.

- In recent months, school leaders have begun to use a range of activities to check the quality of teaching, including scrutiny of pupils' books, lesson observations, shorter walks through lessons and triangulation with assessment information. This enables leaders to develop staff training that is carefully targeted to identified areas of individual and whole-school weakness. Responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire indicate that the majority of staff find this professional development helpful in supporting their improvement. However, considerable variation is still evident in the quality of teaching.

## **Governance of the school**

- Governors are relatively new to their roles. They have heeded the advice of the review following the last inspection and thought carefully about how to improve their practice. They are open, reflective and determined to improve. They have developed a deep understanding of the school and have put in place structures and expectations to ensure that they are not dependent on the headteacher alone to inform them of the school's effectiveness. Governors have a secure understanding of assessment information and all governors have a link role that requires a termly visit. They work closely with the trust and are clear about their respective roles. Governors carry out their statutory duties effectively and are impressive advocates for the school, voicing a strong commitment to its inclusive nature.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school places keeping children safe from harm at the heart of its work. There are well-established procedures to ensure pupils' safety. Records are carefully kept. Staff training on safeguarding is thorough and regular. The impact of social media on pupils' well-being is regularly reviewed.
- A well-trained and dedicated team of safeguarding officers works with parents and external agencies to provide support for vulnerable pupils. The team meets daily with the most vulnerable pupils and keeps careful checks on the 18 pupils currently being educated in alternative provision.

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

### **Requires improvement**

- The quality of teaching across the school is not good enough. Pupils and parents, in the Ofsted questionnaires and in discussions with inspectors, raised concerns about the quality of teaching in many subjects. Frequent changes in teaching staff mean that some pupils' learning is incoherent. They repeat some learning and miss other sections of learning. Some books are disorganised and, on occasions, pupils are working on sheets of paper that are not collated into a useful record of their learning.
- The school's training programme for teachers is beginning to improve classroom practice, in particular for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, by establishing consistent approaches to teaching and learning. Teachers carefully follow the school's new assessment policy and pupils now get regular and accurate feedback on the

quality of their work.

- Where teaching is more effective, pupils are engaged in their learning. Pupils give insightful responses to challenging questions. Prior learning is built on so teaching meets the needs of most pupils. When the pace of learning is brisk, pupils respond well and work hard to keep up. Pupils take pride in their work and most books are neat and well presented. There is now more of this evident in the school.
- Sometimes, teachers' questions do not help pupils understand their work. Teachers allow pupils to give brief one-word responses rather than encouraging them to think more deeply. Teachers do not systematically check that pupils understand what they have been taught so do not reshape learning activities to tackle pupils' misunderstandings.
- Pupils are sometimes given tasks that are too easy or pupils are given too long to complete activities. As a result, pupils do not make the progress expected of them.
- Pupils frequently read in lessons, including reading aloud. The quality of reading is now monitored regularly and weaker readers in key stage 3 receive support from sixth-form students who read with them in form time. The school's recent assessment information and evidence from pupils' books show Year 7 targeted pupils have made good progress in reading.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Requires improvement**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare requires improvement.
- Pupils expressed concerns to inspectors about the impact of frequent changes of staffing on their education. At times, they do not understand the efforts the school is making to improve the situation.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning vary depending on the teacher. Some do not apply themselves to their work, particularly when they have temporary teaching staff.
- Pupils in Year 11 receive impartial external careers guidance to support them in considering their pathways at the age of 16. The majority of pupils move on to sixth form, college or training. However, there are few opportunities provided for careers guidance for younger pupils.
- Pupils feel safe. They have a good understanding about issues that can affect their mental health and are aware of the risks of using social media. There are very few reported incidents of bullying. Pupils in all year groups know who to talk to if they have concerns.
- The school carefully monitors the well-being and attendance of the current pupils in alternative provision. Attendance is checked daily and regular reviews take place of their academic progress.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- There has been a considerable improvement in behaviour in the last term following the introduction of a more rigorous behaviour system. There have been significantly fewer exclusions. All pupils carry conduct cards, which allow teachers to quickly record poor behaviour and give rewards for good behaviour. However, teachers do not consistently apply the new policy and a small minority of pupils can disrupt the learning of others. Pupils in all year groups say that some lessons are disturbed by low-level disruption.
- Pupils' attendance was broadly in line with national levels in 2018. However, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND do not attend as regularly as other pupils and are more likely to be persistently absent from school. In recent months, actions have been put in place to address this difference but it is too early to measure the effectiveness of this work.
- Punctuality, both to school in the morning and to lessons during the day, requires improvement. Some groups of pupils do not move quickly to their lessons. Staff presence in the corridors helps to move pupils along but learning time can be lost.
- Pupils are generally polite and respectful. Most pupils follow the new behaviour code, are proud of their school and are keen to do well. In the dining room and playground, pupils behave responsibly.

### Outcomes for pupils

### Requires improvement

- Historic outcomes for pupils at the end of Year 11 have been weak.
- High levels of staff turnover, low expectations of pupils' potential achievement and poor preparation for the new GCSE examinations were factors in the previous poor performance.
- Extensive staff training, additional support for underachieving pupils and better levels of staffing have led to improved progress for current pupils in most subjects. However, inspection evidence and the school's assessment information suggest that progress of pupils by the end of Year 11 will still be below average.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils has also been weak, despite the additional support from the pupil premium funding. However, pupils currently in the school are catching up and making better progress because of a number of interventions to support these pupils.
- Similarly, pupils with SEND have also made less progress than many of their peers in the school. The school is currently developing ways to support better identification and tracking of pupils with SEND, alongside training for teachers on how to support these pupils in lessons.
- In 2018, the proportions of pupils who achieved a good pass in GCSE English and mathematics were broadly in line with national levels and were a slight improvement on the previous year.
- Younger pupils are making good progress in developing their reading skills. This is a result of the school's approach to developing literacy, including peer reading, dedicated reading time in form time and more reading time in lessons. Assessment information

and work in pupils' books show that standards are improving.

## **16 to 19 study programmes**

## **Requires improvement**

- Outcomes in 2018 were broadly in line with national standards for students taking A-level and vocational courses. In the majority of subjects, students made progress in line with national levels. However, because of disruption to staffing, evidence from students' work suggests that these standards have not been maintained for the current Year 13 students.
- In common with other areas of the school, the head of the sixth form has only been in post since September. A sixth-form development plan has been produced and is part of the whole-school plan to improve students' progress. Its effectiveness is being regularly monitored.
- Although the sixth form is small, it offers a broad curriculum, including some courses taught at other local schools. Students have opportunities to undertake a period of work experience and receive impartial external careers advice to support their transition from school. A higher-than-average proportion of students, including disadvantaged students, move on to education, employment or training. The requirements of the 16 to 19 programme of study are met.
- Attendance in the sixth form is considerably below the levels seen elsewhere in the school. The new head of the sixth form is working with sixth-form tutors to improve this.
- Recent staff appointments have led to an improvement in the quality of teaching in the sixth form. Learning in sixth-form lessons is well planned. Students who have fallen behind are now given additional support. However, inspection evidence shows that the gaps in knowledge and skills created through the period of staffing turbulence are proving difficult to overcome in some subjects.
- Students who resit examinations in GCSE English or mathematics in the sixth form do well and are more likely to improve their grades than other pupils nationally.
- Students behave well, take responsibility for their learning and have opportunities to take responsibility and show leadership, for example by listening to younger pupils read.



## School details

Unique reference number	140586
Local authority	Wolverhampton
Inspection number	10058490

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	901
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Georgina Lahiri
Headteacher	Angie Lawrence
Telephone number	01902 539 500
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	18 October 2016

## Information about this school

- Smestow School converted to become an academy on 1 February 2014 within the University of Wolverhampton Multi Academy Trust (formerly known as Education Central Multi Academy Trust). The majority of strategic decision-making is delegated to the local governing body. The trust holds overall responsibility for finance and the appointment of the headteacher.
- The trust is currently providing additional leadership capacity, with the appointment of an executive headteacher and an assistant headteacher.
- This is an average-sized secondary school with a small sixth form. The school currently works in a local consortium for some of its sixth-form education.



- The proportion of pupils who are disadvantaged and receive support from the pupil premium is above average.
- The proportion of pupils with an EHC plan is below average. There is a small resource base which supports three students with visual impairment.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is above average.
- Eighteen pupils attend alternative provision at the Orchard Centre Pupil Referral Unit.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning, often jointly with senior leaders, in most curriculum areas and the sixth form.
- Inspectors held discussions with senior leaders, heads of department, the special educational needs coordinator, the head of the sixth form, some teachers and members of support staff responsible for safeguarding and pastoral care. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the governing body and had a telephone conversation with the chief executive officer of the University of Wolverhampton Multi Academy Trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents, including information about the attainment and progress of all pupils, records relating to SEND, behaviour and safeguarding, and the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work in lessons and considered information about pupils' current and recent academic performance.
- Inspectors observed tutor time and pupils' behaviour at breaktime and at lunchtime.
- Inspectors took into account the 32 views of parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the views of parents who contacted the lead inspector directly. They also considered the 33 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire and the 98 responses to Ofsted's online pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils, including those in the sixth form, informally around the school and in discussion groups.

## Inspection team

Deborah James, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Gwendoline Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Russell Hinton	Ofsted Inspector
Huw Bishop	Ofsted Inspector

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