

Inspection of Smith's Wood Academy

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

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 March 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Inadequate

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Previous inspection grade

Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

For many pupils, Smith's Wood Academy is not a happy place to be. A culture of low expectations pervades almost every aspect of school life.

Pupils' behaviour both in lessons and at social times is poor. Many pupils do not feel safe. Fights occur regularly. Bullying happens often and pupils have little confidence that staff will address or resolve issues effectively. Staff do not implement the school's behaviour policy consistently or challenge derogatory or inappropriate language, both of which are frequent.

Pupil absence is exceptionally high. Many pupils arrive late to school and a significant number of pupils truant from their lessons. Pupils do not see the value of good attendance and why it is important to attend all their lessons.

In the past, many pupils at key stage 4 have not studied a suitably broad curriculum and have left school without the qualifications they need to successfully take their next steps. Leaders have recognised this and have made changes to the curriculum to help pupils to achieve more. However, turbulence in staffing and inconsistencies in teaching are contributing considerably to pupils not learning enough in lessons. Consequently, pupils' academic achievement is extremely poor.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has experienced significant changes in senior leadership since the last inspection. A new headteacher had been in post for a week at the time of this inspection. This instability has, in part, contributed to the school moving backwards. In many areas of the school, there are deep-rooted issues that have not been addressed or tackled sufficiently well. Trust leaders have not taken effective action to stem the school's decline.

Some work has taken place to help improve the curriculum. Subject leaders, with support from trust leaders, have considered the order in which topics are studied and what knowledge and skills pupils need to develop. In English, for example, leaders have adjusted the key stage 3 curriculum to help better prepare pupils for the demands of GCSE work. Despite this, there remains significant variation in how the curriculum is taught. Too often, teachers move through learning without checking whether pupils have gained the knowledge and understanding they need. This allows misconceptions to persist and gaps in knowledge to grow. In other lessons, teachers check what pupils have learned but do not use this information to help adapt tasks to take account of this. On some occasions, pupils spend long periods of time copying down work from the board without actively engaging in what it is they are writing. All of this, combined with high levels of off-task behaviour, means that pupils make little progress in their learning.

Although leaders have identified those who are weaker readers, they have not precisely identified what specific gaps pupils have in their phonic knowledge. Leaders are not providing enough targeted support to help this group of pupils catch up. This means that too many pupils are unable to access the curriculum as they move through school.

Leaders have accurately identified pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and are starting to put the right strategies in place to help them succeed. However, some teachers do not use the information outlined in pupils' learning plans consistently or make the necessary adjustments, so that pupils can learn. Consequently, some pupils with SEND become frustrated and give up too readily. This often then leads to poor behaviour and a further loss in learning.

Pupils' poor behaviour is commonplace, both in and out of lessons. A significant number of pupils disrupt learning, refuse to follow staff's instructions and complete little work. Leaders react to pupils' misbehaviour rather than proactively looking at the underlying causes of this. Permanent exclusions, suspensions and internal isolations remain extremely high and there is little evidence this is decreasing.

The school's personal development curriculum covers a range of topics, including healthy relationships and how to stay safe online. Pupils in key stage 3 revisit these topics and are reminded of the important themes. However, some key stage 4 pupils do not have enough curriculum time to learn about topics in sufficient depth. In addition, leaders have not ensured that pupils with SEND can access this curriculum in the same way as their peers. A significant minority of pupils do not recognise why the use of both homophobic and racist terms is wrong. Staff tolerate this too readily and do not help pupils understand why this has no place in school life or wider society. This leads to groups of pupils experiencing discrimination, which is not tackled effectively.

Pupils across the school are given appropriate and relevant careers advice and guidance to help prepare them for their next steps in education or employment. Pupils receive talks from guest speakers, local colleges and apprenticeship providers, so that they are aware of the different pathways available to them. However, because absence is so high, many pupils miss these valuable experiences.

Trustees care about the school and local community and want to see it do well. That said, they do not have an accurate view of the school. They do not recognise the extent of some of the weaknesses. Trustees have failed to hold leaders to account effectively for the school's work in key areas, such as safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Leaders have not established an effective safeguarding culture.

Historic issues relating to concerns about a member of staff were not investigated appropriately or timely action taken to reduce potential risks. Newly appointed leaders recognise this and have started to take appropriate steps to strengthen school systems and processes.

Too many pupils do not feel safe in school because they feel threatened or witness physical aggression. A large proportion of pupils are continually absent from school or internally truanting. All of this means that some pupils are at risk of potential harm.

Staff have received training on safeguarding issues and are aware of the school's procedures for recording a concern about a child.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not established a culture of vigilance around safeguarding. Absence and internal truancy are not followed up quickly enough to ensure that pupils are safe and there are frequent incidents of unsafe behaviour between pupils. All of this leaves pupils at risk of harm and some do not feel safe. Leaders should, as a matter of urgency, review all their safeguarding processes, including those for monitoring and following up on pupils' attendance and behaviour, to ensure that pupils are properly safeguarded while at school.
- Staff do not implement the school's behaviour policy consistently. As a result, poor or inappropriate behaviour is not dealt with effectively. Leaders should ensure that their approach to managing behaviour is fit for purpose, make sure that staff understand how to manage misbehaviour and support them to implement the school's policy with consistency and confidence.
- Pupils are not explicitly taught how to behave and expectations of their behaviour are too low. As a result, poor behaviour is common and creates a climate where, too often, pupils cannot learn or do not want to come to school. Leaders should ensure that pupils are clear about what is expected of them and that they learn how to behave appropriately, and make sure that those who need additional support to behave well receive this in a timely fashion
- Absence is very high and a large proportion of pupils frequently truant from lessons. As a result, many pupils have a fractured experience of education, which adversely affects their academic achievement and their personal development.

Leaders should put in place effective strategies that result in improved attendance, both at school and in lessons.

- Teachers do not consistently check pupils' understanding of what they have learned, both in lessons and over time. This means that they sometimes move the learning on before pupils are ready. As a result, pupils develop misconceptions and gaps in their knowledge. Leaders should ensure that teachers check learning effectively to find out what pupils have and have not understood and adapt their teaching accordingly.
- Leaders are not providing enough well-tailored support to help pupils who struggle with reading. As a result, too many pupils cannot read well enough to thrive in their lessons. Leaders should ensure that their analysis of reading data is precise and is used to plan and put in place a programme of support, including phonics teaching as necessary, that is well matched to pupils' reading needs and provided for all pupils who need it.
- Trustees and trust leaders have not held previous school leaders to account effectively for key aspects of the school's work. As a result, weaknesses have been allowed to persist and a culture of low expectation has set in. Trustees and trust leaders should ensure that there are clear systems of accountability and that their challenge and support for leaders is based on a secure understanding of the school's current weaknesses and needs.
- I strongly recommend that leaders and those responsible for governance do not seek to appoint early career teachers.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	143895
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10256933
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	898
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andy Best
Principal	Stephen Huntington
Website	http://smithswood.co.uk/
Date of previous inspection	1 and 2 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust.
- At the time of this inspection, the new principal had been in post a week.
- The school uses six different registered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, His 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.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors focused on the following subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography and physical education. Inspectors examined leaders' curriculum plans, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about the way these subjects are taught. They also looked at other subjects to check how they are planned and taught.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents. These included information about behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and improvement planning. The school website was also checked.
- Inspectors talked to staff and leaders about safeguarding arrangements. They examined how leaders make employment checks on staff and scrutinised further safeguarding records. They also asked how incidents reported by pupils are recorded and analysed.
- Inspectors observed informal times of the day to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the trust, the chief executive officer, the director of education and the school improvement advisor. Meetings were also held with the principal, other senior leaders, subject leaders, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally to pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.
- Inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and free-text comments. They also spoke with some parents on the telephone. Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil survey.

Inspection team

Mark Howes, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Gwen Onyon	Ofsted Inspector
Sultanat Yunus	His Majesty's Inspector
Amjid Zaman	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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