

Smithills School

Inspection report - amended

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| Unique Reference Number | 105260 |
| Local Authority | Bolton |
| Inspection number | 287178 |
| Inspection dates | 26–27 September 2006 |
| Reporting inspector | Julie Price Grimshaw HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1495 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr I Carter |
| Headteacher | Mr Ken Howell |
| Date of previous school inspection | 26 November 2001 |
| School address | Smithills Dean Road Bolton Lancashire BL1 6JS |
| Telephone number | 01204 842382 |
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Amended Report Addendum

This report was originally published following an inspection of Smithills High School in September 2006. As a result of a complaint received as to the accuracy and inferences that might be drawn from parts of that report, Ofsted, having consulted the relevant parties, has made some amendments to the report. These changes reflect the fact that steps taken to address the decline in the performance in 2003 and 2004 contributed to the improvements to the school's examination results in June 2005.

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Smithills School is a larger than average comprehensive school situated in an affluent part of Bolton. However, a large number of pupils live outside the immediate area and travel in by bus each day. Approximately a third of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and about a quarter of all pupils have a first language other than English. This is well above the national average. The school was awarded specialist performing arts college status in 2003 and is also running a programme under the extended schools initiative.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

During the previous inspection in 2001 the school was judged to be good with some very good features. However, from 2002 standards declined: in 2004 examination results were well below the national average and there was significant underachievement. Since then, standards and achievement have improved: examination results for 2006 show that this trend is continuing, although the proportion of students gaining higher grades at GCSE is relatively low.

The behaviour of students in lessons and around the school is good overall, and the great majority of students have good attitudes towards school. There are established systems for dealing with bullying, but a small number of students expressed concern that there are no procedures that enable them to report incidents confidentially and anonymously.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, but occasionally, lessons lack challenge, meaning that students are not always adequately stretched. Major improvements have been made to the curriculum, which now meets the needs of all students, especially at Key Stage 4. Specialist college status has had a positive impact on many areas of school life and has enriched the lives of students through a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. However, specialist school status has not yet had sufficient discernable impact on students' achievement and standards. Work carried out under the extended schools programme is beginning to have a beneficial impact, in both the school and the wider community.

Leadership and management, at all levels, are satisfactory and the school has identified the main issues that need to be tackled in order to improve provision. Strategies for improvement that have been recently put into place are starting to pay off, but systems for development planning and self-evaluation, both at whole school and departmental level, occasionally lack rigour and focus. Although overall effectiveness has not improved since the last inspection there are signs that the school is now making a good recovery from the low point reached in 2004.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students achieving the highest grades at GCSE.
- Ensure that work set in all lessons is sufficiently challenging.
- Increase rigour and focus in improvement planning and evaluation.
- Develop procedures to allow students to report issues of concern in confidence.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards on students' entry to the school are broadly in line with the national average. In recent years results of the tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 showed that students' achievement was significantly lower than average. However, in 2006, test results in all three core subjects - English, mathematics and science - showed a marked improvement and students' achievement and standards are now satisfactory.

Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 declined after 2002 and in 2004 examination results showed considerable underachievement. The results for 2005 and 2006 indicate an improving trend and are now close to the 2002 level. Nevertheless, attainment is still below the national average, particularly with regard to the number of students obtaining the highest grades at GCSE. Students' overall progress by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2005 was below expectations, but has

improved in 2006 and is now satisfactory. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable students are well supported and make satisfactory progress.

The school makes good use of assessment data to set targets and monitor the progress of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students behave well and are respectful to adults and each other. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory and they learn respect for other cultures and religions.

Most students enjoy school and have positive attitudes to their learning. Attendance is in line with the national average. Students are aware of the importance of healthy lifestyles and many join in the range of sporting activities available to them. They feel safe in school and are confident in approaching adults with concerns. However, a small but significant number of students express concerns about bullying. Whilst in no doubt that staff are sympathetic and would deal with such problems, they are rightly concerned that procedures do not allow them to report incidents in confidence.

Students make a satisfactory contribution to the community. The extremely successful school band involves large numbers of students in representing the school at home and abroad. The school council meets regularly and its members show strong commitment, but procedures for gathering students' views and feeding back information are underdeveloped. Older students are given a satisfactory range of opportunities to take positions of responsibility.

Students make sound progress in developing personal qualities and gaining basic skills that will secure their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Inspectors confirm the school's evaluation of teaching as being satisfactory overall. There is mutual respect between teachers and students. This results in almost all lessons being conducted in a harmonious atmosphere and behaviour in lessons is rarely other than good. The school has invested time and energy in developing teaching and learning styles and this is having an increasingly positive impact in lessons. Lessons are well planned and teachers give careful consideration to the ways in which students' progress can be assessed.

In the more effective lessons the students are actively involved by their teachers in the development of ideas. Skilful questioning techniques enable students to have a thorough understanding of their work and they make good progress. In less successful lessons expectations are too low, the work is not challenging enough and there are too few opportunities for students to explain or reflect on their learning.

The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well understood and effectively supported. Students generally know how well they are doing, how well they should be doing and how to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has recently made extensive improvements to the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. This aspect is now good, with some excellent features. Students are well prepared for later stages of education or employment. Good provision is made for vulnerable students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

An extensive range of GCSE options is offered including citizenship and separate science subjects. Vocational courses are provided by the school and in partnership with a local further education college. A small number of students follow a well planned alternative curriculum. This wide provision means that the varied needs of 14–16 year olds are now well catered for and students' enjoyment of learning has increased.

As befits a specialist performing arts college, students in Year 7 study drama and dance as well as music. High attaining students in Year 9 take a one year performing arts GCSE. Key Stage 4 options include an extended range of similar courses, although take up of these subjects is low. A large number of students have instrumental tuition which enables them to take part in a range of ensembles, including the school's prestigious brass band. Students appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities especially in sports and the performing arts. They enjoy participating in holiday school and the other opportunities open to them through the extended schools initiative.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Policies and procedures are firmly embedded to help ensure that students work in a safe and secure environment. Child protection procedures are in place. Suitable checks are made on adults working in the school.

The school works effectively with a range of outside agencies to support vulnerable pupils. There are good arrangements for supporting students with challenging behaviour, such as the 'sideline unit', which helps them to remain engaged in their learning. Effective assessment procedures allow the early identification of pupils who need extra support. The school has recently turned its attention to meeting better the needs of the most able pupils, although it is too early to judge the full impact of this work.

Support for students' academic progress is satisfactory but needs further refinement and reinforcement to make sure they achieve challenging targets.

Arrangements for the smooth transfer of students into Year 7 ensure they settle in quickly. Effective liaison with sixth form providers and the Connexions service ensures students know their options for life after compulsory schooling.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management across the school are satisfactory. In 2005 a new headteacher was appointed and the school implemented strategies to bring about improvement that added to work already in hand. Members of the senior leadership team show a strong commitment to

school improvement and have begun to attend to the main issues affecting students' achievement. These are beginning to have a positive impact.

On the whole, senior and middle managers have correctly identified key areas for development and the school's capacity to improve is satisfactory. However, systems for planning improvements and evaluating the provision are not consistently well used and occasionally lack focus.

The introduction of a coaching programme, in which middle managers provide support for teachers, is beginning to improve aspects of teaching and learning and has encouraged teachers to share good practice. A programme of classroom observations carried out by senior managers and heads of subject enables these staff to make secure judgements on the quality of teaching and learning.

Members of the governing body carry out their statutory responsibilities effectively and assist managers in making decisions relating to the school's improvement. The deployment of resources across the school is satisfactory.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | School Overall |
|--|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
|--|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 3 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | No |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 3 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 3 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 3 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 3 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 3 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 3 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 3 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 3 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 3 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel welcome and for sharing your views with us. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

We think that Smithills is a satisfactory school that is showing clear signs of improvement. In recent years, some of the exam and test results have been disappointing. These are now starting to improve and this year's results are really encouraging. The school managers believe that you are capable of achieving even better results and we agree with them. We have asked the staff to think about how they can make lessons really challenging for you, so that you can all reach your full potential.

Recently, the school has made major changes to the curriculum, meaning that each one of you now has the opportunity to follow a programme of study that suits you best. We were impressed with the range of extra-curricular activities, especially in sport and music. Almost all of you behaved really well, both in lessons and around school. We believe that the staff care about your personal development and are committed to supporting you. Some of you told us that you were concerned about bullying: although you feel that staff are sympathetic and keen to help, you would like to be able to report any incidents anonymously and in confidence. We have asked school managers to consider how this can be done.

Recently, Mr Howell and the staff have made some important changes and are working hard to make sure that Smithills continues to improve. You have an important part to play by focusing on what you need to do to make the best possible progress and meet your targets in all subjects. We hope that you will continue to take advantage of all the opportunities your school has to offer and wish you every success in the future.