



Smith's Wood Sports College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104118
Local Authority Solihull
Inspection number 300109
Inspection dates 24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector Nada Trikić HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Windward Way
School category	Community		Smith's Wood
Age range of pupils	11–16		Birmingham B36 0UE
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 7706811
Number on roll (school)	1043	Fax number	0121 7882881
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Hugh Hendry
		Headteacher	Rob Hawkins
Date of previous school inspection	24 November 2004		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	24–25 January 2007	300109

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Smith's Wood is situated in Solihull and serves an area in which there are significant levels of social deprivation. The great majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds, although six other ethnic groups are represented. Pupils enter the college with attainment below the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

Smith's Wood became a specialist sports college in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Smith's Wood is a satisfactory and improving college with good features. Since the last inspection the principal has provided clear direction and been successful in building a dedicated team of teaching and support staff committed to the welfare and achievements of all pupils. The college has been effective in developing a good curriculum which meets the needs of all pupils, allowing them to follow different learning pathways according to their aspirations, skills and interests. The decision to become a specialist sports college has raised the profile of the college, strengthened partnerships with other schools and services, and extended opportunities for pupils. All these factors have resulted in an overall improvement in standards and achievement in the last four years.

Staff have created a very caring ethos where relationships are good. Pupils feel safe, enjoy their education and take advantage of opportunities to become involved such as through the Pupil Action Group. Care, guidance and support are good and pupils told inspectors that they appreciate the strong support they receive. At the heart of these arrangements is the house system through which pupils across all years meet daily. This allows for older pupils to take an active role in promoting the welfare of younger pupils, which they do with seriousness and commitment. This, alongside opportunities to take on responsibilities within the college, contributes well to pupils' social and moral development. Personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. Spiritual development is satisfactory as planned opportunities for discussion and reflection are less well developed. Pupils from different racial groups get on well and they have a satisfactory awareness of different cultures.

Satisfactory leadership and management have ensured that the college's focus has remained on raising standards and improving achievement. Standards are below the national average and this reflects attainment as pupils enter the college. As pupils move through the college they make satisfactory progress overall. However, the picture is mixed as a result of a difficult period of staffing turbulence and inconsistent quality of teaching. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Learning is most effective when careful planning ensures a variety of learning activities and teaching methods which give pace and purpose to lessons. Pupils say they enjoy the lessons most that give them an opportunity to be active learners. In many satisfactory lessons, progress is too slow to raise attainment further. The quality of assessment for learning, including marking, is inconsistent.

The self-evaluation process is well established, and broad priorities for improvement are accurately identified. However, although checks on teaching and learning take place, information from observation is not used systematically enough to support improvement. Departments are now tracking pupils' progress more carefully but assessment information is not yet fully used to inform the planning of work that provides a match to pupils' needs. Improvements made in recent years, and the growing strength of the college management group and middle leaders, demonstrate that the college has good capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the monitoring of teaching and learning, including by middle and senior leaders, to ensure rigorous evaluation to support improvement.
- Improve the consistency and quality of teaching and learning to increase rates of pupils' progress.
- Make better use of tracking and assessment information to plan work that provides a better match to pupils' needs.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards are below national expectations but there is an improving trend at both key stages. Targets set by the college were successfully met. Overall achievement is satisfactory with elements of good achievement in some areas. For example, at the end of Year 9 in 2005 and 2006, pupils came close to the national average for attainment in English. This indicates very good progress. In mathematics, however, pupils' achievement has been below average, a weakness identified by the college. This is now taken care of through a programme of support and curriculum change. In 2006 there was a 16% improvement in pupils gaining five or more A*–C grades to 44%. Pupils gaining five or more A*–C grades including English and mathematics increased from 16% to 24%.

Performance across subjects remains uneven with below average results in a number of areas. Pupils with statements of special educational need did less well than they should have whereas those with potential for higher attainment did better. At the time of the inspection, pupils with learning difficulties were making satisfactory progress as a result of the amount and quality of the support they were getting.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

It is clear that pupils enjoy their education and take advantage of the opportunities both within the classroom and beyond. They appreciate that when behaviour and bullying, including racism, become issues, staff deal with them effectively. The college recognises that attendance and punctuality need further improvement and is actively tackling those pupils with poor attendance records. Pupils adopt safe practices and feel well supported by staff, who are regarded as good listeners. The vertical pastoral system, with its emphasis upon putting adults with different skills with groups, has done much to support pupils' progress. Pupils have an understanding of rights and responsibilities and generally exercise care in dealing with others. The adoption of healthy lifestyles is a main focus within the college and forms part of the guidance programme. Pupils have welcomed changes towards healthy eating and many take advantage of the improved facilities within the fitness centre. Within the college community a notable success has been the Pupil Action Group. It works effectively to seek improvements in the college such as the rewards system and raising money for

charity. It brings a social benefit to the individual members. The work related curriculum helps pupils to gain an understanding of the world of work and options available to them. However, progress in literacy and numeracy is not consistent, and the college is working on this to enable pupils to do well in their adult and working life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In the majority of lessons, pupils are generally ready to listen and work. In too many satisfactory lessons, too much time is spent listening to the teacher; learning is not always checked; and there is not enough challenge to enable pupils to achieve at a higher level. Assessment information is not used consistently enough to plan lessons to meet the needs of all learners. In the better lessons, pupils are able to explain what they are doing and why, and are keen to make progress. Good teaching provides pupils with opportunities to do this and to think creatively about how to improve their work. Some teachers adapt their lessons skilfully in response to assessment, ensuring that what they know about the pupils influences the content of the lesson, and the way it is taught. The tracking of pupils' progress is satisfactory and improving and most pupils are aware of their targets, but they do not always know exactly how to improve. Much marking is constructive and of benefit but some pupils' books do not contain enough comments to identify the next steps.

Pupils say that their learning is improved through educational visits. For example, a visit to a vehicle production plant by pupils studying business helped them to understand different methods of communication.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Pupils' prior attainment has been taken into account in planning the curriculum. Work related learning, including work experience, is of good quality and has helped raise attainment overall. Vocational courses provide the necessary diversity to meet local needs and encourage young people to remain in education. There is a good understanding of the need to focus on key skills, and to prepare pupils for future economic well-being. However, the use of tutor time is not consistent and opportunities for using the vertical nature of the groups are sometimes missed. The college makes a wide range of provision for pupils who have learning difficulties and those who find the challenges of a traditional curriculum too rigorous. Teaching assistants provide good support and ensure that some vulnerable pupils remain focused on education. However, links between provision for pupils with learning difficulties and the English and mathematics departments are underdeveloped.

Pupils appreciate the good range of additional and out-of-hours learning and enrichment opportunities that involve sport, leisure and cultural activities. Participation rates are high and pupils feel that the frequency and variety of activities ensure that

as many as possible benefit. Pupils are positive about opportunities to gain leadership awards which boost their confidence and skills.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The house system contributes very well to pupils' care and support. Three staff members with different skills are attached to each group. This ensures that pupils' needs and potential can be given specific attention by a number of trusted adults. The development of support staff roles, for example, Child and Family Workers and mentors, are providing invaluable support to young people and their families. Liaison with parents, carers, the local authority and other agencies is extremely well managed. This means that pupils are both supported within the college and prepared for their futures beyond it. Academic guidance is a developing strength. Most departments are now tracking pupils' progress thoroughly and setting challenging targets with increasing confidence that these will be met. Pupils in nearly all subjects know their current standards but in some cases are not as clear about the next steps to take. They feel, correctly, that the college is committed to addressing their personal and learning needs in focused and sensitive ways.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The principal is passionate about the college's development and is supported by a management group whose practice is increasingly effective. Initiative has been taken to develop leaders from within the college and to expand the roles of support staff. As a result, staffing has become more stable and pupils benefit from a supportive workforce with a range of different skills. The college leadership has an overall picture of strengths and areas for improvement. However, plans do not focus sufficiently on outcomes for learners or identify the precise steps needed to improve achievement and standards consistently across the college. Systems for checking the quality of teaching and learning are not yet rigorous enough to identify the developments needed to increase the proportion of good or better lessons. It is recognised that the pattern of pupils' progress is uneven. The management group has a good grasp of where effort needs to be directed to continue the trend of recent improvement. It is energetically applying strategies to encourage stronger achievement across the board, and to meet challenging targets. Leadership provided by heads of house contributes effectively to provision, promoting community spirit and a sense of belonging. Good systems are in place to monitor and analyse pupils' behaviour, attendance and punctuality. As a result, new ways to drive improvement have been introduced, including rewards.

Governors support and challenge the college well and are actively involved through departmental links.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

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	3
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
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?	2

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.

Leadership and management

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	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your college recently. We very much enjoyed talking to you, watching you work with teachers and speaking to you about your progress. You were very positive about your college and the improvements that have taken place in recent years. It is now providing you with a satisfactory and improving education. We agree with you that the staff care for you a great deal and are working hard to help you succeed. You told us that you appreciate the opportunities you have to take part in extra activities such as sport, and the trips and visits which help you to learn in different ways. We were impressed with the ways you voiced your opinions through the Pupil Action Group to help the college make further improvements.

You may have heard that, at the end of the visit, we decided that your college needed to improve certain things in order to make it more successful:

- For senior staff to check more carefully on the quality of lessons across the college so that good ideas can be shared.
- To improve the number of good lessons so that you can make faster progress in your work.
- To make better use of assessment information in order to plan work that is better matched to your needs.

You, yourselves, can help by attending college every day, think more about what you are learning in the classroom and what you need to do to improve.

Our best wishes to you for the future.