

# Smestow School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104389
<b>Local Authority</b>	Wolverhampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	324037
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 February 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mary Davis

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	960
Sixth form	157
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ann Wrigley
<b>Headteacher</b>	Des Ennis
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 May 2006
<b>School address</b>	Windmill Crescent Castlecroft Wolverhampton WV3 8HU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01902 558585
<b>Fax number</b>	01902 558586

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Smestow is an average-sized secondary school and serves a diverse socio-economic area. It takes students from the community of south Wolverhampton. Almost a third of the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Indian or Caribbean origin. The school includes a resource base for 11 visually impaired students who are fully integrated into the school. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average, although the proportion who have statements of special educational needs is higher. The school was designated a sports college in 2004 and English was introduced as a second specialism in 2007. Post-16 provision is supported by a consortium with three other schools.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Smestow School provides a good quality of education. It is improving and the leadership team has been rigorous in its drive to raise Key Stage 3 and 4 attainment since the last inspection. As a result, achievement is now good and standards are above average, placing the school amongst the top 100 performing schools based on sustained improvement at Key Stage 4. 'The school is always striving to do well,' and 'The teachers help students do their best,' are typical of comments made by parents, who value the good care, support and guidance that the school provides, particularly for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students with visual impairment are integrated well into school life because of the support they receive.

The impact of the sports college specialism is exemplified by the ways students have been able to develop their leadership skills, working within the school community and with partner schools, enhancing their personal development. The active school council has further enabled them to develop responsible roles and have a voice within the school community. Students are confident, polite and well mannered and their good behaviour was particularly impressive during the heavy snow throughout the inspection. Students say that behaviour has improved because of new school policies and the support of the effective behaviour mentors, although there is occasional low-level disruption in lessons when teaching does not engage them sufficiently. Most students enjoy coming to school, as can be seen by their good attendance, and the school is working hard to improve the attendance of the minority.

Teaching and learning are good. Students enjoy their lessons, particularly where they have the opportunity to undertake active tasks that are challenging and reflect real life situations. Sometimes, however, teachers direct activities too closely, missing opportunities to enable students to become more independent. Students value the advice and guidance provided by teachers that help them to improve their work, but some students do not know what they have to do in order to achieve their targets. The good curriculum is constantly being refined to meet the changing needs of individuals. The wide variety of pathways provided in Key Stage 4 includes an alternative off-site course for targeted students. This has enabled previously disaffected students to achieve success. Large numbers take up the variety of extra-curricular opportunities offered, particularly in sport.

Good leadership and management at all levels have been the main driving force towards raising attainment. The strong leadership of the headteacher and his team is demonstrated by their clear vision for school improvement and the strategies they have put in place to bring about change. Although this vision is shared with the middle leadership team and the teaching staff, not all show a shared accountability and responsibility for raising standards. Secure tracking and target setting inform the education process, enabling early identification of underachievement and interventions to be put in place. The school places equality of access and achievement at the heart of its work and the school and makes a strong contribution to promoting community cohesion, as can be seen by mutual respect and care shown by its students. Although the impact of the sports college is evident, that of the English specialism has yet to show an impact across the school. The improvements noted, particularly those in students' achievement, indicate that the school has a good capacity to continue to improve.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

### Grade: 3

Students in the sixth form enjoy the wide range of courses through the good curriculum provision both at 'home' and 'away' in the partner schools. Although results in 2008 showed improvement on the previous year, standards are average and overall progress is satisfactory. There is an inconsistency across subjects, however, with film studies, media, applied information and communication technology (ICT) and English performing well in 2008, reflecting the good teaching in these areas. Mathematics, history and biology performed least well. The senior leadership has recognised the need to strengthen the leadership of the sixth form to address this, a view that is shared by some parents. This is already having an impact and students feel that they are well cared for and that their progress in all courses is now being monitored well. They say they receive good guidance to support their next steps in education or employment; however, they would value more opportunities to interact with their tutors as currently registration time lacks structure and purpose. Although teaching in some subjects is good, overall teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students take an active role in the school through the sixth form forum where they have been able to improve resources in the common room. Large numbers take leadership and mentoring roles to support younger students both in and out of the classroom. Their experience is enriched by working alongside students who visit from other countries.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all students know their targets and how to achieve them.
- Develop strategies to promote independent learning skills in the classroom.
- Fully embed target setting and monitoring systems in the sixth form to ensure consistent progress in all subjects.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Students join the school having reached average standards in the national tests in English, mathematics and science in their previous schools. Standards over the past three years have shown improvement and by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 they are above the national average. This represents good achievement. This has been achieved by close monitoring, the setting of challenging targets and better intervention. Leaders also responded to teachers' requests to reduce class sizes in mathematics to enable greater progress. Improved behaviour in lessons has also had an impact on students' learning. Teachers' assessments indicate that the current Year 9 are now close to their targets in English, mathematics and science, while the most able students in science are exceeding them. In 2008, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A\* to C was above the national average, while the numbers gaining these grades including English and mathematics was average. Results of modular tests, mock examinations and tracking evidence indicate that challenging targets for the current Year 11 are likely to be exceeded, as a result of the robust strategies put in place by the school. In the sixth form, some students progress well, but this progress is not uniform across all subjects and the performance in some subjects in 2008, such as history and AS level biology, was significantly below predictions. There is no significant difference between performance of different ethnic groups and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities perform equally as well as their peers.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. This is supported by cultural events during the year. Students live as part of a harmonious community that views diversity as a strength. They feel safe and say that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with quickly and effectively. There is always someone to go to for help and students greatly value the support of the 'fantastic' behaviour mentors who are trusted and respected. The impact of the sports college status can be seen in the wide variety of opportunities to develop teamwork and leadership skills within sport. Students say this helps them to be self-confident. They know how to stay healthy and large numbers are involved in the wide variety of physical activities offered. They make a good contribution to the school and local community including promoting recycling and through charity fund raising. Well-developed social skills enable them to express their personal opinions and ideas confidently, both in and out of their lessons. These personal skills, in addition to good key skills, including in ICT, prepare them well for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Relationships are founded on mutual respect and trust and, as a result, students are attentive in class and enthusiastic about their learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and have high expectations of their students. Opportunities for teamwork and to show leadership and independence in lessons are enjoyed by students, although this strong aspect of the sports specialism is underdeveloped across all subjects in the classroom. Most teachers use assessment information well to plan for individual students' needs and support and challenge them accordingly. Where students make less progress, there is reduced opportunity for them to discuss, check their understanding, and refine ideas. There is insufficient questioning to stimulate interest and debate. In these lessons, students engage passively, and do not proactively develop their learning.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

Curriculum provision is good and improving. At Key Stage 3, all statutory requirements are met and provision for citizenship is being strengthened. The sports college status provides for two hours of physical education and sport, including swimming in the school's pool. The Year 9 curriculum is enriched by the opportunity to take an early qualification in ICT and Enterprise days that focus on developing business, science and mathematics skills. A variety of courses in Key Stage 4 meet the needs of pupils, providing a variety of pathways, including vocational courses. Diploma courses at Foundation and Higher levels are offered in conjunction with partner schools. The inclusion centre provides an alternative curriculum for targeted students, but at present opportunities are being missed for these students to develop team skills and partake in physical activity, as they have no access to the sports provision. Changes in curriculum provision post-16, in response to some underachievement, have been put in place but they are too new to have had an impact.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

Students say that they are well cared for and Smestow is a 'friendly community'. Safeguarding procedures are robust and vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well supported. Students with disabilities, including the visually impaired, are well integrated into school life and say that they are supported by other students as well as receiving a high level of care from the school. The inclusion centre has enabled disaffected students to achieve, providing an extra level of support for those in danger of being excluded. The attendance of these students has also improved. Academic guidance is well structured and directors of learning monitor students' progress against their targets. However, the role of the form tutor is underdeveloped and opportunities are being missed to use registration time more productively to guide and support.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good in the main school and satisfactory but improving in the sixth form. Leaders respond quickly and effectively to promote good achievement and have acted robustly to ensure this. Data shows that there are no racial incidents and all groups of students perform equally well, showing the school's commitment to equal opportunities. Value for money is good and the sixth form is financially viable. Although the act of worship does not meet statutory requirements in full, governance is good. The governing body is a strong, supportive, critical body who contribute well to school development. Whilst the 2008 sixth form results were an improvement on those of 2007, they were inconsistent. Senior leaders recognise that target setting and monitoring of standards and achievement across subjects is an ongoing priority for the sixth form leadership. Systems for self-evaluation have built an accurate picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. These have enabled weaknesses to be addressed effectively.

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**Annex A**

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

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<sup>1</sup>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.

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

4 February 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Smestow School, Wolverhampton, WV3 8HU

My colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your school. We were impressed with the welcome you gave us and appreciated your help in enabling us to find our way around. We were particularly impressed by your good behaviour during the snowy conditions. You go to a good school. These are our main findings.

- Standards in Years 7 to 11 are above average and are broadly average in the sixth form, and there are clear signs that you are working hard to improve. The tracking of your progress and recent examination results show that you are making good progress.
- The school's specialist sports college status is enabling you to develop as confident young people. We particularly liked the way in which older students support and care for younger ones.
- The good teaching you receive ensures you learn well. We think, however, that sometimes teachers don't enable you to think for yourselves and take sufficient responsibility for your own learning.
- The curriculum that you follow is good and the extra-curricular opportunities you are offered are exciting.
- The good care you receive enables you to feel safe and well supported. We think, however, that the school can do more to ensure that you all know how to improve your work so that you can reach your targets.
- The leadership is working hard to ensure that you continue to improve and that the teaching you receive will enable you to succeed.

All of the above applies to the sixth form as well as the main school. In order to take your learning to new heights, we have asked the school to ensure that you all know your targets and how to achieve them, and that they encourage you to be more independent in your learning. We have also asked them to ensure that sixth form students progress equally well in all subjects.

You can help by always working hard to achieve your targets.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Mary Davis Lead inspector