

Smithills School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	105260
Local Authority	Bolton
Inspection number	336463
Inspection dates	30 September –1 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Janet Palmer HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1495
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr I Carter
Headteacher	Mr C Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	6 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 42 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff, groups of students and a local authority representative. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation including 271 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- attainment and progress, particularly in English and mathematics
 - attendance, punctuality and exclusions
 - the achievement of boys
- the capacity of the senior leaders to sustain improvements.

Information about the school

Smithills is a larger than average comprehensive school situated in an affluent part of Bolton, although large numbers of students travel to the school from more economically disadvantaged areas. Approximately one third of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and about a quarter of all students have a first language other than English; well above the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The school was awarded specialist performing arts college status in 2003 and runs a programme under the extended schools initiative. The school holds a number of awards including Healthy Schools, Artsmark Gold and the Sports Charter Mark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

Smithills is providing a satisfactory education overall with some good and outstanding features. A new and dynamic leadership team have made good progress since the last inspection. The range and flexibility of the curriculum have improved considerably. The new curriculum is well designed to meet the needs of individuals and groups and has been developed through effective collaboration with other schools and education partners. Outstanding features include the range of enterprise activities and the extensive provision of extra-curricular options in the performing arts and sports. The overall quality of care, guidance and support has improved and includes elements of outstanding practice. The school's work with families to support the well-being of students facing challenging circumstances is deeply embedded and highly effective. However, despite the now generally good provision, too little of the teaching is sufficiently stimulating or challenging and the strategies the school has put in place to foster improvements have not had sufficient impact on learning. Although attainment levels overall are improving and are now broadly in line with the national average, the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades with English and mathematics remains consistently well below the national average, particularly for boys. The school has worked hard to eliminate the legacy of boys' underachievement and the gap between girls and boys at Key Stage 3 has narrowed. However, at Key Stage 4 and especially in English, boys' attainment and progress is very much lower than girls.

Students enjoy coming to Smithills where they feel safe and well cared for. Incidents of bullying have reduced and learning is rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. The well-being of students is supported effectively by good opportunities to discuss any issues of concern. Students are keen to take actions to improve their health through physical activity, the uptake of healthy lunch options and through student led health campaigns. They have a very good understanding of the dangers of smoking and substance abuse and their understanding of mental well-being is enhanced through personal, social and health education (PSHE). The specialist performing arts college is having an excellent impact on students' personal development. Through the performances of the senior brass, concert and symphonic wind bands, drama and dance troupes, students make an outstanding contribution to the community and raise very large sums of money for charity. Students contribute to the running of the school through the active school council. Council representatives have negotiated improvements in uniform, toilets and areas around the school and taken part in the process for appointing staff, helping to develop their confidence and personal and social skills. A further example of outstanding contribution is through the work of the design group in contributing to the plans for the new school.

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All leaders share the same high ambitions for the school and have a shared commitment to bring about change. A rigorous process of self-reflection and review at all levels has led to improvements in provision and in students' well-being demonstrating good capacity to improve. However, the judgement of the quality of teaching and learning has been overly generous and insufficiently linked to learning outcomes and attainment. Despite many initiatives and much training since the last inspection, the efforts to raise the quality of teaching and learning have met with varying levels of success. Strategies are in place to use assessment to support learning but these are not being used to best effect in meeting individual learner's needs. The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in classrooms is good but teachers do not routinely harness its potential to enliven and deepen learning.

The vast majority of parents are supportive of the school and believe it to be well led and managed. Governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and can identify the key areas for improvement. They show a commitment to health and safety and can cite examples of where their work has had a positive impact on the rigour of safeguarding. Governors are good at challenging the school and as a result, contribute well to the school's good capacity to further improve. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the attainment and progress of boys, particularly in English and mathematics by:
 - monitoring, evaluating and analysing how well lessons are planned to meet individual needs.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning with particular reference to:
 - pace and challenge
 - the use of assessment to effectively support learning
 - the imaginative and effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before the next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

The attainment of students is improving but remains below the national average in the key subjects of English and mathematics. Although boys achieve as well as girls in science and many other subjects, they remain behind in mathematics and well behind in English. Current Year 11 students are making satisfactory progress overall but are not reaching their targets in mathematics. The school has worked hard to increase the proportion of students achieving the highest grades at GCSE and the 2009 results showed a significant rise in the proportion achieving A* and A grades. By the time

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students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, leave school at the end of Key Stage 4, the progress they make is satisfactory. Students with specific needs appreciate the effective and extensive help they get from support staff. Progress and learning overall, as observed in the classroom during the inspection, is broadly satisfactory.

Behaviour is good. However, fixed-term exclusions are consistently high, particularly for boys of White British and Pakistani heritage. The reasons for this have not been sufficiently analysed to identify strategies for improvement. Students are generally punctual and attendance is improving, although it remains below the national average. Targets are not yet set for students who are persistently absent from school and the analysis to ascertain the needs of this group of students is not secure.

Through the enterprise programme there are many good and outstanding opportunities for students to engage in activities that contribute to their workplace and other skills. However, boys' achievements in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are not sufficiently good to ensure good future economic well-being. Cultural awareness is good through the excellent range of artistic, sporting and enrichment opportunities. In PSHE and citizenship lessons students take part in high quality discussions focusing on ethical and moral issues such as children's rights and responsibilities. This contributes to their overall good social, moral and cultural well-being. However, there are too few opportunities for students' spiritual development.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and there are examples of good and outstanding practice. The good lessons observed were characterised by engaging tasks, the effective use of assessment such as questioning being used to probe and deepen understanding, good use of ICT and helpful marking in books which helps students understand how to improve. However, too many lessons lacked pace and challenge, teachers did not allow enough time for discussion, too much time was spent on mundane tasks such as copying out text and the lessons were not planned to meet individual needs. Relationships in lessons are good and students work very well together in groups, but the tasks they are given too rarely require imagination and creativity.

The curriculum is now modified to better meet the needs of different groups and offers a broad range of learning opportunities and specific pathways relevant to each key stage. Extended services are outstanding and provide a very broad range of activities to address a diverse range of student needs. The new curriculum model ensures qualifications are accessible to all students including at Key Stage 3 and those on alternative curriculum pathways. 'Own Zone' promotes achievement and accreditation out of school through a range of motivating and engaging activities including horse riding and skiing.

Students are well cared for, guided and supported. Induction arrangements are good; the environment is welcoming and students feel that staff are helpful, approachable and committed to supporting them. Very good care is provided for students in challenging circumstances and the more vulnerable make progress personally and academically as a result of good support. Support for some students with special educational needs and/or disabilities through external agencies is insufficiently well developed. Interventions are not specifically targeted to inform, support and improve progress for this group of students. Similarly, intervention strategies to raise boys' aspirations are reviewed with insufficient rigour and not routinely informed by assessment data.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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How effective are leadership and management?

The school runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The headteacher's ambitions for the school are clear to all of the staff. A culture of coaching has been established to improve the quality of teaching and learning and all heads of subject and senior leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning as part of the annual cycle of self-evaluation.

However, monitoring does not always bring key issues and priorities into sharp focus.

The school attainment targets have been overly ambitious for some groups of students but insufficiently challenging for others. The school has targeted and succeeded in raising the attainment and progress of a group of underachieving boys of Pakistani heritage, but it has been less successful in targeting and raising the attainment of boys overall. Specialist targets have been met and exceeded. The high quality partnerships established by the specialism are having a very good impact on students' enjoyment, self-esteem and confidence.

Middle leaders make a good contribution to planning for improvement. Departmental plans dovetail with school plans and are monitored throughout the year. Governors are effective. They ensure that policies and procedures are compliant and reviewed as necessary, including for safeguarding, which meets requirements and exemplifies good practice. As part of safeguarding, strong partnerships with outside agencies support the safety and health of vulnerable students. The school has an effective action plan to promote community cohesion and a number of initiatives on a local, national and global scale are having a positive impact. A good example is the link with a school in Pakistan to enhance cultural understanding. Extended services make a positive contribution to engagement with the local community.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money**3**

Views of parents and carers

Just under one fifth of parents and carers gave their views and the great majority of responses were supportive of the school and its management. Some concern was expressed as to how well the school takes account of parents' and carers' suggestions and concerns. Ten per cent of the respondents did not feel that the school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour and a similar proportion did not feel that the school helped their children to have a healthy lifestyle, although inspectors judged this outcome to be outstanding. Ninety seven per cent of those who expressed a view were happy overall with their children's experience at the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Smithills School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 271 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1495 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	195	43	246	55	3	1	2	0
The school keeps my child safe	184	41	253	56	8	2	2	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	154	35	261	60	9	2	2	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	169	38	255	58	9	2	2	0
The teaching is good at this school	170	38	266	60	1	0	2	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	130	30	283	65	12	3	2	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	122	27	302	67	20	4	2	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	158	37	245	58	7	2	2	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	153	35	257	59	16	4	2	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	170	39	233	53	24	5	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	131	31	250	59	25	6	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	193	44	230	53	5	1	2	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	242	55	193	44	4	1	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Inspection of Smithills School, Bolton, BL1 6JS

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school recently. We were pleased to hear that you enjoy coming to Smithills and that you appreciate the care shown by staff. You take good advantage of the many lunchtime, after-school and holiday activities that contribute to your health and well-being. The curriculum has improved since the last inspection with many more options to meet your needs and more opportunities for your work to be accredited. Your attendance has also improved and you told us that you feel safe and secure in school. You behave well around school and through the performing arts you make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community.

At the end of the visit, we decided that your school needed to improve certain things in order to be more successful. We have asked the school's leaders to make improvements so that boys, in particular, make faster progress and achieve higher grades in mathematics and English. You enjoy many of your lessons but some of them are not challenging enough, and you need more opportunities to be imaginative and creative in lessons. You told us that you learn best when lessons are lively, when your understanding is checked, and you are shown how to improve your work. We noticed that you also enjoyed opportunities to discuss your work. We have asked school leaders to check that lessons meet your needs to enable all groups of students to make good progress.

You, too, can help the school to improve further by attending regularly and continuing to take full advantage of the many good opportunities the school offers.

Best wishes for the future.

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