

Smithills School

Address: Smithills Dean Road, Smithills School, Bolton, Lancashire, BL1 6JS

Unique reference number (URN): 140500

Inspection report: 31 March 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	● ●
Needs attention	● ● ● ●
Urgent improvement	

✔ **Safeguarding standards met**

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Leaders have created a warm and welcoming environment, where everyone feels part of the Smithills community. Most pupils want to come to school. Leaders prioritise increasing pupils' rates of attendance. Staff work closely with families to ensure that the right support is in place for any pupils with barriers to attending school. Leaders carefully monitor the impact of this support. As a result, attendance is broadly in line with national averages and continues to improve.

Leaders have recently strengthened the school's behaviour systems. The expectations are clear. Staff and pupils now share a secure understanding of how pupils should behave and what will happen if their conduct falls short. Older pupils value the positive changes that have been made. There has been a marked reduction in the number of suspensions and exclusions, including for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This is due to the bespoke support given to those pupils who struggle to manage their own behaviour.

Generally, classrooms are calm and purposeful places, where pupils can learn. Pupils typically show positive attitudes to their learning. They are proud of the work they produce. Staff build positive relationships with pupils. The school's values are at the heart of these relationships. In turn, pupils show respect to their peers. Bullying or discrimination are not tolerated and leaders act swiftly to resolve any such incidents.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders use a range of appropriate methods to identify any additional needs that pupils may have. Teachers are appropriately trained to meet these needs. For example, they adapt resources and provide targeted support. This support typically reduces barriers to pupils' learning and wellbeing.

Pupils with barriers to their learning are supported through effective personalised support. This includes help for pupils who struggle with reading and for those who are new to speaking English. A small number of pupils' needs are appropriately met through alternate provision.

Leaders regularly check how well pupils with barriers to their learning progress through the curriculum. Leaders work closely with parents and carers, staff and other professionals to make sure that the right support is in place for each pupil. This helps leaders to adapt provision if pupils' needs change.

Leaders use additional funding appropriately to remove any barriers to learning or wellbeing for eligible pupils, including disadvantaged pupils. This goes beyond the academic. For example, leaders thoughtfully reduce any barriers to pupils' participation in trips and enrichment opportunities. Leaders monitor the learning and wellbeing of these pupils to ensure that they have what they need to be successful.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Typically, pupils do not achieve well enough. This includes their attainment in national examinations at the end of key stage 4. Although there have been some recent improvements, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with lower academic starting points, these are not sustained over time in most subjects.

Inconsistencies in the quality of teaching hinder how successfully pupils learn across the curriculum. This variability is reflected in the quality of work that pupils produce. That said, most pupils secure places in education, employment or training when they leave school.

Leaders ensure that pupils who are behind with their reading benefit from suitable support. However, leaders' work to support pupils who struggle with handwriting or number work is at an earlier stage. As a result, gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills persist.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders have not ensured that teaching is consistently effective. They know what needs to improve and have recently introduced whole-school teaching strategies that promote learning. However, this work is new. The impact of the training that staff receive is not consistently evident in lessons. As a result, teachers do not routinely check for, and correct, misconceptions in pupils' learning. This hinders how securely pupils' build knowledge over time.

Recently, leaders have made improvements to the curriculum. It is now appropriately ambitious and sets out clearly what pupils should learn. Staff have suitable knowledge of the subjects they teach. However, they do not always deliver this in a way that routinely checks for and corrects misconceptions in pupils' learning. This hinders how securely pupils build knowledge over time.

Leaders identify any pupils who need additional support with their reading, handwriting and number skills. The support for pupils to improve their reading is effective. This is not the case for pupils with gaps in their handwriting or number knowledge.

Staff know pupils' needs well. In the main, staff adapt their teaching appropriately so that pupils with any barriers to their learning can access the curriculum. This includes disadvantaged pupils and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

Leaders have taken action to improve. However, the impact of these improvements is inconsistent. Some improvements have been too slow. This is evident in the achievement of pupils in national examinations at key stage 4. Leaders have not accurately identified the need to strengthen the delivery of the personal development programme.

There is a professional learning programme in place for teachers. However, its effectiveness is not routinely monitored. This means that there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching that are not always tackled. That said, staff are happy to work at Smithills. They value the consideration leaders make of their wellbeing and workload.

The school has joined a trust this academic year. The trust provides additional support and challenge. This support has contributed to some improvement. For example, the introduction of the new internal space to support pupils who have previously struggled to learn in larger classes. However, it is too early to see the impact of many of their actions.

Governors play an active role in the activities of the school. They understand leaders' priorities and are committed to supporting the school. Governors regularly receive information about the school. However, they do not routinely check this information. This means they do not routinely challenge leaders on the impact of their work to drive improvement.

Leaders' actions have effectively improved pupils' behaviour and attendance. As a result of these deliberate actions, more pupils attend school regularly. Suspensions and exclusions have reduced and continue to do so.

Leaders at all levels, including trustees, have the best interests of pupils at the heart of their decisions. They prioritise support for disadvantaged pupils. These pupils achieve better than their peers. Leaders provide sufficient support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and for children known to, or previously known to, social care.

Personal development and wellbeing

Needs attention 

The school's personal development programme is not typically delivered well. Generally, pupils cannot recall what they have learned. Leaders do not routinely check how well the personal development programme is taught or how effectively pupils' knowledge deepens over time. This means that gaps in pupils' understanding are not always addressed.

Leaders have designed a coherent personal development curriculum. It is ambitious and age-appropriate. It includes opportunities for pupils to deepen their knowledge of online and offline safety, relationships and fundamental British values. Pupils learn that some things that make people different are protected by law. This is evident in the respectful relationships between pupils. Leaders adapt assemblies to address any local issues as they arise.

Leaders have implemented a suitable careers programme. This has been recently strengthened and includes individual advice for pupils. This offer is enhanced for disadvantaged pupils and pupils who face other barriers to their learning. Most pupils value the careers guidance they receive. Pupils in Year 10 experience the world of work through a work experience placement. All pupils have encounters with colleges and local employers. This includes local college visits during assemblies and a careers day. Typically, they choose suitably ambitious education, training or employment when they leave school.

Pupils appreciate the pastoral support available. Staff know pupils well and act in their best interests. Pupils know who they can speak to if they have any worries. Leaders work with outside agencies to ensure pupils have access to wellbeing and mental health support.

Staff offer a range of leadership and enrichment activities for pupils. For example, performing arts productions and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. These opportunities are open to all pupils. Financial support is offered, where necessary, to ensure there are no barriers to pupils' participation.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Smithills School is a warm and nurturing environment, where a diverse mixture of pupils are well cared for by staff. Pupils trust staff and report feeling safe. They are happy to ask for help from staff if they need to.

Pupils typically behave well and work well together. A culture of mutual respect underpins everything pupils do. Pupils report that bullying and discrimination are rare and that any incidents are resolved swiftly. Pupils appreciate the improvements leaders have made to behaviour. For example, they can now learn without disruption in their lessons.

Too many pupils do not achieve well enough at this school. This includes disadvantaged pupils, pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those known or previously known to social care. Leaders' work to strengthen the curriculum is secure. However, pupils do not typically receive high-quality teaching across all subjects. As a result, some pupils have gaps in their knowledge. These are not always addressed effectively. Pupils, including those with SEND, learn well when staff check their learning and make appropriate adjustments.

Most pupils attend school regularly and are ready to learn. Generally, they feel a sense of community and display positive attitudes to their work. Most lessons are calm and purposeful. Many pupils are proud of the work they produce. They appreciate the rewards and recognition they receive.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of enrichment and leadership opportunities. This offer includes the debate club and the chess club, as well as a range of sports and performing arts clubs. There really is something for everyone. These opportunities are available to all pupils and support them to develop their interests and talents. Pupils are taught the essential information about life in modern Britain. For example, they understand how to follow rules and the importance of keeping themselves safe online and in their local community. Pupils have access to bespoke careers guidance. Increasingly, they choose appropriate education, employment or training when they leave school.

Next steps

- Leaders, including governors, should strengthen their systems for evaluating the impact of their work so that they can more accurately and precisely identify areas for development and drive improvement.
- Leaders should strengthen all elements of the personal development programme, ensure it is delivered consistently and improve their evaluation processes so they can better

understand its impact and pupils' experiences.

- Leaders should ensure that teachers use assessment information effectively to identify and address gaps, errors and misconceptions in pupils' knowledge.
 - Leaders should ensure that teachers have the expertise to check for and address gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge in handwriting and mathematics.
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About this inspection

This school is part of Bolton Impact Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul Hodgkinson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Keith Davies.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the chief executive, the headteacher, and 3 members of the local governing committee, including the chair, during the inspection. Inspectors spoke to a representative of the local authority.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school uses 3 registered and one unregistered alternative provision settings.

Headteacher: Carolyn Dewse

Lead inspector:

Helen Fowler, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Liz Kelly, Ofsted Inspector

Paula Crawley, Ofsted Inspector

Sue Farrimond, Ofsted Inspector

Tom Theobald, His Majesty's Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 31 March 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,201

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,250

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

42.38%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

2.00%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

12.32%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	20.1%	45.4%	Below
2023/24 (final)	29.5%	45.9%	Below
2022/23 (final)	27.5%	45.3%	Below

Attainment 8

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	36.5	46.0	Below
2023/24 (final)	39.5	45.9	Below
2022/23 (final)	38.9	46.3	Below

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.04	-0.03	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.34	-0.03	Below

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	13.2%	25.8%	Below
2023/24 (final)	19.7%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	18.3%	25.2%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	31.0	34.9	Close to average
2023/24 (final)	35.2	34.6	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	34.7	35.0	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.31	-0.57	Close to average
2022/23 (final)	-0.40	-0.57	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	13.2%	53.1%	-39.9 pp
2023/24 (final)	19.7%	53.1%	-33.4 pp
2022/23 (final)	18.3%	52.4%	-34.1 pp

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (revised)	31.0	50.4	-19.4
2023/24 (final)	35.2	50.0	-14.9
2022/23 (final)	34.7	50.3	-15.6

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-0.31	0.16	-0.47
2022/23 (final)	-0.40	0.17	-0.57

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023 leavers (provisional)	87%	91%	Below
2022 leavers (revised)	90%	93%	Average
2021 leavers (revised)	93%	94%	Average

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	9.1%	8.1%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	10.2%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23 (3 term)	10.0%	9.0%	Close to average

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	25.0%	21.9%	Close to average
2023/24 (3 term)	31.5%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	31.5%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

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