

Inspection of Smithills School

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

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 September 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Good

The headteacher of this school is Carolyn Dewse. This school is part of The Bolton Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is a single-academy trust, run by the headteacher, Carolyn Dewse, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Paul Hodgkinson.

What is it like to attend this school?

Smithills School is an accepting environment where pupils typically treat staff, and one another, with respect. A number of pupils join the school mid-year, including some who have recently arrived in the country. These pupils are warmly welcomed and quickly settle into school life. Most pupils are happy to attend this school. They typically behave well, upholding the school values in lessons and at social times. Pupils feel confident that staff will help them to resolve any concerns that they report.

The school has increasingly high aspirations for pupils' achievement. It recognises that, over time, outcomes for some pupils have not been strong. To address this, the school has made recent changes to the curriculum to better support pupils' learning. However, many of these changes are in the early stages of implementation. This means that, due to gaps in knowledge, some older pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

Pupils benefit from a wide array of clubs and activities that enable them to develop new skills and to make new friends. The school ensures that these opportunities are open to all. For example, pupils are encouraged to take part in musical shows, regardless of their prior experience. The broad range of sporting activities on offer includes plenty of competitive and non-competitive options to encourage as many pupils as possible to participate.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

School leadership, including at trust level, has recently been through a period of considerable change. The current board of trustees has strong accountability systems that help them to know the school well. Trustees are providing effective support to assist the school to identify and address the weaknesses in provision that have hindered pupils' achievement in the past. However, it is too early to see the full impact of the school's actions on improving the quality of education for pupils.

The school has recently made changes to increase the overall ambition of the curriculum. This is to ensure that pupils are better prepared for their next steps beyond high school. The school has also made improvements to individual subject curriculums. This is so that the knowledge that pupils should learn is more clearly defined and organised in an increasingly logical order.

Teachers typically have strong subject knowledge. However, some teachers lack the expertise to design activities that promote pupils' learning effectively enough. In these subjects, some pupils do not learn new knowledge to the depth required to succeed.

In many subjects, the school's assessment systems are underdeveloped. They are not designed to check whether pupils have learned the knowledge which underpins the curriculum. This is because, in these subjects, the knowledge that pupils must

learn has only recently been defined. Therefore, teachers are sometimes unaware of pupils' misconceptions and any gaps in knowledge that pupils may have. As a result, some pupils do not have secure enough foundations on which to build new knowledge.

The school has rigorous systems to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Skilled staff support most pupils with SEND to access the same curriculum as their peers. Nonetheless, the deficits in the delivery of the curriculum also impact on pupils with SEND.

The school is in the early stages of rolling out a programme to support pupils that need to develop their reading knowledge. This includes some pupils with SEND. Despite this, some pupils struggle to access the curriculum because they have not received the help that they need to improve their reading.

The school has recently implemented changes to the behaviour system, with a stronger focus on promoting positive attitudes to learning. Staff quickly challenge any poor behaviour so that disruption to learning is minimised. As a result, classrooms are calm and purposeful learning environments.

The school has thoughtfully considered the wider knowledge that pupils should learn to support their personal development. Pupils successfully increase their knowledge about a range of topics, including finance, diversity and how to develop healthy relationships. The school has designed a rich and varied careers programme, which helps pupils to make well-informed choices about their futures.

The school is proactive in seeking the views of pupils, parents and carers. It uses this information well to improve policy and practice. For example, the school has acted to offer a greater choice of languages and vocational subjects following feedback from pupils and parents.

Most staff feel happy and proud to work at Smithills School. Leaders at all levels carefully consider the impact of any changes that they make to school systems which may affect the workload and well-being of staff.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some of the activities that teachers design do not enable pupils to learn the curriculum as well as they should. This hinders how well some pupils achieve. The school should ensure that teachers know how to design activities that help pupils to learn the intended curriculum.

- In many subjects, the school's assessment systems are in development. Consequently, some teachers do not identify the gaps in pupils' knowledge quickly enough. The school should ensure that its assessment systems are designed to check whether pupils have learned the essential knowledge that is defined in the curriculum.
- Some pupils do not receive the support that they require to improve their reading knowledge. Consequently, these pupils cannot access the wider curriculum, leading to underachievement. The school should ensure that it provides swift and effective support that enables these pupils to catch up with their reading knowledge.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	140500
Local authority	Bolton
Inspection number	10282112
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,190
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Paul Hodgkinson
Headteacher	Carolyn Dewse
Website	www.smithillsschool.net
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 June 2018 under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there have been changes to the school's leadership, including the appointment of a new headteacher and chair of the trust.
- The school uses one unregistered and three registered alternative providers to support a small number of pupils.
- 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.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, including the headteacher, and a range of school staff. The lead inspector also spoke with representatives of the trust, including the chair of the trust.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of evidence, including leaders' self-evaluation documents, improvement plans, minutes of trust board meetings and records of pupils' behaviour and attendance.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experiences of school and their views of behaviour and bullying. They observed pupils' behaviour during lessons and at social times.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in mathematics, English, art and design, geography, languages and religious education. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some teachers and pupils about their learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Charlotte Oles, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Chris Glennon	Ofsted Inspector
Alan Hammersley	Ofsted Inspector
Stephanie Gill	Ofsted Inspector

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