



# Smestow Academy

**Address:** Windmill Crescent, WV3 8HU

**Unique reference number (URN):** 149635

## Inspection report: 11 November 2025

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.

## Strong standard ●

### Attendance and behaviour

Strong standard ●

Leaders have created a culture where pupils know what is expected of them. Pupils willingly meet these high expectations. They behave very well in lessons, at social times and as they move around the school site. They apply themselves well to their learning. Pupils treat staff and each other respectfully and kindly. Everyone knows that bullying or discriminatory behaviour is not tolerated here. Older students in the school have particularly positive attitudes and set a clear example to younger pupils.

If pupils do need to be reminded about an expectation, for example about their uniform, they respond positively to the prompt. On the rare occasions when pupils do not make the right choices, staff help them to reflect on their behaviour and do better next time. The effectiveness of this support can be seen in the significant reduction in the number of suspensions over the last year.

The school's work to improve attendance has also been successful. Attendance is in line with national averages and is even higher for disadvantaged pupils. The work to improve attendance for some pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities has been particularly effective. Attendance for all groups of pupils continues to rise.

### Leadership and governance

Strong standard ●

The new trust and school leaders have quickly identified what needed improvement, resulting in significant progress at the school. They have worked on these priorities with an absolute focus on getting things right for all groups of pupils. This is why there have been rapid improvements in attendance, behaviour and the number of pupils securing passes in GCSE English and mathematics.

Leaders at all levels want to do their best for pupils. Robust challenge and meaningful support from those responsible for governance set the tone for how leaders across the school are held to account. Trustees and leaders pay close attention to detailed evidence about how the school is improving. This is used to identify precisely what needs to be worked on next.

Staff know that their well-being and professional development matter to leaders. They value the professional learning they receive from the school, the trust and from being enabled to pursue leadership qualifications. Their voice is heard when key decisions are being made.

Everyone is rightly proud of the part they are playing in the improvements at Smestow. Leaders have ensured that this is a happy place to learn, work and thrive together.

### Personal development and well-being

Strong standard ●

Pupils flourish at Smestow. A thoughtfully designed personal development programme is embedded across all areas of school life. The school has made sure that this programme

reflects the needs, interests and aspirations of the school community. As such, pupils see it as relevant and a valuable part of their education.

Pupils are knowledgeable about important topics such as healthy relationships, staying safe online and mental health. They talk openly and articulately about these areas. They develop a deep understanding of all that it means to live in modern British society. They eagerly share their views and listen to each other respectfully. They are proud to share their own cultures, and to learn about different backgrounds. This contributes to the culture of respect that permeates the school.

Pupils have a wide range of opportunities to develop their talents and interests. These include the arts and many different sports. Pupils explain how taking part in activities such as school productions develops their confidence and resilience. Pupils can also develop their academic interests beyond the subjects that they study through links with universities. Leaders remove barriers so that all pupils can make the most of these opportunities, including those who are disadvantaged. This includes some pupils taking study trips abroad.

The school wants all pupils to develop a sense of personal responsibility and leadership skills. Pupils are eager to contribute to the school and wider community. Many apply for formal leadership roles including form captains, prefects, librarians and ambassadors.

The school's careers education is highly effective. It prepares pupils well for future education, employment or training. Pupils have meaningful encounters with local employers and higher education providers. These increase pupils' aspirations for what they can do in the future. Tailored advice enables pupils to understand the steps they need to take to achieve their ambitions.

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## Expected standard

### Achievement

Expected standard 

Pupils learn the curriculum well. Throughout the school, staff identify key gaps in pupils' knowledge and make sure that these are addressed. Pupils' attainment in national examinations at the end of key stage 4 is in line with national averages. Their overall progress, including for disadvantaged pupils, is better than national averages.

Teachers make sure that sixth-form students achieve well in their subjects, mastering the foundational knowledge they need to succeed on post-16 courses. The progress students make from their starting points is in line with national averages.

There is effective support for those pupils who are not yet confident, fluent readers. However, pupils' speaking and writing skills still need some further development. Leaders know this and have plans in place to address it.

Pupils achieve the qualifications and wider skills they need to move successfully on to their next stages of education, employment or training.

## Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders have made significant changes to the curriculum since the school became Smestow Academy. Pupils benefit from a broad curriculum that enables them to study a range of academic and vocational qualifications. Leaders are working to ensure that teaching is consistently effective and meets pupils' needs.

The curriculum is generally taught well. Staff have received effective training to help them follow the 'Smestow teaching principles'. They use shared strategies which help pupils to understand what is expected of them as learners. In many lessons, especially in key stages 4 and 5, teaching is highly effective. For example, staff carefully check what pupils have understood. They make any adaptations needed to address misconceptions or help pupils to learn more independently. However, this is not consistent across the school.

The school ensures that pupils still developing their reading skills get prompt support to become fluent readers. Pupils' reading skills are supported and developed well across the curriculum. However, there is not the same, consistent focus on the development of writing and speaking skills. This means that some pupils do not deepen their thinking or apply their learning as well as they could.

## Inclusion

Expected standard 

Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), those who are disadvantaged, those known (or previously known) to social care and those who are in the early stages of learning English are supported well. The school has systems to identify pupils' needs and effective strategies are put in place to reduce any further barriers to their learning and/or well-being that they face. This includes thoughtful use of external agencies where appropriate. The views of pupils and of their parents and carers are used to shape the support that the school provides for pupils.

Leaders keep a close eye on how well vulnerable pupils are doing, both academically and personally. The school's focus on getting to know pupils' individual needs and/or barriers has resulted in impressive improvements in pupils' behaviour and attendance rates.

Staff receive regular training about how to support these pupils, especially those with SEND. They know how to make appropriate adaptations or adjustments to learning for pupils with SEND or those who speak English as an additional language. However, they are less clear about the specific support some disadvantaged pupils may need in lessons.

## Post 16 provision

Expected standard 

Following a number of significant changes to its post-16 provision, the school offers a curriculum and range of qualifications that are broad and well-matched to students' interests and aspirations. Since the school became Smestow Academy, there is limited outcomes information available for the sixth form. However, examination grades and the high quality of work produced by students show that they are progressing well from their starting points.

Students who may face barriers to their learning, for example those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are supported well in lessons.

Students are motivated and keen to improve their knowledge. They make good use of the helpful feedback given by their teachers. They develop the study skills and confidence that will support them as they move on to their next stages in education, employment or training. Thanks to useful, personalised advice and guidance, students know what they need to do to realise their ambitions.

There is a well-considered programme on offer to enhance and enrich pupils' academic learning. Students value the care and support they receive from staff. In return, they are keen to make an active contribution to the school and are great role models to younger pupils.

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

There have been significant improvements at the school since it opened as Smestow Academy in January 2023. Pupils and staff speak about the culture shift that has happened and why they feel happy to come to school. This has contributed to the improvement in pupils' behaviour and attendance.

This is a friendly, respectful community where pupils are able to be themselves. Pupils feel safe and are confident that any concerns they may have will be taken seriously because this is a 'telling school'. They value the support they receive, including in the 'support hub'. They are impressively open about topics that matter to them, for example the importance of looking after their mental health.

Pupils who may face barriers to their learning and/or well-being know that the school will try to help them overcome these. This is especially the case for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are in the earlier stages of learning to speak English.

Pupils have a positive attitude to their learning and are keen to do well. They are attentive in lessons and can get on with their tasks without disruption. Many pupils produce good-quality work and achieve examination results in line with national outcomes.

Many pupils take up the extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities available to them. They appreciate that some of these take place before school as that makes it easier for them to attend. These activities and breakfast club mean that the school is buzzing from well before the bell rings. Many pupils take on leadership roles in the school because they know the importance of contributing to their community. They pride themselves on their charity fundraising, for example for BBC Children in Need. From Year 7 to Year 13, everyone is helped to become the best version of themselves.

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## Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that staff know the specific barriers disadvantaged pupils face in lessons and are able to support them effectively so that they achieve as well as they can.
  - Leaders should ensure that all pupils secure the foundational writing and speaking skills needed to successfully apply and deepen their learning across the curriculum.
  - Leaders should ensure that all staff confidently and consistently make changes and adaptations to planned learning, including making adjustments ‘in the moment’, in response to how well pupils have understood their learning.
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## About this inspection

This school is part of Matrix Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Lynsey Draycott, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Sir Mark Aspinall.

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 (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspection activities:

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, other leaders and staff at the school. Inspectors also met with trust leaders, including the CEO, and trustees, including the chair of the trust board. Inspectors spoke with pupils at different times across the school day.

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 opened as Smestow Academy in January 2023 when it joined the Matrix Academy Trust.

The headteacher took up post in January 2023. Several senior leaders have also started since then.

The school does not currently make use of any alternative provision.

Headteacher: Ian Chamberlain

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**Lead inspector:**

Nicola Beech, His Majesty's Inspector

## Team inspectors:

Sarah Favager-Dalton, His Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Madden, His Majesty's Inspector

Dan Owen, 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 11 November 2025

## School and pupil context

### Total pupils

**552**

Well below 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

**1,010**

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: 1,152

### Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

**54.84%**

Well 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

**1.27%**

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

**11.41%**

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

**Above 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	30.0%	45.2%	Below
2023/24	43.5%	45.9%	Close to average
2022/23		45.3%	

### 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	42.4	45.9	Close to average
2023/24	44.3	45.9	Close to average
2022/23		46.3	

### 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	0.31	-0.03	Above
2022/23		-0.03	

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2021/22		-0.03	

## 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	21.3%	25.6%	Close to average
2023/24	28.6%	25.8%	Close to average
2022/23		25.2%	

### 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	41.2	34.9	Above
2023/24	34.7	34.6	Close to average
2022/23		35.0	

### 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	-0.22	-0.57	Above
2022/23		-0.57	
2021/22		-0.55	

## 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	21.3%	52.8%	-31.6 pp
2023/24	28.6%	53.1%	-24.6 pp
2022/23		52.4%	

### 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	41.2	50.3	-9.1
2023/24	34.7	50.0	-15.3
2022/23		50.3	

## 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	-0.22	0.16	-0.38
2022/23		0.17	
2021/22		0.15	

## 16 to 18 performance

### A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	22.24	34.38	Below

### A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	0.0	0.0	Close to 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 (1 term)	7.9%	7.7%	Close to average
2023/24	10.2%	8.9%	Close to average
2022/23	13.4%	9.0%	Above

## 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 (1 term)	24.4%	21.1%	Close to average
2023/24	33.9%	25.6%	Above
2022/23	39.8%	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 standards expected of them.

### Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standards 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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