Inspection of SMS Changing Lives School

Unit 2, Aniseed Park, Oldham Broadway Business Park, Oldham OL9 9XA

Inspection dates:	10 to 12 June 2025

Overall effectiveness	**Requires improvement**
The quality of education	**Requires improvement**
Behaviour and attitudes	**Good**
Personal development	**Good**
Leadership and management	**Requires improvement**
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
Does the school meet the independent school standards?	**Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Staff at SMS Changing Lives are focused on supporting pupils to re-engage with education. Pupils have the support that they need to develop trusting and positive relationships with their peers and others who they encounter. Typically, pupils attend school more than previously. They enjoy coming to school and being a part of this small school community. Pupils enjoy the opportunity to have wider experiences, such as visiting theatres to watch performances of texts they study in class.

The school has set out a broad curriculum offer, which includes national curriculum subjects and vocational courses. This reflects the school's high expectations for pupils' achievement. In some instances, the school implements these subject curriculums successfully. Typically, pupils achieve well in these subjects. However, some of the curriculums are not delivered as successfully. This impedes how well some pupils achieve across the curriculum.

Pupils typically behave well. Underpinning the school's approach to supporting pupils' behaviour is developing positive relationships with them. This approach is effective. Staff and pupils have mutual respect. Pupils respond well to the encouragement and boundaries which staff put into place for them.

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

The school has a clear vision for its curriculum. It is currently undergoing some changes in preparation for the new academic year and in response to its own evaluation of the impact of the curriculum on pupils' learning. Nevertheless, it has set out a curriculum that gives pupils the knowledge and skills they need for their future lives. This includes working towards recognised qualifications, such as functional skills or GCSEs. Pupils in the outreach centre have a personalised curriculum based on their individual needs. This effectively helps them to prepare for life beyond the school.

In some subjects, checks on pupils' learning are not as effective in identifying what they know and have remembered. This means, at times, teaching moves on to new learning before pupils understand previous content. In other instances, pupils are held back from new content for too long and complete work that does not deepen their understanding.

The proprietor knows the school well. It has ensured that it has put into place a leadership team which has the skills needed to identify future improvements to the quality of education. Nonetheless, there has been a shortfall in ensuring that staff receive the most appropriate professional development to help them to implement the curriculum effectively. This means that some staff do not have the subject-specific knowledge they need to deliver the different subject curriculums consistently well.

The school reviews what impact the curriculum has on pupils' outcomes. In some cases, this leads to improvements. However, in some subjects, the school's oversight of the curriculum is less clear. This means that the school loses focus on the actions which will bring about the swiftest improvements to the quality of education that pupils receive.

The school gives due consideration to developing pupils' wider development. Pupils have access to high-quality pastoral support. They understand the different fundamental British values, such as mutual respect and tolerance. Overall, pupils demonstrate respect of different faiths, religions and beliefs. The school ensures that pupils have opportunities to develop important life skills. For example, pupils learn how to cook different healthy meals. This helps to prepare them to live independently. Pupils receive effective careers guidance and support. They visit local colleges to ensure that their next steps are suitable for them to be successful. The school promotes pupils' interests and talents well. For example, pupils were given the opportunity to visit a fashion show when they demonstrated an interest in pursuing this after their time at the school.

Pupils who attend the school all have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school identifies any additional special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) well. This follows a comprehensive transition into school from the pupils' previous settings. However, some strategies identified to support pupils to access the curriculum are sometimes not put into practice.

Overall, the school is successful in changing pupils' previous perceptions of reading. It has introduced a library which has a range of literature to support pupils' understanding of different authors and texts. Pupils who find reading difficult have effective support to help them to become more confident, fluent readers.

Staff support pupils well to improve their attitudes to education after turbulent prior experiences. In lessons, pupils typically show positive attitudes to their learning. They are proud of the work that they produce.

The proprietor ensures that staff share its vision for the school. Staff work together well as a team across all three sites. They feel well supported to manage pupils' behaviour. Additionally, the school ensures that staff's workload is manageable.

The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards (the standards) are consistently met, including compliance with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The school ensures that it works effectively with local authorities to support pupils' EHC plan reviews. Appropriate checks are made on staff before they begin working at the school. The school works with multiple agencies to ensure that pupils are safeguarded effectively. The premises are suitable for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school does not ensure that effective checks are made on pupils' learning. This means that sometimes pupils move on to new learning too readily before having a secure understanding of the required knowledge. At other times, pupils are not given the opportunity to deepen their learning before moving on. The school should ensure that effective checks on pupils' knowledge are made so that pupils build up a secure body of knowledge over time.
- The school has not ensured that some staff have the expertise they need to implement the curriculum consistently well. This hinders pupils from achieving as well as they could across all subjects. The school should ensure that these staff have the support and professional development they need to implement the intended curriculum well.
- At times, the school has not ensured that staff use the adaptation strategies identified to support pupils' individual needs. This sometimes hinders pupils' ability to learn the most important knowledge and skills. The school should ensure that staff have the guidance and expertise needed to use these adaptation strategies consistently well.
- In some subjects, the school's oversight of how well pupils achieve is not sharp enough. This means that improvements to the quality of education that pupils receive are not as precise as they should be to improve pupils' outcomes. The school should improve how well it uses the evaluation of pupils' performance to inform future improvements to the curriculum.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	146646
DfE registration number	353/6004
Local authority	Oldham
Inspection number	10391789
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	40
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	SMS Coaching Ltd
Chair	Jonathan Davies
Headteacher	Hecabe DuFraisse
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,000 to £58,000
Telephone number	07476 916437
Website	www.smsschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@smscoaching.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 November 2022

Information about this school

- The school provides full-time education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The school operates from premises located at Unit 2, Aniseed Park, Broadway Business Park, Oldham OL9 9XA, 67 Ayres Road, Old Trafford, Manchester M16 9NH and 29 Greek Street, Stockport, Manchester SK3 8AX.
- The school is registered to admit up to 80 pupils. Currently, there are 40 pupils on roll. The pupils are split between the three different sites.
- The school offers alternative provision for local schools. These pupils attend 67 Ayres Road, Old Trafford, Manchester M16 9NH.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place from 15 to 17 November 2022. The school had a material change inspection in October 2024.
- The school makes use of one unregistered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's provision.
- Inspectors discussed the continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders.
- The lead inspector met with the proprietor.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English; mathematics; hair and beauty vocational course; and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of the school, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and honest culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- School policies and other documents were examined to check compliance with the standards and to provide other inspection evidence. These included the school's evaluation of its own performance and its development plan. Behaviour and

attendance records and information relating to safeguarding were also scrutinised.

- There were no responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff or pupils.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted Parent View. However, the lead inspector did consider some free-text responses, and he spoke to two parents and carers on the telephone.
- As part of their checks on the school's compliance with the standards, inspectors made a tour of all three premises, accompanied by the centre manager at each site.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Cleo Cunningham	Ofsted Inspector
Maria McGarry	Ofsted Inspector

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