

The High Arcal School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103873
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	355480
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Michelle Parker HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Denzil Smith
Headteacher	Jo Manson
Date of previous school inspection	13 September 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 38 lessons and saw 39 teachers. Meetings were held with parents, groups of students, governors and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at whole-school planning, teachers' planning, school policies and 328 parental questionnaires, 147 student questionnaires and 13 staff questionnaires.

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

- How effectively the school meets the needs of lower attaining boys.
- The effectiveness of leadership and management in raising attainment and improving the progress of all students, especially lower attaining boys, looked after children, gifted and talented students and those on the autistic spectrum.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average. It is a specialist science college and has Applied Learning and Gifted and Talented Lead school status. The school has an International Schools award. Students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of those students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average as is the proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs. However, the proportion of all students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below the national average. The proportion of students who do not have English as their first language is very low, and a very small number are in the early stages of learning English. There is a recently opened centre, managed by the school, to support those students on the autistic spectrum.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. Every day it lives its ethos of 'making a difference for every student'. The school is highly self critical and not complacent about any aspects of its work. The headteacher energetically leads the drive to continually improve through processes informed by robust self evaluation. She is ably supported by her outstanding senior team and the governing body, which provides outstanding support and challenge. Together, they ensure that all staff work very effectively to challenge discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. This is seen in the school's outstanding work with parents and carers and its excellent work on community cohesion. These efforts have brought about a marked change in ethos which has impacted on all aspects of school life. For example, behaviour is now outstanding and attendance has risen to above average. These improvements testify to the outstanding care, guidance and support provided to students and their families. The school has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Attainment is average. Achievement is good overall and all groups of students make at least good progress including those who are identified as gifted and talented and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. Students who are looked after and some students who have special educational needs and /or disabilities make outstanding progress. The school monitors students' performance regularly and intervenes decisively to tackle any identified underachievement. The school has recently extended its good provision for students on the autistic spectrum with a dedicated centre. This provides highly tailored and sensitive support to students to ensure they can be successful in school. The school's prompt action to address weaknesses in English improved provision in the subject and lower attaining boys, also targeted for support, accelerated their progress. The outstanding curriculum is carefully matched to students' interests and needs. The specialism enriches whole school provision. As one member of staff said, 'it is a web and not a strand,' reinforcing all aspects of developments in the school.

Teaching and learning are good. Much teaching is interesting and innovative and enables students to make considerable gains in their understanding and independence as learners. However, best practice is not shared most effectively.

Strong partnership work has improved students' social awareness, respect for others and understanding of how to develop healthy lifestyles. Students' opportunities to participate and contribute both to the school and the wider community are outstanding. For example, 60% of Year 10 students participate in the Junior Sports leaders' course, in their work with primary schools. Students also expressed high levels of feeling safe.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment further through sharing good practice in teaching so that teachers are confident to take risks in making their teaching more imaginative and students more active and independent learners.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Attainment on entry to the school is below average. The school's performance in the percentage of students achieving five or more A* to C GCSE grades at the end of Key Stage 4 has improved faster than nationally. It was 52% in 2010, in line with the national average. There has also been improvement in the achievement of gifted and talented students with 27.5% achieving three A* to A GCSE grades.

Good progress was clearly seen in lessons observed by inspectors. Work was well matched to students' starting points and teaching assistants made timely and well considered interventions that helped maintain the good pace of learning. In English lessons, there was an appropriately strong emphasis on developing students' understanding of the assessment scheme, so that they could decide how to improve their work. Teachers encouraged and supported students in aiming higher than their target grades. Likewise in mathematics lessons, starter activities effectively refreshed students' understanding of previous work and enabled students to tackle the main learning activity with confidence. Students' capability to review progress and set targets for improvement in their work was also strengthened.

Strategies to improve the progress and achievement of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are successful and, as a result, students' reading ages have greatly improved. Those students known to be eligible for free school meals are also carefully tracked to ensure they continue to receive the necessary support to enable them make at least good progress. This is because these students have a wide range of different needs which the school quickly identifies and tackles. The newly opened base for students who are on the autistic spectrum has already had a positive impact on students attending and ensures they make at least good progress, particularly in social and communication skills so that they are able to learn well in lessons. Parents spoke enthusiastically about the high quality of teaching and culture of concern for the well-being of every student. This meant their child loved coming to school and they were confident that the school helped every learner to achieve their potential.

The great majority of students enjoy learning and school. This is reflected in the improvements in attendance and high levels of student participation in extended school activities. For example a group of students took part in a video conference to a Japanese school, arriving in school at 05.45 to be ready for their 06.30 slot, to talk about earthquakes. This really fired their interest and imaginations. They later shared their information with classmates.

Behaviour is outstanding. In lessons students arrive promptly and quickly settle to work and so allow the maximum time for learning. They participate in paired and group activities with maturity and respect each others' opinions. Around school students are courteous towards each other, staff and visitors. Staff presence is appropriately unobtrusive because students are able to monitor their own behaviour effectively. There are instances when the high expectations of the school are not met and students told us

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about this. They appreciate the consistent and fair methods staff use to manage infrequent instances of inappropriate behaviour.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good. Teachers' good subject knowledge is used to plan work which interests students. Questioning is used well to check students' understanding. Modern technology promotes learning well. In a science lesson on plate tectonics, the teacher imaginatively challenged and inspired students, so that all were confident to speculate on the causes of volcanoes and earthquakes. However, some teachers lack confidence in teaching more imaginatively and this reduces the range of learning experiences used to stimulate students' engagement with learning.

The outstanding curriculum is adapted well to meet individual needs and this helps secure all students' learning but especially helps those students whose confidence in learning topics is fragile. It provides a good balance of vocational and more traditional subjects and provides a very good range of science related courses. The school works very effectively with partners to extend students' choices, for example in offering engineering. Students enthused about the memorable experiences school provided through enrichment days and activities such as the rugby tour to France and the visit to Poland and Auschwitz. Applied Learning Approaches (ALA) are used very effectively with some lower attaining boys to grab their interest through practical learning activities and extra English and art.

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The school's systems for care, guidance and support are outstanding. For example fewer students are excluded because of the effective way staff identify and work with those in danger of exclusion to ensure that they quickly re-engage with learning. As a consequence all but one student in 2010 progressed into further education or employment with training. This is because of the extensive and effective work the school has with a wide range of agencies such as Connexions that encourages students to have high aspirations.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has forged a very able senior team and steers the school with intelligence and determination. She has ensured that a culture of high expectations and strong partnership working have driven improvements in students' learning, attitudes and well-being. Effective monitoring and clearly communicated feedback have built students', staff and parents' confidence in tackling barriers to achievement. This is evident in the purposeful way the school works with parents and carers, other schools and colleges to promote good learning in this part of the authority. It is also characterised in the improvements in leadership and management at all levels and the good range of leadership opportunities provided for staff. The school effectively identifies and nurtures staff leadership capabilities and other talents. This has helped to improve staff recruitment and built in effective succession planning. Middle managers are accountable for improving teaching and learning and whole school workshop sessions have begun to share good practice identified by faculty leaders. The strong systems of monitoring and review of practice promote improvement of staff skills in all parts of the school.

The governors make an outstanding contribution to the school. They use their professional expertise to good effect to effectively hold the school to account and to challenge all staff to do their best for every child.

Community cohesion is outstanding. It has a wide ranging impact both on school life and the local community. The curriculum encourages students to think deeply about complex and difficult issues such as medical ethics and conflict resolution. The senior team and governors quickly identify emerging tensions and ensure they are addressed effectively in school at an early stage. Thus racist incidents have reduced and are less frequent than in the locality. This is echoed in the excellent promotion of equality of opportunity as seen in all aspects of the school's work. From promoting shared values of education and successfully tackling poor attendance in the locality to helping parents and carers improve their qualifications and feel included in their children's education.

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Robust safeguarding procedures are in place that exceed statutory requirements as they are rigorously implemented throughout the school. The school has outstanding systems in place to ensure parents and carers are kept well informed about all aspects of their children's well-being and learning at school. Every parent is regularly told about their child's progress at school meetings, or if parents have been unable to attend them, over the telephone. A booklet, written by parents, is given to every new parent with clear information about the school's procedures and how to contacting staff.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents whom inspectors spoke to were fulsome in their praise of the school and its work in supporting their children to be happy and to achieve. This view was corroborated by survey evidence from the large majority of parents and carers. Some parents were concerned about behaviour, bullying, thefts from students and the speed with which school addressed their concerns and contacted them. A very small minority of parents and carers said their children were not happy at school. This was also reflected in students' questionnaire responses. Inspectors investigated all their concerns and were able to confirm that the school took any concerns of parents, carers and students seriously and followed them up assiduously. The school has appropriate policies in place with regard to these issues and procedures are followed consistently.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The High Arcal 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 328 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1203 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	110	34	196	60	13	4	7	2
The school keeps my child safe	119	36	193	59	10	3	3	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	112	34	199	61	15	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	111	34	203	62	7	2	4	1
The teaching is good at this school	97	30	216	66	9	3	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	84	26	222	68	19	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	64	20	238	73	19	6	1	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)	97	30	212	65	7	2	2	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	96	29	207	63	15	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	92	28	194	59	23	7	12	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	69	21	228	70	12	4	6	2
The school is led and managed effectively	103	31	206	63	10	3	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	124	38	182	56	14	4	3	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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.



19 November 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The High Arcal School, Dudley, DY3 1BP

Thank you for all your help and comments throughout the inspection. They were very useful to us. We were very impressed by your courtesy to us and how well you worked together in lessons. You go to an outstanding school that continually strives to improve. It provides you with a safe and caring environment which enables you to develop well as confident learners and to contribute to your community.

Outstanding leadership by your headteacher and the very able support of the other leaders and governors make sure that you do well in school and aspire to great things. All staff care about you and encourage you. We were impressed by how many of you took up sport and in Year 10 were now Junior Sports Leaders. The school provides you with a wide range of opportunities to be involved in the local community and school life. We were very impressed with the group who came into school for a video conference at 05.45. Teaching is good and you work hard in lessons. We have asked the school to ensure that more of your lessons provide interesting and imaginative learning experiences. Your attendance at school has improved and is good, but you need to maintain this to benefit fully from all that your school offers. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school was outstanding. You are very mature in the way you behave in the school canteen and wait to come into school at the beginning of the day. You must maintain your high standards of behaviour and respect for each other because they will help you to achieve your high ambitions.

We wish you continued success in all you do.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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