

Aldridge School - A Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104263
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	355547
Inspection dates	17–18 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Michael Smith HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1488
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	197
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Keith Holland
Headteacher	David Mountney
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and five additional inspectors. They visited 51 lessons, saw 51 teachers and held meetings with staff, students, parents and governors. They observed the school's work, interrogated the school's assessment records in the sixth form and looked at the minutes of the meetings of the governing body, aspects of community work, the minutes of meetings with the School Improvement Partner, subject evaluations and school action plans and evaluations. They also scrutinised 102 parent and carer questionnaires, 65 staff questionnaires and 155 student questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The challenge for potentially high-attaining students.
- The progress made by sixth form students during lessons and towards their final examinations.
- How effective leaders have been in raising standards and overcoming weaknesses in teaching.
- The impact of the school's science specialism in raising standards, improving the quality of teaching and learning and supporting the community.

Information about the school

Aldridge School is larger than the average-sized secondary school with a large sixth form. Students come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, as is the proportion of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of students are of White British backgrounds, although a number of different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school. A new headteacher started at the school in April 2009. The school has gained a number of prestigious awards since the previous inspection, including the, International Schools Silver award, the ECM Standards, an anti-bullying award, Sportsmark and Healthy Schools.

Twenty students each year gain admission that is based upon their musical abilities.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

The school provides a satisfactory standard of education and is improving. The highly effective headteacher, well supported by senior colleagues, has brought about a significant change in attitude so that there has been a very marked change to the focus of staff to continually improve their work and the achievement of students. The specialist area of science now makes a significant impact upon the school's excellent work in the local community and is contributing successfully to improving the quality of teaching and learning across the school.

Standards are above average at the end of Key Stage 4 and average in the sixth form. However, the progress students make has been weak and this has been particularly evident in the sixth form. The proportions of students attaining the highest grades in either GCSE or A level examinations are below average. The school has responded so that now the progress made is satisfactory, being better in the main school than the sixth form. Staff are now more focused upon the quality of learning, and observations show that learning is often good and occasionally outstanding.

The quality of teaching is improving, but as yet many of the strategies to bring about improvements are not fully embedded. Overall teaching is satisfactory, with some good and outstanding practice. However, subject leaders do not consistently identify when learning is less secure and then aid support staff to bring about improvements. A key reason why students do not make good progress is that too often they are not given sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are too quick to offer support rather than allowing students to persevere and hence improve their understanding. Students are not always given opportunities to formulate their thinking by discussing their work before writing. Teachers use assessment very well in many lessons to inform students how to improve, although at times marking is not as effective because it fails to inform students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

Students' personal development is good, and they make an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. Pastoral care is good with very good support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, which is why these students make better progress than their peers. Support for students' learning is less effective. It is in the early days of implementation within the sixth form where at times the monitoring of progress towards targets lacks rigour.

The headteacher quickly identified crucial areas of the school's provision that needed significant improvement and impetus for further development is very clear. Leaders at all levels are totally committed to building upon the gains to date. However, at times self-evaluations by middle managers are too generous, as they do not always consider the impact of the provision upon outcomes. Many new initiatives have not had sufficient time to become fully embedded. There is quite rightly considerable optimism and a real sense

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of purpose in tackling underachievement. However, there has not been enough time to show improvements over a significant period and hence the school is judged to have a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to increase the rate of progress of learning in all years and particularly in the sixth form by:
 - ensuring students, particularly the most able, are consistently challenged to achieve their full potential
 - embedding target setting and the rigorous monitoring of progress.
- Further improve the quality of teaching and learning so that more is judged outstanding and the vast majority of teaching is judged at least good by:
 - ensuring students have greater opportunities to become independent learners without undue intervention by staff
 - ensuring students have more opportunities to talk about their work and articulate their thinking as precursor to writing
 - ensuring marking consistently informs students how to improve.
- Improve the impact of leadership to reduce inconsistencies, so that all middle leaders:
 - have a secure understanding of what constitutes good learning and the skills to support staff to bring about and embed improvements
 - are more rigorous with their evaluations based upon student outcomes.
- Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The school's analysis of assessment information and inspectors' observations of the quality of learning in lessons indicate that the downward trend has been halted and progress is now improving. In lessons students' good behaviour ensures they are engaged in their learning. Learning is best when they are challenged by the work, for example, in music when students were observed enjoying performing pieces of music or for others in science when considering the energy changes during an experiment. Students start school with standards that are above average. The comparatively few students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. However, some higher-attaining students are allowed to work at their own pace rather than being challenged. The achievement of pupils from all ethnic groups is satisfactory.

The vast majority of students said they feel safe in their questionnaires and this was supported by all of the parents and carers who returned their questionnaires. All said they enjoyed school. The school is very meticulous in recording any incidents of bullying, which are effectively dealt with. Students have a good understanding of moral issues. They know how to live healthily and many take up extra-curricular sport and other fitness activities.

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Good social development enables students to make an excellent contribution to the college and wider community, where they are held in high regard, for example as influential members of the local Youth Parliament. Spiritual development is good with students celebrating their success through a wide variety of displays and also considering the wonder of elements of their work. The local Rotary Club was very pleased with the commitment of students and school musicians at the recent Service of Remembrance. There are a wide variety of activities for students to enhance their cultural understanding, and there are very well-attended musical and dramatic events. Students take part in a variety of work-related activities and experiences which, along with effective key skills, prepare them well for their futures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?

In the best lessons, teachers plan carefully and students are very clear about what they need to do in order to make progress. The level of challenge in these lessons is well matched to the students' abilities and questioning is used effectively to stretch students appropriately. However, at times assessment information is not used well to plan learning for different abilities, meaning that in some lessons all students complete the same activities regardless of their starting points.

Gifted and talented students have opportunities to share science investigation ideas with a school in the United States. Provision in music is a further strength and the school attracts

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talented musicians from the local area, resulting in high standards and a wide range of groups and ensembles. However, this level of challenge for higher-attaining students is not consistent in all lessons. Students are not always encouraged to articulate their thinking and so access the higher levels and grades. As a result, more-able students do not always make the progress they should. The school's specialist status in science has contributed to the increase in provision of science courses and classroom technologies that are often used well to engage students. Inspectors saw some examples of good marking in English and humanities, which provided helpful and explicit guidance to students on how to improve. This good practice is not used consistently across the school.

The curriculum is well organised and supports students' needs. Individual and small group support in reading and writing is used effectively to improve access to the curriculum for less-able students and, as a result, they make good progress. Students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well supported and there are robust safeguarding procedures to protect any child who is considered at risk. Recent improvements at Key Stage 4 give the curriculum greater breadth to take into account the range of abilities in the school. Planning is also at an advanced stage to develop further the curricular provision in the sixth form and at Key Stage 3. This includes good support for students as they transfer into the school and between different phases of their education. The good range of extra-curricular activities and trips adds much to the learning opportunities of the students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders give a very strong steer and direction. Staff are committed to this ambition and are motivated. The vast majority of staff who submitted their questionnaire agreed that they were proud to be a member of staff and that the school was well led. The school has made important progress in improving the quality of teaching, but as yet this has not had a full impact; it has not yet ensured the great majority of lessons lead to good learning. Departmental reviews involve middle leaders in evaluating the work of their subject areas, although some are not fully clear of what they are looking for when they monitor lessons.

Governors are supportive of the school through their well-defined and effective committees. They ensure that budgets are carefully monitored and any additional funds are linked to intended outcomes. They also ensure that safeguarding is good and that it meets current requirements. The school gives good support to the local community and works well with its partners. It collaborates well with local primary schools and external

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agencies that have improved students' personal well-being. Good community cohesion is demonstrated through a clear understanding of local, national and global issues, including working closely with schools in Sicily and Washington DC.

The school is inclusive and there are good systems in place to monitor equality, including a comprehensive analysis of examination data to identify any underachievement of individuals or groups. However, it is only recently that the school has been able to challenge the underachievement of various groups, for example the high-attainers. Given the satisfactory outcomes, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Just under half of students transfer into the sixth form at the end of Year 11. Almost all attend well and progress through to Year 13 to complete their courses. At A level in 2010, too few students made the progress expected of them compared to their starting points, although progress on vocational courses was satisfactory. Inspectors' observations of current students' learning and the school's monitoring records show a much improved and satisfactory rate of progress. While most students develop well socially and personally, their awareness of healthy lifestyles is more limited because they receive too little reinforcement. Students receive a great deal of help in applying for higher education, but less support is available for those who transfer to either further education or employment. Students make a strong contribution to school and community life including mentoring younger students and working with local schools.

Students enjoy their lessons and increased independence. A rising proportion of lessons are good, ensuring better progress for the majority of current students. However, questioning rarely provides enough stretch and challenge to extend learning to meet students' full potential. Managers recognise that the curriculum has not met the needs of

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all students. The entry requirements have been raised and more accurate information is used to guide students to make appropriate choices. Work to increase the range of courses is ongoing through productive collaboration with other schools and colleges. The level of participation in enrichment activities is high in Year 12 but lower in Year 13. Pastoral care is good, but academic support is only just starting to be effective as new systems become embedded. New management of the sixth form has ensured a recent, notable increase in the rate of improvement following a period of insufficient action and decline. Much has been done to resolve shortcomings in data analysis and target setting, although some work is at an early stage.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of responses returned is low. Responses from the questionnaires, and when an inspector met a group of parents and carers, show great satisfaction with the school. A recurrent theme is the impact of the new headteacher and how the school had changed since his arrival. One parent commented, 'I am very impressed with the new senior leadership team and positive changes in the last year'; another said that the behaviour scheme which rewards good behaviour was far better. Good communication with the school through letters, texts and the website were also praised, as was excellent pastoral care, including support for vulnerable students.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aldridge School ? A Science College 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.

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Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	33	63	62	5	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	38	37	64	63	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	38	37	60	59	0	0	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	36	61	60	4	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	23	68	67	6	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	25	25	64	63	12	12	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	23	23	63	62	13	13	0	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)	34	33	60	59	4	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	29	66	65	5	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	41	51	50	5	5	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	29	54	53	8	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	34	33	62	61	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	40	39	58	57	4	4	0	0

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 Aldridge School ? A Science College, Walsall WS9 0BG

Thank you for talking to us when I visited your school recently with my colleagues. We met some of you at lunchtime and talked to others during lessons and at break. We were impressed with your good behaviour and manners and your excellent contribution to the life of the school and local community. You told us that you enjoy school and that you think it has got better since the new head has arrived. We judge that your school is satisfactory but that there has been a great deal of improvements recently, some of which are not yet fully embedded.

Results in your GCSE examinations are above average, but until recently students have not been making enough progress while at school. This has been particularly the case in the sixth form. We have asked your school to make sure you all do as well as possible and to help you do this that they check closely how well you are doing against your targets. We saw some good and outstanding lessons, but also some which were satisfactory. We judged that teaching is satisfactory and in order for your school to get even better, we have recommended that you are given more opportunities to take more responsibility for your learning. We want you to persevere at tasks without getting too much help. You also need to have time to talk and discuss your work before you write and marking needs to be more supportive. Almost all of you said in the questionnaire that the school prepares you well for the future.

Staff support and care for you well, making sure you are able to go forward to the next stage of your education, including for many of you to university. You also said they helped you to settle at the start of Year 7. Most of you said you felt safe in school and we saw that the safeguarding procedures are good. Virtually all of you said that the headteacher and senior staff do a good job. He, along with other senior leaders, has very clearly identified what needs to be done and they are very determined to carry on improving the school. They are supported by some good subject and pastoral leaders and teachers. However, we have asked the school to make sure middle leaders are more aware of what is good learning and so have an accurate overview of all areas. We wish you well at this supportive school.

Yours sincerely

Michael Smith

Her Majesty's Inspector

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