

# Plantsbrook School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	137053
<b>Local Authority</b>	N/A
<b>Inspection number</b>	385569
<b>Inspection dates</b>	14–15 September 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Clive Kempton HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Academy
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1274
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	229
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Griffiths
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tracy Campbell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	N/A
<b>School address</b>	Upper Holland Road Sutton Coldfield B72 1RB
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 24 lessons and 24 teachers. They held meetings with the senior and middle managers of the school, four representatives of the governing body, a group of parents and carers, and four outside professionals associated with the school. They spoke to 10 groups of students representing all year groups. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school improvement plan as well as subject improvement plans. Evidence was also provided by 395 parents and carers, staff and students who completed questionnaires to express their views of the school.

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

- Why the trend of attainment is better in English than in mathematics.
- The behaviour of the students.
- How well students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported in lessons.
- The quality of school development planning at all management levels.
- How much the sixth form has improved since the last inspection.

## Information about the school

Plantsbrook is a large school that converted to an academy in Summer 2011, a few weeks prior to this inspection. As such, it receives no direct support from the local authority and is funded directly from central government. It is a very popular school and significantly oversubscribed. The school operates within an area of Birmingham where approximately 20% of local students attend grammar schools. It is a technology college and gained a second specialism in music in 2006. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is similar to the national average. Eligibility for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school has a specially resourced provision for 20 students with visual impairment.

**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

Plantsbrook is an outstanding school where students attain high academic standards and develop impressive personal qualities. It is a happy school. Strong leadership is at the centre of its success, and the whole school community is encouraged to contribute to its development. There is a warm welcome for visitors.

One of the significant strengths of the school is the quality of relationships between staff and students. Everyone is valued and encouraged to do their best. Visually impaired students are well integrated into mainstream classes. One sixth form student summed up the school as a place which 'celebrated difference and where you were treated as a unique individual'. Inspectors agree. The behaviour of the students is exemplary both in lessons and around the school at break and lunchtimes, and this engenders a positive climate for learning. Students are focused, ambitious, hard working and proud to be a part the school. Staff morale is high. Teachers work hard and know every child as an individual. Teaching quality is rarely less than good and much is outstanding. Little time is wasted in lessons and students tangibly enjoy coming to the school to learn. This is why attendance is high at 95.1%, well above the national average of 92%.

By the time students reach Year 11 their attainment is well above the national average. In the 2011 examinations, virtually all students gained five good GCSEs and three quarters did so when including English and mathematics. Following a period of staffing instability in mathematics, attainment, already high, is accelerating further and closing the gap on the even higher-attaining English department. This pattern of improvement and high attainment is matched in other subjects across the school and now virtually all achieve above national average percentages for higher grades. This represents outstanding progress. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities also make outstanding progress.

The headteacher leads with vision and determination and a relentless drive to improve the quality of teaching and learning. She and her senior team have been extremely successful in embedding ambition and driving improvement and their track record of year-on-year improvement demonstrates their outstanding capacity to continue to improve student outcomes. Monitoring by all leaders and managers is a regular feature of the school's work. As a result, the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness is accurate. However, improvement plans at all management levels lack clear and measurable success criteria linked to student outcomes and are written more as a list of actions to complete. Specialist status has had a major impact on

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attainment in the school, especially in the use of technology.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that improvement plans at all management levels contain clear and measurable success criteria linked to student outcomes that enable the governing body to hold leaders to account.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**1**

There has been a strong pattern of high and improving attainment since 2006. Students enter the school at a level of attainment which is close to the national average. The number of students reaching five or more A\*–C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics has increased steadily to a level significantly higher than national figures. Students at Plantsbrook enjoy learning. They are ambitious for their future and keen to do well. They respond with enthusiasm and commitment to the challenging lessons which are carefully planned for them. As a result the large majority of students achieve highly and are able to make exceptional progress. Standards of attainment in English are particularly high. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve outcomes which are well above the national average for similar children and they make outstanding progress in their learning. This is particularly true of the visually impaired students, many of whom make remarkable progress while at Plantsbrook. This pattern of sustained improvement in outcomes has been achieved in part by making sure that teachers are fully aware of each student's individual capabilities, and that students understand in detail how to improve their work, and are motivated and supported to do so.

Students report that they feel very safe in the school and this is endorsed by parents and carers in the questionnaire received as part of this inspection. The behaviour of students is exemplary. Students respect each other and all adults in the school. This engenders an active student involvement in lessons and a willingness to learn. They are eager to contribute to the school and local community and many choose to give up their own time to help at open evenings or entertain senior citizens. Their regular attendance, high standards of attainment and courtesy to visitors ensure they are ready to make the transition to the next phase of education or training and contribute to their future economic well-being.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. The school has a strong set of positive values and many parents and carers choose to send their children to the school due to the high reputation it has achieved in the local community for respect and tolerance of the views of others. Assemblies and the opportunity to reflect on a Thought for the Day enable students to develop an awareness of those less fortunate than themselves. They raise large sums of money for charities in this country and abroad, often at their own instigation.

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*These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes*

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

## How effective is the provision?

When leaders observe any practice that falls below the high standard expected, they act promptly, thoroughly and effectively to help the colleague to improve. Across the school, students are inspired by teachers’ enthusiastic celebration of their achievements and passionate ambition for them to make outstanding progress. Students know how well they are performing as their work is usually marked with grades and comments that also let them know what they need to do next. Relationships between students and teachers are therefore very strong. In this highly positive atmosphere, students report that lessons are ‘varied, fun and interesting’. They know that teachers expect them to think about their work and use what they have learned when they move on to the next stage. During the inspection, teachers were observed involving students in setting their own success criteria. This practice, students say, helps to make the work meaningful so that they learn very well from it. If they do have difficulty with a task, they are confident that the teacher will make sure that they understand. Learning objectives are clarified by being introduced in the context of the task. During the lesson, almost all teachers have assessment discussions to ensure that students are coping with the work. They use a broad range of assessments to pitch tasks to challenge students at just the right level.

Attention to the needs of individuals and groups provides a powerful basis for the formation of the strong curriculum. Students in Years 7 to 9 follow all the National Curriculum, with particular strengths in their preparation for the next stage of their courses. Excellent provision for students with special educational needs and/or

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

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disabilities, including those who are visually impaired, keeps them in class with their peers for almost all of the time, with effective support from adults trained to address their individual needs. The Key Stage 4 curriculum has been developed in consultation with students and their parents and carers to give them courses that meet their individual needs and ambitions. Early consultation from Year 8 enables the school to plan in advance. Challenging courses for higher-attaining students bring about the outstanding proportion of A\* and A grades at GCSE. All students can opt for an academic pathway, but the vocational route is growing in popularity and becoming increasingly successful. The high provision of information and communication technology (ICT) equipment allows for its use across all subjects, and there are strong links with literacy, particularly in history. Recognising that numeracy is less well used in other subjects, leaders are acting to promote improvement. Students speak enthusiastically about opportunities to work with partner schools, for example in engineering and problem solving days. Musicians are proud of their choir and orchestra, who perform in city and national events. A very high proportion of students take part in the broad range of activities in the school. As a result, students' personal, vocational and academic development in all areas of experience is outstanding.

In this strongly caring and supportive environment, students make outstanding progress. A strong focus on individuals makes all students feel that they matter. Parents and carers and the students speak with enthusiasm about the depth of the staff's commitment to their well-being. From the time that students enter the school, they know that they are welcome and known to the staff, and that their needs will be met. Attention to detail is strong, for example in the designation of a lower school playground that makes them feel safe. Students' high attendance is the result of their enjoyment and well-being, as much as of the care taken to meet the needs of the very few who are persistent absentees. The work of the strong pastoral support team and the interesting programme for personal, social and health education bring about a highly positive ethos. Students whose circumstances may make them vulnerable have a safe haven. The school monitors progress to provide activities that support those who struggle. For example, a club has been started to help students who have identified problems with numeracy. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities have a wide range of facilities to help them, based on regular analysis of their individual needs. The visually impaired students receive exceptional support. Advice about course selection through the school is thorough at all stages, resulting in a high level of student satisfaction with the courses they have chosen. This positive attitude, coupled with the general sense of ambition, has a strong impact on their outstanding performance.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
The use of assessment to support learning	1
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where</b>	<b>1</b>

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<b>relevant, through partnerships</b>	
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior staff have ensured that the sixth form is now good, and the middle leaders throughout the school have received considerable in-house training to improve their effectiveness. They are now an impressive group of subject leaders who are actively driving standards within their own areas. Excellent management systems, such as regular department reviews and the appointment of assistant subject leaders, ensure that the subject leaders themselves are well supported to fulfil their roles and succession planning is secure. Managers at all levels monitor the consistency of teaching quality and provide appropriate support to individuals when required. An appropriate assessment overview by year leaders ensures that any individual students falling behind are identified early for additional support. All staff actively promote equality and tackle discrimination and as a result, all students succeed.

Safeguarding procedures are outstanding and exceed government requirements. Students feel safe in the school and 97% of parents and carers agree. The school puts all aspects of health and safety at the heart of its work. It takes all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of its students, completely fulfilling its statutory duties of keeping central records of staff up to date. The governing body and all staff receive regular training on safeguarding, in particular child protection. As a result, a realistic and proportionate approach to safety and safeguarding permeates every aspect of the school’s life. The collaborative working with other key agencies around these issues is exemplary.

Community cohesion is good. The school has audited its community, created action plans and evaluated the impact of its actions. It is itself a cohesive community and strong links have been made as part of the specialism with the local community, for example local senior citizens. However, links with another school in a different context in this country are still at the early stage of planning.

Governance is good. The governing body has developed its members’ skills over the last few years through regular training opportunities. They now question the school more and hold the headteacher to account for student outcomes. External professionals are very positive about the links they have with Plantsbrook. One described the school as having a ‘huge impact on its local community’. Parents and carers are also very positive and one summed up the school as ‘a very caring school that has got the right balance between pastoral support and academic achievement, both of which are excellent.’ Inspectors agree.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*



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

## Sixth form

Good improvements to the sixth form reflect the strengths of the school as a whole. Students enjoy their studies and are well prepared for their next stage of education. For many this means continuing at university or college, or following pathways towards training, apprenticeships or employment. Underpinning this success is outstanding leadership and consistently good or outstanding teaching in both Year 12 and Year 13. Students receive outstanding information, advice and guidance to meet their academic and pastoral needs. Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are below the national average. Students make good progress in most subjects to reach high pass rates at A level, although the proportion reaching the higher grades remains below average. Lessons are purposeful and productive with a very positive climate for learning. Teachers set high expectations and students respond very well as they try hard and feel that their efforts are valued and rewarded. There is an evident warmth within lessons and a shared sense of purpose. Relationships are excellent and students are confident that they will achieve their targets. As one student said, ‘Teachers are helpful and sensitive. They really know what we need and that’s why I chose Plantsbrook, because you know the staff really care.’ Students readily take part in a wide range of additional activities. These include musical ensembles as well as the creative arts and young enterprise work. Students make an excellent contribution to the school and local community through charitable fundraising and support for younger students in younger year groups.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
	2

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The quality of provision in the sixth form Leadership and management of the sixth form	1
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## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. In their responses to the questionnaire sent as part of this inspection, nearly all said their child enjoyed school. A similar high percentage reported that the school kept their child safe. The question that elicited the most negative response was, 'The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle.' Inspectors considered this concern and spoke to a group of parents and carers as well as a large number of students. Inspectors visited the school dining hall and analysed the after-school clubs that promoted an active lifestyle. They judged that while the school constantly promotes healthy lifestyle choices, some students choose not to always make the right choice. The headteacher has agreed to ensure all staff are more vigilant for opportunities to reinforce healthy eating and promote an active lifestyle.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Plantsbrook 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 395 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1274 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	181	46	202	51	9	2	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	204	52	177	45	5	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	152	38	190	48	17	4	6	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	149	38	197	50	18	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	151	38	203	51	15	4	1	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	109	28	217	55	33	8	4	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	72	18	249	63	37	9	7	2
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)	146	37	204	52	16	4	2	1
The school meets my child’s particular needs	137	35	213	54	18	5	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	133	34	202	51	21	5	4	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	94	24	220	56	28	7	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	165	42	204	52	9	2	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	207	52	169	43	10	3	1	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 8 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



16 September 2011

Dear Students

### **Inspection of Plantsbrook School, Sutton Coldfield, B72 1RB**

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we inspected your school earlier this term. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcome of the inspection and what you could all do to improve the school even more.

I think you go to an outstanding school which has demonstrated that year on year it can improve. Your exam results are well above those attained in other schools nationally. Your teachers really care that you achieve your full potential and work hard to prepare lessons that you find interesting and enjoyable. You are also making exceptional progress in developing personal and social skills that will equip you well for the world of work, such as outstanding attendance, behaviour and consideration for others where you raise large sums of money for those less fortunate than yourselves. You have a very good headteacher who leads the school extremely well and has made sure that everyone is involved in improving it. It was clear to see that you have respect for your teachers and other adults, visitors and each other. You are willing to go out of your way to help each other, both in lessons and around the building. This all makes the school a positive environment in which to learn.

In order to make your school even better, I have asked the headteacher and senior staff to do the following.

- Improve the plans the school writes to improve your exam results by including more measurable success criteria.

I wish you all the best for the future. Don't forget to make the most of your time at Plantsbrook and take advantage of the wide range of opportunities the school provides.

Yours sincerely

**Clive Kempton HMI**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

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