

Great Barr School

Aldridge Road, Great Barr, Birmingham, B44 8NU

Inspection dates 8–9 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement.

- Achievement in mathematics requires improvement, because the teaching and leadership of this subject are not enabling students to make progress at a rapid enough pace.
- Teaching requires improvement, especially in mathematics. Although there is good and outstanding teaching in other subjects, there are inconsistencies across the school, because work is not always pitched at the right level. It is sometimes too easy and sometimes too hard.
- There is some inconsistency in the way that teachers provide feedback on students' work, including through marking, so they do not always have a clear understanding of how to improve.
- Although leaders have ensured that teaching in most subjects has improved since the previous inspection, the leadership of mathematics requires improvement.
- Governors have not taken fast enough action to raise the quality of teaching and achievement in mathematics.

The school has the following strengths

- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress because they are well taught, and the good support and advice they receive prepares them well for their next steps.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Students behave well in lessons and are keen to do well. They say that they feel safe and are confident that adults will take care of them and support them.
- Attendance rates have significantly improved and exclusion rates have fallen, as a result of leaders' good management and the care and support they provide.
- Older students frequently support younger ones and help them to behave and work well, and get on with each other.
- The courses that students follow are well matched to their individual needs and promote literacy well. The special courses provided to ensure that disaffected students remain fully included, enable them to achieve success.
- Achievement and teaching in science are particularly good.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 57 lessons, six of which were joint observations with the senior leaders. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons.
- Meetings were held with students, a representative of the governing body, and staff, including middle managers. A phone conversation took place with a representative of the local authority.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at: policies, self-evaluation and development planning, monitoring records, data related to the tracking of students’ progress, safeguarding documents, and samples of students’ work.
- The views of 15 parents and carers who responded to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, along with 46 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Mary Davis, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kevin Harrison	Additional Inspector
Raymond Biglin	Additional Inspector
John Burridge	Additional Inspector
Alan Jarvis	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average, as is the proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs.
- There proportion of students from minority ethnic heritages is above the national average; the largest groups are of Indian and Caribbean heritage. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is also above average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for some students including those in local authority care and those known to be eligible for free school meals, has risen sharply over the past three years to above the national average. The proportion in Key Stage 3 is now 40%, which is well above average.
- The school meets the government's floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has recently experienced staffing difficulties in mathematics, including in the recruitment of staff.
- The school is a specialist science college.
- None of the school's students are taught elsewhere.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching by:
 - planning tasks and providing resources and support that meet all students' individual needs, making sure work is hard enough for more-able students and not too hard for the less able
 - promoting students' independent learning by always providing clear written feedback on their work to help them reach and exceed their targets.
- Raise achievement in mathematics to match that in science by:
 - sharing the existing good practice in science to develop the leadership and management of mathematics, and establish much better teaching of mathematics across the school.
- Ensure that governors provide effective challenge for the schools' leaders and support them in taking urgent action to address identified weaknesses, particularly in mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Achievement is not yet good because progress in mathematics, a key subject, is not rapid enough. Attainment in mathematics, although improving, has remained well below average for three years. Progress has also been slower than is typical nationally but it is not inadequate as it is also improving. The schools' assessments indicate that the current Year 11 are on track to reach closer to average standards by the end of the year, and that an increasing proportion are now making expected progress.
- Students enter the school with below average levels in the basic skills of reading, writing, communication and mathematics. By the end of Key Stage 3 they are now making improved progress and at the end of Year 11, standards are close to average. There is no significant difference between the achievements of students from different ethnic backgrounds.
- Attainment and progress in science has been consistently well above average. In English, although the proportion of students gaining a good GCSE pass rose in 2011 to above average, the proportion gaining the highest grades remained below average. Rates of progress in English were sustained in 2012.
- Sixth form students achieve well. For example, A-level students enter the sixth form with below average prior attainment and achieve results that are close to the national average, although better at A2 (the qualification at the end of Year 13) than at AS level (usually Year 12). Students' applications to higher education are well supported and the good care and guidance they receive enables them to do well.
- Well-designed strategies are helping to accelerate reading across the school. The 'Jigsaw' course in Year 7 promotes literacy, and effective daily catch-up courses for the weakest readers establish a systematic approach, and provide effective individual support. This results in students making rapid progress. Students are frequently encouraged to read out loud and they support each other by helping with unfamiliar words.
- The school provides well for those students eligible for the pupil premium. Nationally in 2011, the number of points these students scored in GCSEs was 115 behind other pupils. In the school it was only 74. The school's tracking of progress indicates that the gap between their attainment and that of their peers is closing rapidly.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs, and those who speak English as an additional language are enabled to make equal progress to their peers through the individual support, care and encouragement provided for them. However in some individual lessons, and particularly in mathematics where the progress of all abilities is often slower, their learning slows because teachers do not provide tasks that always meet their needs sufficiently.
- Students display good attitudes towards their learning and are usually attentive and keen to do well. They enjoy the opportunities provided to develop independence. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, students had a clear understanding of what was required for a high quality response, enabling them to target their answers appropriately. Here a variety of lively and active tasks enabled them to make rapid progress in their understanding of the characters of the novel they were studying.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Leaders' rigorous checks show that teaching is typically good or outstanding in most subjects across the school, including in the sixth form. Lesson observations during the inspection confirmed this. There is, however, a very marked difference between the quality of teaching in mathematics and other subjects. Here, little good teaching was observed and the large majority of lessons required improvement. This is because teachers are not using assessment information well enough to plan lessons that meet students' individual needs. This results in higher-attaining students being insufficiently challenged so that they find the work too easy or lower-attaining students finding the work too difficult. Consequently the pace of learning is not quick enough. This is also the case in a small minority of lessons observed in other subjects.
- Teaching in science is a strength of the school. Here there is a consistent approach that enables students to benefit from a wide range of stimulating activities that motivate them to learn. For example, in an outstanding physics lesson, students were engrossed in learning about the impact of nuclear energy, by thinking about how the recent nuclear explosion in Japan affected people's lives. Teachers of mathematics are missing creative opportunities such as these to engage students sufficiently in their learning.
- Most teaching observed in the sixth form was good or outstanding. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and lessons are well planned and structured. They promote students' independence by ensuring they have a secure understanding of how their work will be assessed, enabling them to aim for high quality responses. For example, in an outstanding English lesson, students used the assessment criteria and examples of high-scoring answers to identify these qualities in their own poetry analysis.
- Most teachers plan tasks that enable students to develop their personal and social skills and to develop their understanding of moral issues. For example, in an outstanding drama lesson, the teacher enabled her students to reflect on the issue of gang crime. She provided opportunities to develop not only their stagecraft skills and their knowledge of technical drama language, but also their knowledge of how to work as part of a team, as they devised a scene in response to a film sequence. By providing progressive steps to success, she built their self-confidence and raised their aspirations of what they were able to achieve.
- Students say that teachers provide helpful verbal feedback so that they know how to improve and develop their work. Some inconsistency, however, in the quality of written feedback means that students do not always have a clear idea of their next steps in achieving their targets, or have the opportunity to respond to the advice given by practising skills or trying another challenge. Some books are marked infrequently, which results in students' not bothering to present their work well or to complete tasks.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Staff, parents and carers are positive about the standards of behaviour in lessons. Students are generally polite and courteous, both to one another and to visitors. They told inspectors that the school keeps them safe and that there are always adults who will listen to them and support them.
- Most students' have positive attitudes and their good behaviour in lessons has a strong impact on their learning. There are some students who require guidance to behave appropriately, but they understand, and are quick to respond to, the clear ladder of consequences and say that teachers are fair in their behaviour management. Relationships are warm and supportive, and students generally concentrate well and are keen to contribute, even when teaching is less than

good.

- Key Stage 4 students told inspectors that they take more responsibility for their own behaviour once they embark on GCSE courses and these older students, together with those in the sixth form frequently support younger ones who find conforming to the school's expectations difficult. The vertical tutor groups that enable students of different year groups to work together support this.
- The school has developed clear systems that have improved the behaviour of students. Leaders have been quick to respond to a widening intake to the school, some of whom have behavioural issues, by appointing additional leaders to work on this. Behaviour management is effectively led and there is detailed analysis that enables appropriate intervention and support to be provided for those students who need it.
- Fixed-term exclusions have been high, but leaders have introduced new systems including the use of an isolation room, the effectiveness of which is regularly checked, and have significantly reduced this rate. The support and close involvement of parents and carers have contributed to this success.
- Bullying incidents are thoroughly recorded and the school places a high priority on ensuring that they are swiftly dealt with. Most students have a good understanding of the different forms bullying can take, including cyber-bullying. There is less understanding of homophobic bullying, but the school has plans to address this.
- Students are able to express their views via the school and house councils. The house system promotes competition and enables the large school to be divided into smaller groups to ensure that students are well known as individuals.
- Behaviour in corridors can occasionally be boisterous as students attempt to travel the, often large, distances between one lesson and another. Students sometimes show a lack of urgency at lesson changes and there is inconsistent challenge from staff about lateness to lessons. The school leaders are aware of these minor weaknesses and are already working to do something about them.
- Attendance rates have gradually improved over recent years and are now above average. Persistent absence has also reduced over the past year. Punctuality to school continues to improve.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders check on the quality of teaching thoroughly and provide good support and training to improve it. The headteacher has made this a priority, and also uses pay rises and promotion effectively to reward good performance. These strategies have resulted in an improved quality of teaching in most subjects since the previous inspection. However, leadership is not yet good because a lack of effective subject leadership in mathematics and an insufficiently unified approach over recent years mean teaching in mathematics remains significantly below the quality seen in other subjects.
- A new mathematics leader has recently been appointed and appropriate strategies put in place, such as after-school and holiday revision classes. Early entry in Year 10 for the highest attaining students is used appropriately given that these students have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of mathematics in Year 11 if they are successful, or to retake and improve their

grades if they are not. As a result of the new strategies, achievement in this subject is showing a rising trend. However the quality of teaching in lessons is not sufficiently strong to ensure that these improvements will be sustained.

- The combination of courses offered is flexible to meet the needs of specific groups of students. The science specialism is used well to provide additional options, for example, astronomy. The 'jigsaw' integrated curriculum, in Key Stage 3, not only promotes literacy and numeracy but also establishes expectations of behaviour and promotes learning skills. A good range of options at Key Stage 4 include a foundation course, combining work placements with qualifications. This has had a significant impact on keeping students at risk of exclusion engaged in their education and in 2012, resulted in only one student not being in education, employment or training after finishing compulsory education at the school.
- A wide variety of opportunities are provided for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students told inspectors that those from different ethnic backgrounds get on well together and show respect for beliefs different to their own. The school promotes understanding of different cultures through international partnerships and ensures that all groups are fully included.
- The pupil premium funding is effectively used to provide the 'jigsaw' and foundation provision, revision courses and a wide variety of individual support, by learning mentors and the guidance and support unit. This has resulted in the raising of achievement of this group of students. Although the impact of this funding is checked, leaders' analysis, including that of the governors, is not sufficiently sophisticated to evaluate the effectiveness of all elements of the provision.
- The school works closely with parents and carers and provides effective support for those families facing challenging circumstances. Although there was a very low response to the on-line questionnaire, large numbers of parents and carers attend progress evenings and communications with home use a variety of media, including the school's website.
- The local authority provide appropriate support for the school's leaders, helping to develop the skills of middle leaders and their ability to challenge teachers about pupils' progress.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors provide support and challenge for the school's leaders and fulfil their statutory duties. They check on what is happening and seek training and external support appropriately. They know the main strengths and weaknesses of the school including the fragility of the mathematics department and have endeavoured over a period of years to appoint an effective mathematics leader. They have however lacked urgency in this regard and have accepted recruitment issues as the reason for continued weakness, without producing strategic plans to secure the rapid improvements required. Governors meet frequently with the school's leaders and take part in lesson observations. They are involved in performance management and monitor how this relates to salary progression. They are aware of the performance of different groups of students and of how effectively the pupil premium funding is being allocated. Governors' financial planning to meet the challenges of a changing intake is secure. They are aware that some of their practice requires improvement and are keen to improve the level of challenge that they provide.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	103550
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	400630

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	2091
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lee Crowe
Headteacher	Catherine Mary Abbott
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2008
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