



# Great Barr School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 103550  
**LEA** Birmingham  
**Inspection number** 276949  
**Inspection dates** 8 February 2006 to 9 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Davinder Dosanjh HMI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Aldridge Road
<b>School category</b>	Foundation		Birmingham
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 18		West Midlands B44 8NU
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 3666611
<b>Number on roll</b>	2428	<b>Fax number</b>	0121 3666007
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mrs Judy Watts-Janef
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 March 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Catherine Mary Abbott

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 18	<b>Inspection dates</b> 8 February 2006 - 9 February 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 276949
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Great Barr is the largest school in the country and is a popular and oversubscribed school. It is a mixed 11–18 comprehensive school. There are 2,453 pupils on roll of whom 355 are in the sixth form. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is 27%. The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs is below the national average and the proportion eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average. It became a specialist science college in September 2005.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 3**

The school evaluates its overall effectiveness as satisfactory and the evidence from this inspection supports this view. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made in most of the areas identified, the new music accommodation is impressive but French results are still low. Parents are concerned about behaviour and the steady decline in discipline. This is supported by the inspectors' observations. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher who has only been at the school for a term is focused on making further improvements. The senior leadership team is a committed group that ensures efficient daily management of a very large school. Achievements and standards are satisfactory. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results have been rising and in 2005 the school achieved its best ever results. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. There are some very enthusiastic and outstanding teachers who motivate and engage pupils well. However, too much teaching is lacking in challenge. Pupils receive good care and support and the house system is a particular strength of the school. The curriculum is appropriate, with an increasing choice and flexibility at Key Stage 4. The current timetable limits teaching time and results in lateness to lessons. The school gained specialist science status in September 2005 and has progressed quickly by putting a range of initiatives in place. It is too early to judge the impact of these initiatives on achievement and the curriculum. The school's self-evaluation accurately identifies the areas it needs to improve and the key priorities have been addressed in the school development plan. However, actions need to be taken more quickly to address areas of concern. The school has the capacity to improve further and provides satisfactory value for money.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The sixth form is satisfactory. Standards are improving. Attendance, an issue in the last inspection, is now improved. Students are offered a wide range of AS/A level subjects. The new study facilities in the sixth form are providing opportunities for students to develop their capacity for independent learning. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving. Some teaching is outstanding and this accounts for the better progress in some subjects. All students are set challenging examination targets and the school monitors individuals' progress well. When progress falters there are clear procedures to rectify matters but these are not always fully effective. Steps to make departments accountable for results are beginning to raise standards.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve achievement and raise standards of attainment by strengthening the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve the behaviour of a significant minority of pupils by consistently applying the behaviour management strategies.
- Review the school day to address issues of punctuality to lessons and the actual amount of time spent teaching.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

The achievement of pupils is satisfactory. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with attainment which is average and reach standards that are broadly average by Year 11. In Key Stage 3, standards are line with national expectations for English and science. However, progress in mathematics and English is weaker than in science. At Key Stage 4, the school's results have been rising at a good rate since 2001. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades improved by 10% in 2005. Progress in English is weaker than in mathematics. However, overall progress is uneven at Key Stage 4 with boys doing less well than girls. The proportion of pupils gaining the top levels and grades at Key Stages 3 and 4 is below average. The achievement of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is often higher than those from White British backgrounds. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress. In the sixth form, attainment in GCE AS/A level is below the national average but is improving. Attainment in vocational courses is better. Retention is good. Targets that were set last year for performance were exceeded in 2005 for Key Stage 4.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Most enjoy school and have good attitudes to learning but a small minority do not, causing some disruption to lessons, particularly when the work lacks challenge and the pace is slow. Behaviour in the dining halls and when pupils are moving between lessons is generally good. The number of exclusions is higher than average. Bullying is rare and effectively dealt with. Attendance is satisfactory but punctuality to lessons is not. The site is large and no time is allowed for pupils to travel between lessons so learning time is lost. Pupils appreciate the good care given to them by the dedicated house staff and the opportunities they are given to contribute their views through the House Forum system, particularly to the Healthy Schools initiative and the use of MP3 players. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Local and global citizenship is promoted effectively through, for example, links with an African village, the Eco-school activities and the Young Person's Parliament. There is an effective behaviour management system of rewards and sanctions but it is not always managed consistently by teachers. The religious education programme effectively promotes understanding and tolerance of religious and cultural differences which are evident in the school community. Pupils gain a good understanding of the workplace through citizenship and careers. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to the local community.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall and accords with the school's own view. This contributes to the satisfactory progress pupils make throughout the school. In the good lessons, teachers use their close knowledge of pupils' progress to plan challenging lessons. As a result, pupils make fast progress, working persistently and with enthusiasm. Where teaching is outstanding, for example in drama, pupils understand clearly what they need to do to improve. They appraise each other's work with tact and sensitivity. In the satisfactory lessons, good relationships and teachers' expertise in their subjects ensure that pupils make steady progress. Pupils are made aware of the purpose of lessons. However, they rarely have the opportunity to measure their progress at the end of lessons. Pupils work at a fairly relaxed pace. Less successful lessons are characterised by teaching which pays insufficient attention to pupils' individual learning needs. For example, in some English lessons, the most able pupils are insufficiently challenged and this results in too few pupils achieving the highest grades in national tests. Occasionally, perceptive feedback from teachers and helpful marking enable pupils to improve the quality of their work, but this is not consistent. In inadequate lessons, poor management of pupils results in time wasting and behaviour which occasionally disrupts the learning of others.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. The curriculum is varied and interesting and enables pupils to make sound progress over time. The amount of time spent teaching is below recommendations and is further eroded by lateness to lessons. The curriculum for 11- to 13-year-olds is satisfactory. It is broad and balanced and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The provision for 14- to 16-year-olds is improving. The number of vocational subjects on offer is growing but limited. There is a successful course, partly based at a local college, which provides well for less academic pupils. The school has a flexible arrangement to ensure continuing education for a small minority who might otherwise opt out of education. The school has a sufficient range of sports clubs that are well attended and broaden pupils' horizons and sporting aspirations. Currently, many pupils are enthusiastically rehearsing for a school production of 'Grease'. A wide range of subjects is offered to sixth form students. Many interesting visits and activities enrich the curriculum.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 2

Pupils receive good care and support by committed staff. The house system is a particular strength, ensuring that all pupils in this very large school feel safe and say they have adults who know them well. Child protection and health and safety

procedures are all fully in place and effective. The school supports its vulnerable pupils particularly well; those with learning difficulties and disabilities are fully integrated in all the school's activities and make satisfactory progress. Pupils particularly praise the twice yearly academic review days with their form tutors and parents, which they see as most useful in helping them improve. They also like the 'Sleuth' system which enables rewards and sanctions to be accurately recorded. Careers education is particularly good. Pupils are given good opportunities to gain awareness of job opportunities through work experience placements, role play, such as that done by Year 10 in the College of Law, and opportunities to quiz visitors about their jobs in 'What's my line?' in Year 9.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Effective action has been taken to bring about improvements in most of the areas highlighted in the last inspection. Some areas of the school's performance have improved significantly, such as performance at GCSE. However, behaviour has shown a decline. The headteacher has only been at the school since September 2005 but has a clear overview of the issues the school needs to address. The senior leadership team is a committed group that manages a very large school efficiently. Managers also have a clear idea of the priorities for improvement. However, some actions need to be taken more urgently to ensure that emerging patterns of concern can be reversed as quickly as possible. The school asks parents and pupils for their views on its work, but a relatively high proportion of parents do not feel that their concerns are listened to. In many respects, the school's managers, including governors, have a clear idea of its strengths and weaknesses. However, there are inconsistencies in the way that policies, such as dealing with behaviour or ensuring all pupils receive work that is hard enough, are put into practice. One great strength in management is the way that the school's specialist status has been organised. The school has got off to a flying start. It is already much further on than would usually be expected after only six months.

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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	3
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	2

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

### **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Pupils and Students As you know we visited your school recently to check on how well it was doing. We would like to thank you very much for making us feel so welcome, especially those of you who gave up your time to talk to us at length. What we liked most about your school

- You enjoy school and make satisfactory progress.
- Most of you work hard and have positive attitudes to your work.
- Attendance in the sixth form has improved since the last inspection.
- You enjoy taking on responsibilities and treat them seriously.
- The house system ensures you are cared for well and helped to make sensible decisions about your future.

In addition, we enjoyed watching a large number of you rehearse for 'Grease'! What we have asked your school, with your help, to do now

- Improve the standards you achieve and the progress you make.
- Ensure that you all behave well and get to lessons on time.
- Improve the teaching in some lessons.

The headteacher, teachers and support staff are very committed and are working hard to improve your school. We wish you all the very best in the future and thank you for being so helpful. Yours faithfully Davinder Dosanjh Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools