



Alcester Grammar School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 125770
LEA Warwickshire
Inspection number 281997
Inspection dates 22 March 2006 to 23 March 2006
Reporting inspector Clive Kempton HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)	School address	Birmingham Road
School category	Foundation		Alcester
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Warwickshire B49 5ED
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01789 762494
Number on roll	900	Fax number	01789 400626
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Richard Bush
Date of previous inspection	19 November 2002	Headteacher	Mr Iain Blaikie

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools (HMI) and three Additional Inspectors (AI).

Description of the school

This mixed grammar school serves a wide and socially diverse community radiating as far as 17 miles from Alcester. Students are selected by ability at age 11, while the sixth form, which makes up half the school, is non selective with 65% transferring from a family of local feeder high schools. This post-16 intake is not typical of a grammar school and broadens the overall ability range. The school collaborates with several other local secondary and primary schools as well as offering community sports and arts provision. The school became a Performing Arts College in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Alcester Grammar School is an outstanding school. The school self-evaluation and parents' views also reflect this positive judgement. Students make good progress in the main school and outstanding progress in the sixth form and achieve very high standards throughout. Students obviously enjoy being at school and their behaviour is exemplary. The care, guidance and support provided for students and their personal development and well-being are also outstanding. The quality of teaching across the main school is good and outstanding in the sixth form, although a sharper focus on telling students how to further improve their work in all subjects will improve its consistency. The curriculum is outstanding across the school, notably the extra-curricular opportunities where students are provided with a wealth of additional experiences including international cultural exchanges. A significant feature of the school is the tangible confident and caring nature of the students themselves. The overall quality of leadership and management across the main school is good, and excellent in the sixth form. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. The school has made good improvement on the issues raised at the last inspection. Senior managers are committed and dedicated to further improve the school and have the strong capacity to do so. Their overall school self-evaluation is broadly accurate. They have identified clearly the issues that need to be developed within the school, such as the use of assessment to promote better learning, and a sharpening of the focus and consistency of departmental self-evaluation to reflect some existing exemplary practice. The Arts College status has had an immediate impact on the ethos of the school. Whilst there has been progress in some subject departments, there is still work to do in embedding creativity across the curriculum to support the specialist school aims. The school provides very good value for money

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards are very high with students making outstanding progress. Students thrive as a result of first rate teaching and their strong desire to learn. Retention rates on courses are excellent, and on completion, the vast majority of students move on to take degree courses. Students are drawn from a number of feeder schools and high quality preparation leads to students feeling very well equipped for sixth form study. Induction arrangements on course entry are excellent. Students enjoy their learning, display a strong desire to learn, take full advantage of a wide range of excellent enrichment opportunities and make many positive contributions to school life. They feel valued and extremely well supported. Relationships with staff are excellent. Leadership and management are extremely effective and the sixth form provides very good value for money. As a consequence the sixth form's reputation in the community is very high.

What the school should do to improve further

- ensure students receive rigorous and consistent guidance on how they can improve the quality of their work
- sharpen the focus of departmental self-evaluation by sharing the exemplary practice of some departments.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards in 2005 tests and examinations in the main school are very high. The majority of learners meet challenging targets. In the 2005 national tests for Year 9 students, over three quarters of students reached the highest levels of Level 7 or above in English, mathematics and science. At GCSE in 2005, all students gained at least five A* to C grades and almost two thirds attained the highest grades. While the majority of students achieve high standards, a small number of mainly Year 10 and Year 11 students fail to achieve their full potential. The school is aware of this and are already taking steps to raise the level of challenge to underperforming students. For this reason, achievement and standards in the main school are judged to be good rather than outstanding. School initiatives have already led to improvements in achievement, for example the achievement of boys in Key Stage 3 now equals that of girls. This is the result of additional challenge and pace in lessons combined with quality support for learning. Most subjects and courses perform well with GCSE music, business studies, German and religious education particular strengths. However, significant numbers of students following GCSE courses in art and design and drama have not performed as well as in other subjects. Achievement and standards in the sixth form are exceptional. Students start their sixth form with marginally above average standards. Recruitment from a number of local non-selective feeder schools results in students starting their courses with a range of backgrounds, skills and experience. Excellent preparation and induction in close collaboration with feeder schools, coupled with highly effective teaching and support for learning, leads to challenging targets in AS, A2 and VCE subjects being consistently met. Several individual students achieve the highest grades across all subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development and well-being of students are outstanding. They respond positively to a wealth of experiences and opportunities in school. Spiritual, moral and social education is underpinned by a comprehensive programme of teaching and lively assemblies in which students play an active role. Their understanding of wider cultural issues is enhanced by an extensive programme of visits and exchanges, reinforced by excellent work in art and design and music. Students demonstrate a generous concern for the welfare of others and an excellent understanding of the importance of safe practices in their exemplary behaviour. Positive attitudes and enthusiasm for work are key factors in ensuring good progress. Attendance is above the national average and

guaranteed by a first rate system to communicate with parents and support students who are experiencing difficulty. The school carries out appropriate risk assessments to ensure safety. Rare incidents of bullying are dealt with rapidly and staff intervene thoughtfully to ensure that individuals appreciate the consequences of their actions. Students pursue healthy lifestyles both in the curriculum and through an excellent range of extra curricular activities featuring team and health related fitness. The school's care and commitment to students' emotional well-being is exceptional. Students develop an exceptional awareness of the skills and qualities required for working life, with a strong range of work experience and involvement in enterprise activity and team working. Students are involved well in the life of the school as shown by their participation in elected school councils, and sixth formers' many initiatives in organising and leading events. They also contribute well to the wider community, for example through helping with a young people's youth drama group in the town.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching across the school is good, and it is outstanding in the sixth form. Teachers form excellent relationships with students. As a result, students' interests and motivation are readily engaged and they work with clear focus and energy in lessons. In the most successful lessons, stimulating and lively activities challenge students to produce their best. Pace of work is rapid and time is very economically used so not a minute is wasted. Questioning is very well focused to induce higher level thinking, and pair and group work enables students to learn from one another. Where teaching is less successful, work could be better matched to individual needs and more proactive use made of assessment information to inform planning. Pace is sometimes slower and activities not as varied or well structured as in the best lessons. There are examples of very good marking which provides useful and constructive feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. However, this is not consistently well developed across all subjects and the school is working well to address this shortcoming.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Curricular provision is outstanding in both the main school and the sixth form. Excellent extra curricular provision and enrichment activities within the mainstream curriculum extend students' learning experiences and nurture their personal and academic development exceptionally well. The extensive international links widen students' intercultural understanding. There is a high level of participation in the clubs and activities that operate every day. The standard curriculum in all years has added depth and breadth to cater for the overall high attainment of students at the school. The arts curriculum has brought an additional dimension to existing provision and inspires

students to push the boundaries of creative thinking. For example, film-making and use of digital media enables students to develop ideas and produce striking visual imagery to express them. Other subjects are beginning to benefit from the arts specialism. There is some excellent collaboration between art and design and English. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported through appropriate curricular adjustments. Provision for students who are gifted and talented is well developed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are excellent throughout the school. Staff show a high level of care and concern for each individual student. Key stage coordinators go the extra mile to ensure that all students are happy, well settled and doing their best at school. Induction programmes for Year 7 students and those joining the sixth form from outside are exceptionally well tailored to their needs. As a result, retention rates for sixth form courses are very high and most students move on to degree courses at university. Child protection and health and safety procedures are robust. Key stage coordinators make excellent use of data to monitor and track the progress of individual students and the academic support and guidance they provide is extensive. In particular, the coordinators have excellent rapport with the students and a very well established system of communication with subject staff to ensure that individuals do not slip through the net. The school is working at establishing consistent academic guidance and support across all subjects. Whilst there is good practice in some areas, not all subjects are equally good at setting clear targets for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The overall quality of leadership and management across the main school is good. The headteacher leads the school with vision and purpose and has ensured many significant improvements to the school such as the impressive development of sporting facilities and the successful designation as a Performing Arts Specialist School. He is ably supported by a highly effective senior management team which fulfils its roles with dedication, and helps to ensure that the school is well placed to continue to improve. The school's overall self-evaluation of its provision is effective, whilst occasionally generous. Middle managers feel they are well supported by the open door philosophy of the senior team. There are some exemplary middle managers, but further work on rigorous departmental self-evaluation, currently at an early stage of development, is needed to raise the quality of all middle managers to that of the best. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The process of regular departmental review with the senior management team is robust and challenges heads of department to review examination results and set targets for further development. Issues from these reviews are naturally fed into the annual school development plan. Leadership

roles are developed in other areas of the school, for example sixth form students acting as mentors to younger students or supporting evening twilight drama sessions for adults with learning difficulties from the local community. Non-teaching staff are provided with good professional development opportunities and supported to develop additional skills and qualifications such as accountancy and training to support students with dyslexia. Governance is good. Governors know the school well and provide good support. They are regularly updated with information and challenge the school to justify its intentions. They are aware that the school does not currently meet the statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship. The school's resources are deployed very efficiently indeed. Parents hold the school in very high esteem and report how quickly their children settle into its supportive environment. Regular parent questionnaires provide the senior management team with valuable information that is assimilated and used to take action to support the school's development. External professional bodies that have regular contact with the school are very enthusiastic about the links that have been developed. Nominated local partner schools appreciate the good management of the Arts College initiative, the reciprocal sharing of expertise, and additional opportunities that the school provides.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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

How well do learners achieve?	2	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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 Students I am writing to thank you all for your courtesy and welcome to Alcester Grammar School during the inspection week in March. We all enjoyed talking to you and looking at a sample of your work. I thought you would all like to know the outcome of the inspection, the judgements we made and what we felt could make your school even better. We particularly noticed the following positive features:

- your parents think you go to an outstanding school and we agree
- you were all very considerate and courteous in lessons and around the school
- you spoke with confidence and clarity about why you liked the school
- the students we spoke to were excellent ambassadors for Alcester Grammar School
- your teachers work very hard for you; they obviously enjoy teaching you and you in turn enjoy learning
- you achieve high standards and work hard
- Mr Blaikie is an outstanding headteacher and he and the staff want the school to get even better
- you are fortunate in the wide range of opportunities that the staff create for you outside school, at home and abroad
- the school prepares you well for life.

To make your school even better we have asked Mr Blaikie and his senior team to:

- make sure that you receive consistent guidance on how you can improve your work
- encourage all subjects to share more widely their good practice.

Yours faithfully Clive Kempton HMI Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools Alexandra House 33 Kingsway London WC2B 6SE T 0207 421 6800 F 0207 421 6707 www.ofsted.gov.uk