



# Plantsbrook School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 103527  
**Local Authority** Birmingham  
**Inspection number** 285377  
**Inspection dates** 20–21 September 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Davinder Dosanjh 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>	Comprehensive	<b>School address</b>	Upper Holland Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Sutton Coldfield
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		B72 1RB
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 3627310
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1334	<b>Fax number</b>	0121 3217311
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	251		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	David Griffiths
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Tracy Campbell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 February 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	20–21 September 2006	285377

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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

Plantsbrook is a large comprehensive school. It very popular 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 April 2006. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. Eligibility for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. The school has a resource base for 22 students with visual impairment.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Plantsbrook is a good and improving school. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. Students appreciate the school and view it as a happy and encouraging place in which to learn. It is a caring school valuing the 'whole person'. Students are enthusiastic about the good opportunities provided for them to contribute actively to their school and the wider community. Parents are very supportive of the school and comment that 'the staff are always there to help'. Attendance is outstanding. Behaviour is good; students are well mannered and have good attitudes to learning. Spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural education is outstanding. Plantsbrook is an inclusive school with excellent provision for students with visual impairment. Achievement is good and standards are now generally above average. In 2006 the school made significant improvements at Key Stages 3 and 4 and achieved its best ever results at GCSE. The proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose significantly to 72%, an increase of 19% from 2005. The school's considerable efforts to improve achievement have been very successful. These have included booster days, success seminars and Saturday and Easter revision sessions. Excellent use is made of data to monitor student performance and target students for support. Achievement coordinators for each school year oversee a broad range of arrangements for academic development and pastoral guidance. As a result of the success at Key Stage 4, at least 70% of students in last year's Year 11 have stayed on into the sixth form. Teaching is good overall. Lessons are well prepared and encourage student contribution and students are able to assess their own learning. In less effective lessons teaching is not sufficiently challenging for the most able students. The school's technology and music status has had an impact in raising standards of attainment and is producing many benefits in the curriculum and improved links with the wider community. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively in the curriculum to support teaching and learning. The headteacher is very effective and has set a clear direction to further improve achievements and is very well supported by senior managers. The senior leadership team has a good understanding of the strengths of the school and what needs to be done to improve further. The headteacher gives a high priority to improving teaching and learning, undertaking detailed observations of teaching and learning of all staff. Staff morale is high and they support each other well by sharing good practice. The effectiveness of middle management is variable with some excellent monitoring and evaluation of performance but there is some weaker practice as well. The school recognises this in its selfevaluation document and has recently started a training programme for middle managers. The school has a good capacity to improve as indicated by the significant improvements in achievement and standards made in 2006.

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

### **Grade: 3**

The effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form are satisfactory. The quality of guidance and support is good and very much valued by students. They take on a wide

range of responsibilities, organising charity events and acting as 'study buddies', supporting younger students in their learning. Students receive good advice and preparation for higher education. The sixth form is part of a consortium enabling students to access a wide range of courses, but very few students do so. Standards reached by students are broadly average. A minority of students are not making the progress expected of them based on their GCSE results. Teaching is satisfactory but varies in quality. Some lessons do not provide sufficient opportunities for independent learning. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The new achievement coordinator has a clear vision for the direction of the sixth form and has made some key changes in a short time. He has put in place a range of new strategies which have yet to impact fully on achievements. Post-16 teaching and learning reviews are rigorous with a clear focus on improvement.

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

- Improve the achievement of students in advanced level courses in the sixth form so they all make the progress expected of them.
- Ensure that the effectiveness of middle managers is more consistent.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

Achievement is good and standards are now generally above average. Students enter the school with attainment that is close to the national average and they are now making good progress by the end of Year 11. Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 have shown significant improvements in 2006. The school has been very successful in implementing a range of intervention strategies from success seminars to revision days. All core subjects at Key Stage 3 showed good improvement from 2005, particularly in English and mathematics. Standards are now above average and improving at Key Stage 3. The proportion of students achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE rose significantly from 53% in 2005 to 72% in 2006. This represents the school's best ever results. The number of students gaining A\* to C grades in English and mathematics have continued to improve. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make similar progress to other students. The school's post-16 results represent satisfactory progress overall. Pass rates for GCE AS/A level and vocational courses are generally around the national average. Higher grades showed some improvement in 2006. There is significant variation in the attainment between different subjects. Students generally achieve the grades expected, based on GCSE results, but a minority do not. The school undertakes rigorous monitoring of performance using a range of data and reviews targets on a regular basis. This has contributed to the significant improvement in examination results in 2006.

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

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 2**

Personal development and well-being are good. Students work well, behave responsibly and are enthusiastic about the good opportunities provided for them to contribute actively to their school and the wider community. Through the school council and tutor groups they are able to act and reflect upon their rights and responsibilities so that they become genuinely committed to the school's ethos, which is to do the best for themselves and for others. Year 10 students act as mentors to Years 7 and 8 students. Very substantial sums are raised for charity. These examples show the public face of a set of attitudes shared across the school, that people should be cooperative and concerned for each other as a matter of course. Spiritual, moral, social, emotional and cultural education is outstanding. Assemblies and tutor periods encourage reflection on questions of belief and principle. Through the strands of emotional and cultural education students are enabled to be thoughtful about their own behaviour and that of others, and to celebrate cultural diversity. Imaginative projects such as One World Week and Black History Month are both intellectually challenging and popular, taking students out into the wider community and gaining them acknowledgement and admiration. Students eat healthily within school and understand the importance of diet and exercise. They participate in sporting and other activities in substantial numbers, develop skills which stand them in good stead for future careers, and clearly enjoy their education. The inspection confirmed the school's view that there is more to do in developing students' health awareness, and their capacity to work as active and independent learners. Students generally feel safe and secure at Plantsbrook. Students are deeply appreciative of the efforts teachers make on their behalf. Many remarks made to inspectors showed this unambiguously. 'All the teachers encourage us to be the best we can be. If they didn't they wouldn't be here.'

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Teaching and learning are good overall and satisfactory in the sixth form. Students value the good teaching that they receive and the help that they get from teachers. They are well prepared for examinations and this resulted in impressive improvements in GCSE results in 2006. Collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants is good so students with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. Effective monitoring of teaching and learning has led to significant improvements in students' progress. Teachers enjoy good professional development opportunities. The school identifies areas where teaching and learning still need to be improved. The technology college status has resulted in ICT being well used, both in the presentation of lessons and as a tool for independent learning. Well planned teaching encourages positive

behaviour, although in some lessons students are too dependent. Weaker teaching is not sufficiently challenging, especially for older and more able students. The best lessons require students to make a positive contribution and to develop social skills. Teachers use assessment well, including students' self-assessment, and the school has worked hard to develop this aspect of teaching and learning. Good teaching prepares students to assess their own learning accurately so they accept that agreed targets are achievable. Students benefit from half-termly personal targets and from the 'Student in Focus' systems that monitor their learning.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

The curriculum for the main school and the sixth form is good and is kept under regular review. It is flexible and as a result the needs of the individual student are clearly identified. Specialist status has had a very positive impact on the range and depth of courses offered; all students study design and technology, ICT and a modern foreign language. Work related education is strong and there are many links with local companies. The recent addition of the music specialist status reflects the very strong extra-curricular provision of a full orchestra, several bands and the introduction of AS level music technology. There is an adequate number of vocational courses in the main school, notably in ICT, business French, hospitality, engineering and the ASDAN youth award. A small number of students follow an individual curriculum, 'Learning through work' at the local college. Gifted and talented students have good opportunities to learn a second modern foreign language, to study GCSE statistics and AS and A level chemistry and biology. There is a wide variety of extra-curricular activities including the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, numerous educational and residential visits in Britain and abroad and a wide range of lunch time and after school clubs. Subject enrichment lessons enjoy a high participation rate and contribute well to the improving level of achievement. Students in the sixth form are offered a wide range of courses through the local consortium arrangements but only a very limited number of students take up this option. Breadth is developed through general studies and critical thinking. Recently the curriculum was revised to provide more time for study support. There are few vocational options in the sixth form.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. Achievement coordinators for each school year oversee a broad range of arrangements for academic development and pastoral guidance. These contributed significantly to the improvement in examination results in 2006. Achievement is interpreted more broadly than examination success alone, so that tutors seek to create an environment which supports students emotionally as well as academically. Tutors follow students throughout their school careers so that individuals are known personally and well. The needs of vulnerable students are

attended to sensitively and well through practical arrangements. Some aspects of care and support are outstanding. For instance, the support for visually impaired students enables them to make progress equal to or better than their peers. The arrangements in place to support the transition of Year 6 pupils into the school are excellent. Plantsbrook students contribute themselves to the programme, an indication of how responsibilities for care are seen as involving all in the school community. Guidance on option choices and careers is good and appreciated by both students and their parents. The quality of care and guidance has led to good achievement. Robust systems are in place to track students' progress so that they can fulfil their potential.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The leadership and management of this school are good, raise achievement and support students well. The headteacher is highly skilled and she provides a clear vision for the school. The senior team manages the school effectively, leading by example and using resources efficiently. Together, members of the team drive the school along as they constantly seek to bring about improvements. They have a secure knowledge and understanding of the strengths of the school and a genuine awareness of what needs to be developed, although the school's self-evaluation document was at times overgenerous in its grading. Equally, the well established governing body ensures that the leadership team fulfils its role, whilst it both challenges and supports the school. Together they ensure that the procedures for keeping all the students safe within the school meet current government requirements. Subject leaders play a significant role in monitoring provision within their own curriculum areas, although the quality of subject management varies. Achievement coordinators work highly effectively with students and their parents, ensuring that achievement is not seen in narrow, academic terms but also in terms of personal fulfilment. All members of the school community are fully involved in accurately evaluating performance and in devising ways forward. The use of data about student performance has significantly improved since the time of the last inspection and all staff are positive about its use to set challenging targets. The performance management system is well designed and successfully linked to the professional development of individual staff and the whole-school improvement process. Creative use is made of ICT to support the school's management and to improve whole-school communication. The impact of the school's specialist status in music and technology can be seen in the enhanced curriculum. The local community, particularly the local primary schools, have benefited greatly both in terms of resources and support.



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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>	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	2	

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	3
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2	2
<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 to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
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	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

- Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. You were mature and sensible and gave us an enthusiastic account of school life. Many of you were keen to tell us how much you enjoy school. We were all impressed by your attendance, behaviour and positive attitudes to learning. You are right to be proud of your school. Plantsbrook is a good and improving school. Some aspects of its work are outstanding. The following are our main findings.
- You are making good progress in your work. The 2006 results in national tests at the end of Year 9 were the best ever and well above average. The improvement in the proportion of students achieving five good GCSE passes was very good. We have asked your school to help you achieve as well in the sixth form as you do in the rest of the school.
- You greatly appreciate the help that you receive from teachers. It is clear that the best lessons challenge students to think and the less effective lessons encourage a more passive attitude.
- The school is working hard to continue improvements in the quality of teaching and to set targets which will help every one of you make the best possible progress. It is up to you to respond by trying to beat those targets.
- The school's technology and music status is benefiting you in many ways. The curriculum offers you the opportunity to follow a range of courses. There is a wide range of lunch time and after school clubs that many of you attend.
- The proportion staying on into the sixth form is high. Your school genuinely values all students and listens to your views. Staff provide high levels of care, support and guidance. Your parents speak highly of the help you get. You make good contributions to the life of the school in so many ways. The headteacher and her senior managers make a good team. We have asked them to ensure all managers are equally effective. The managers, teachers, staff and governors are very committed to their work and know where they can make further improvements. We encourage you to continue to support the school and to play your part in making it even better.