



Alderbrook School and Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 104110
LEA Solihull
Inspection number 286858
Inspection dates 14 June 2006 to 15 June 2006
Reporting inspector Cathy Morgan HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive	School address	Blossomfield Road
School category	Community		Solihull
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		West Midlands B91 1SN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0121 7042146
Number on roll	1264	Fax number	0121 7114123
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs A Scott
Date of previous inspection	3 February 2003	Headteacher	Mr William Sedgwick

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	14 June 2006 - 15 June 2006	286858

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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

Alderbrook School and Arts College is a large, popular mixed community secondary school. Whilst the percentage of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average, the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational need is above the national average. This is due to the additional provision for pupils with moderate learning and speech and language difficulties. The school is recognised as a centre of excellence in the visual and performing arts and has an extensive outreach arts programme. The school has received a number of national good practice awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and improving school, although it believes itself to be outstanding. The effective management and strong leadership teams are well supported by the governing body. The school has a number of distinct features, including its specialist arts status, which have a direct and beneficial impact on staff, pupils and on the links with partner schools, the local authority and the wider community. The school is working continuously to improve standards still further and raise achievement for all pupils. GCSE examination results are high and have risen significantly since the time of the last inspection. Pupils benefit greatly from good and some outstanding teaching. Pupils' progress in relation to their prior attainment is generally good. The school recognises that some higher attaining pupils do not always make the progress expected of them, particularly in the lower school, and has implemented well designed strategies to improve this. The school provides a safe and secure environment for its pupils and has the full confidence of parents. There is a strong ethos of care throughout the school and, as a result, pupils' personal development is good. There is no doubting the determination of staff to provide the best opportunities for all pupils. Links with other partners are very strong and help to improve provision, especially for the more vulnerable pupils. Whilst good use is made of the views of pupils and external consultants in evaluating the strengths and future developmental needs of the school, managers have overestimated the quality of provision in some areas. Not all of the good practices identified are consistently and rigorously applied across the school.

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The school provides a safe and secure environment for its pupils and has the full confidence of parents. There is a strong ethos of care throughout the school and, as a result, pupils' personal development is good. There is no doubting the determination of staff to provide the best opportunities for all pupils. Links with other partners are very strong and help to improve provision, especially for the more vulnerable pupils.

Whilst good use is made of the views of pupils and external consultants in evaluating the strengths and future developmental needs of the school, managers have overestimated the quality of provision in some areas. Not all of the good practices identified are consistently and rigorously applied across the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the processes of school self-evaluation to facilitate a more accurate judgement of areas of strength and weakness.
- Further extend the sharing of good practice in the school to improve the progress of pupils, particularly by the end of Year 9.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The majority of pupils enter the school with standards that are above the national average and they make good progress by the time they leave. Standards are consistently high in the examinations taken by pupils at ages 14 and 16. Approximately one third of pupils taking national tests in 2005 at the end of Year 9 achieved Level 7 or higher in mathematics.

GCSE results have risen significantly since the time of the previous inspection. Seventy-eight per cent of pupils attained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2005. The school is particularly effective at identifying older pupils who are at risk of underachievement. The extensive range of additional support provided for these pupils has a positive impact on achievement, and in recent years has led to significant improvement in the performance of boys. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress overall, particularly in the lower school.

The school recognises that although standards are high, the most able pupils do not always achieve as well as they should. The school has rightly extended intervention and support systems across the school and is working hard to ensure that all pupils meet challenging targets and reach expected levels, particularly in music and in English at the end of Year 9.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. Pupils are friendly, relaxed and very helpful to staff and to visitors.

Pupils feel valued and listened to. Bullying is rare and any incident is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils respond well to the school's expectation that they make good decisions and take responsibility for their own actions. They contribute positively to effective year group and school councils. Innovative focus groups enable a wide range of pupils to be actively involved in discussions about key issues that affect their lives, such as healthy food options and improving the security of the school site.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They enjoy an impressive range of clubs, visits and activities, through which they learn about and participate in a variety of cultural experiences. They make a positive contribution through fundraising and community initiatives such as a 'Wednesday Club' for senior citizens.

Behaviour is generally good. The introduction of a new initiative known as Building Learning Power (BLP) is helping pupils and staff to focus on developing strategies for successfully working and learning with one another.

Attendance rates are at the national average and the school is working hard with families to emphasise the benefits of regular attendance.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good rather than outstanding as judged by the school.

In the most effective lessons, teachers and pupils work closely together on challenging tasks which have been well planned to meet the learning needs of individuals. Pupils make good progress in these lessons and enjoy being actively involved. The school's Arts College status is well reflected in the level of outstanding teaching and learning observed in dance, drama and art lessons during the inspection. In one outstanding lesson, Year 7 boys developed high level skills and made excellent progress in dance. They benefited greatly from the constant feedback and encouragement they received and the expertise of their teacher and a visiting professional dancer.

Pupils receive good guidance on how to improve their work but younger pupils are not always aware of the targets they are working towards. Pupils with moderate learning and speech and language difficulties receive excellent support from teachers and teaching assistants and they make good progress in lessons. The BLP programme, although in its early stages of development, is helping pupils to focus on ways to become more effective and independent learners.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

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although in its early stages of development, is helping pupils to focus on ways to become more effective and independent learners.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Pupils are happy. They know that adults and other pupils care about their physical and emotional well-being and that by discussing any difficulties, action will be swift and effective. Excellent induction arrangements and close links with primary schools ensure that pupils' transition into Year 7 is very positive.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are very well supported by highly effective specialist teaching assistants. Pupils' personal and academic progress is guided by clear targets, which help them to achieve. These targets, however, do not always reflect high enough expectations of some of the younger pupils who are capable of making more rapid progress.

Pupils benefit from personal and social education and curriculum focus days, which ensure they are well informed on matters of health and safety awareness, drugs and sex education, as well as how to be good citizens. There are outstanding links with external services and agencies, which secure the well-being of the pupils. Pupils' safety is ensured through rigorous health and safety and child protection procedures. Pupils in Year 9 receive good guidance in a variety of ways to help them choose the subjects they study in Years 10 and 11. Good careers advice from Year 9 onward is supplemented by valuable work experience in Years 10.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's passionate commitment and clear vision are focused on providing the best possible education for pupils.

The leadership team is strong, has a good range of complementary skills and is instrumental in creating an aspirational culture within the school. This team provides a clear direction for staff and effectively shares expertise internally and with external partners. This is clearly demonstrated by the commitment of managers to the training of new and experienced teachers and the implementation of the BLP programme, which they believe has the potential to improve pupils' learning and behaviour.

Relationships between staff are positive and there is a strong emphasis on teamwork. Performance management is effectively embedded into the school and faculty planning and review processes. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good and through the strategic appointment of key managers, the school has the capacity to improve further.

Heads of department and heads of faculty monitor the effectiveness of their teams, but there is some variation in the rigour of this process. Plans for improvement are prioritised well and are accurately costed. The school's judgments about the quality

of some aspects of its work are too generous and not all weaknesses are clearly identified in their self-evaluation report.

Parents and governors provide strong support for the school. The school has rightly identified the need to widen opportunities to seek the opinions of parents and act on their responses. Governors are committed and well informed and hold the school to account. They are fully involved in managing the school's budget and ensuring that the school provides good value for money.

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

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

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	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

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

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. You were mature and sensible in the way that you spoke with each of us and we really enjoyed talking to you. Many of you were keen to tell us how much you enjoy school and how you are improving the way you learn through the Building Learning Power programme. Your parents believe that your school is successful. They particularly value the extra help that many of you receive from your dedicated teachers when you are preparing for your examinations.

Alderbrook is a good and improving school. We were impressed by your thoughtful behaviour and your positive relationships with one another and with your teachers. Your opinions are valued and you have helped to make some important changes through your year group and school councils and the focus groups that many of you have been involved with.

Your teachers work hard to ensure that you make good progress by the time you take your GCSE examinations; the results have really improved since the last time your school was inspected. We have asked your school to help you to improve the progress you make in the lower school, particularly those of you who achieved well in the tests you took at the end of Key Stage 2.

You all receive good care and guidance. You said that you feel that the school is a safe place to be and that you have many opportunities to become involved in a wide range of enrichment activities, school productions and visits.

The headteacher and his senior managers make a good team. We have asked them to continue to identify where things are working well and where they can make improvements. The managers, teachers, governors and staff are highly committed to their work and know that your school has the potential to do even better. We wish you every success in the future.