

Aldersley High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104404
Inspection number	301290
Inspection dates	9–10 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Rob Huddleday HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	720
6th form	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jim Inglins
Headteacher	Timothy Edward Perry
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	Barnhurst Lane Codsall Wolverhampton WV8 1RT
Telephone number	01902 556868
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school draws its students from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures. Several of the areas it serves are socially disadvantaged and the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is above average. Around 60% of the students are White British and the remainder are largely of Caribbean, Indian or Pakistani heritage. The proportion of students with learning difficulties or disabilities is below average. However, there are more with a statement of special educational needs than is usual because the school has a resource base for students with language and communication difficulties. Sixth form education is provided within a consortium of local schools. National tests taken in the primary schools indicate that attainment on entry to Year 7 is broadly average.

The school gained specialist status for technology several years ago. The headteacher joined the school in January 2006.

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 performs satisfactorily but is at a transitional stage. Achievement and standards are satisfactory and the school has been successful at raising the proportion of pupils gaining the equivalent of five GCSE grades at A* to C. However, many of these pupils have not gained good passes in English and mathematics. In addition, a minority of other pupils who were not expected to pass many exams at grade C or above have underachieved. The school has been beset by staffing difficulties in the past, which largely explains the varying trends in attainment and achievement in different subjects and the muted impact of the school's specialist technology college status. All subjects are now on a more even keel and standards across the board are set to improve this year.

Teaching is satisfactory and there is much that is good or outstanding. A significant minority of teachers, however, use a narrow range of styles of learning based mainly on instructing students rather than developing understanding and enthusiasm. The school is keen to improve practice and the new headteacher talks appropriately of moving from an 'attainment culture' to a 'culture of learning'. The staff are supportive but have not all identified how they need to change the way they operate. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher is leading effectively and ensuring that everyone understands why change is required. Rigorous audits of subjects are identifying precisely what is needed and issues are clearly prioritised in the school's improvement plan. The school has demonstrated that it has a satisfactory capacity to improve but it has weaknesses in the way it uses assessment as a management tool to identify emerging trends and define a clear response.

The pupils behave well and their personal development and well-being are good. Relationships between different ethnic groups are good and the pupils' conduct is sometimes exemplary. The atmosphere in the dining room, for example, is exceptionally calm and inviting. Attitudes to learning are positive but the pupils are accustomed to be passive rather than enthusiastic participants in many lessons. Their true potential is seen in the school's annual talent show, organised by the performing arts department, and in lessons that recognise their individuality. Students in the resource base and others with learning difficulties or at the early stages of speaking English, for example, are well served and often make good progress because of closely targeted support.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Provision in the sixth form is broadly satisfactory. Students generally achieve as expected but girls do better than boys and lower attaining students do not achieve as well as others. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities receive very good support and achieve notably well. Students' personal development is satisfactory, but significantly better in Year 13 than in Year 12. Many students feel they were not prepared well for the challenges of sixth form work, but have settled in Year 13 because support and guidance have been more effective. This issue was raised in the last inspection and has not been tackled effectively. Teaching and learning are good, with some outstanding lessons seen, but staffing inadequacies in the recent past have

hindered achievement in some subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT). The curriculum is satisfactory, but the wide range of advanced level vocational and academic courses is not supplemented by lower level courses which would match several students' abilities on entry better. The potential of the consortium in this respect is untapped. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is satisfactory but development has been hindered by the heavy teaching commitments of the post holders.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop provision in the sixth form to meet academic and pastoral needs better, especially in Year 12.
- Raise achievement at all key stages by placing more emphasis on monitoring and targeting the students' progress at all levels of attainment, especially in English and mathematics.
- Improve satisfactory teaching to good by ensuring that teachers develop a broader range of teaching and learning styles to foster the students' confidence, independence and enjoyment in learning.
- Sharpen the analysis of pastoral and academic data to give a clearer overview of the impact of initiatives.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Achievement and standards are satisfactory but have fluctuated widely. The school's results were markedly higher in 2005 than in the preceding years but this performance was not sustained in 2006. In both years, strengths in some areas were offset by weaknesses in others and this continues to be the case. The proportion of students on track to gain five passes at grades A* to C in 2007, for example, is average and continues a strong upward trend. Standards in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4, however, have been low in recent years and remain below average despite rising this year. At Key Stage 3, standards remain below average and dipped considerably in 2006 in mathematics and science but rose in English.

The students' achievement, measured by the progress they make from Year 7 to Year 11, has also varied in a similar fashion. It was average in 2004 and 2006 but above average in 2005. Rates of progress in English and mathematics have risen and fallen alternately. Higher-attaining students have tended to make more progress than students in the middle groups. Students with learning difficulties or speaking English as an additional language have made good progress. Broadly speaking, the students have made better progress at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3, where the school has identified that there is a degree of underachievement which has worsened since 2004. In 2006, for instance, White British students in Year 9 appeared to have made significantly less progress since Year 7 than nearly every other ethnic group. However, the picture is complicated by the insecurity of the data caused by a significant minority of high-attaining students taking the national tests a year early.

In the sixth form, achievement is broadly satisfactory. Attainment is below average but overall value added data for Years 12 and 13 show that progress is satisfactory. Numbers are too small to draw safe conclusions about achievement on most individual programmes, but none stand out as above average and several are below average.

Staffing difficulties, which have often been at the root of the variations in achievement at all key stages, are largely resolved. Consequently, the quality of learning is more consistent for

most students, enabling them to make satisfactory or better progress in the current academic year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The personal development and well-being of the students are good in the main school but satisfactory in the sixth form. The great majority of students behave very well in lessons. Parents say that their children enjoy being here and that is supported by what the students themselves say. However, students often lack a degree of self-motivation unless experiencing inspirational teaching. Moral, social and cultural development is good but the spiritual dimension is underemphasised. Students move around the school quietly and there is a notably calm ethos. They say that they feel safe, and that with the help of staff they found their introduction to secondary education pleasant. Permanent exclusions are very rare as the school works hard to keep its students. The number of temporary exclusions is not excessive but the school is keen to reduce it. Attendance has been above average in past years but is currently in line with national figures.

Members of the well established school council are proud of their input. They have made significant contributions to the introduction of healthy and well presented school meals and readily available drinking water. These are appreciated by all ages because health messages have been reinforced in lessons. Students' readiness for adult roles is fostered satisfactorily through work experience, options and careers advice, and increasing opportunities to work collaboratively. The youngest students do a good job helping the office when acting as reception assistants, and students are involved in raising funds for charity, and a range of community activities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, although it varies across the school from outstanding to a small but significant amount that is inadequate. The significant feature of the good and better teaching seen was the high involvement of students in their lessons. Activities were well matched to the students' interests and levels of understanding so they were motivated to tackle tasks enthusiastically. Questioning challenged students to think for themselves and not to rely on the teacher to tell them the answer. Where teaching was satisfactory it was competent but generally uninspiring. Students undertook the tasks set and were content to follow the teacher's instructions. However they were not encouraged to explore new ideas for themselves or to share ideas with each other. Teaching in the sixth form is now good overall as it tends to be undertaken by the school's most experienced staff. Some excellent lessons were seen in which students engaged at a high level with challenging concepts. Teaching in withdrawal sessions for students at the early stages of learning English and for those with learning difficulties is consistently good, as is the support provided in lessons.

Ongoing assessment of students' progress is developing well. There is some excellent practice in the humanities department that clearly feeds back to students how well they are doing on a regular basis and informs lesson planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Strengths include the range of vocational subjects for Years 10 and 11 and improvements since the last inspection in personal, health and social education (PHSE), citizenship and partnerships with feeder primary schools. Initiatives such as the 'mini-school', which eases the transition from primary school for one Year 7 group, and the 'shortened programme', which enables early entry to tests and examinations for the most able students, are potentially beneficial but have yet to be evaluated fully. Provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including speech and language difficulties, is good, as is support for students with English as an additional language. In some subjects, the school recognises that the choice of courses, for instance in science and design and technology (DT), has not always been successful. Staffing issues have created difficulties in curriculum provision, particularly in ICT, but this is now resolved. Statutory requirements to teach the locally agreed syllabus in religious education at Key Stage 4 and to provide for the subject in the sixth form are only partially met. Extra-curricular provision is good in sports and the performing arts, with high rates of enthusiastic participation in the much enjoyed annual talent contest. The impact of the school's specialist status is reflected satisfactorily within mathematics, science, technology and ICT but is lacking across the wider curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The appropriate arrangements for child protection and safety are in place. The school ensures that all vulnerable students, often identified through liaison with the feeder primary schools and other agencies, are given the support they need to succeed. Measures are in place to provide students who have short-term behavioural difficulties with constructive options beyond the classroom. Students agree that the amount of what they call bullying is small and any incident is rapidly and effectively dealt with. The school has conducted surveys of staff and students and has generally responded effectively to their findings. Teachers pay due attention to health and safety in lessons, and the premises are well maintained.

Teachers' assessments are carefully recorded to enable the school to know whether each student is on track to meet challenging targets based on prior attainment and the teachers' knowledge of them as individuals. The information is held electronically and is available to all staff. In the strongest departments, such as humanities, the data are used well in conjunction with lesson-by-lesson evaluation of what the students need to do to make good progress. In some other departments, the use of assessment is less developed. A survey of staff across the post-16 consortium identified difficulties with keeping each other informed about the progress of sixth formers who are taught away from their own school. The consortium has subsequently undertaken training on this issue.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear vision for the course the school needs to follow if it is to build on the successes of the past few years. He has carried staff with him by listening carefully and adopting a staged approach to change. The senior team is cohesive and effective. Responsibilities are clearly defined and the line management of departments is transparent. A few of the senior team have too many roles and the resulting time constraints have led to some loss of pace in effecting change. The headteacher has prioritised areas for review and these audits have been thorough and rigorous. Issues have been fed directly into the comprehensive and ambitious improvement plan and there is a robust mechanism for monitoring and evaluating progress.

The school is in a transitional period and is implementing new arrangements which have not had time to make an impact. However, the management of data at a strategic level is not wholly in place and this leaves the school exposed and unable to react quickly to any emerging issues. The school is working on ways to improve the efficiency of its systems but the analysis of performance by different groups of students, for instance, currently lacks sharpness. Information is available but not in a succinct or manageable format to aid the senior team or governing body in interpreting trends. Heads of department of the major subjects are new to their roles and the regular and systematic monitoring of teaching and standards to ensure consistency is only just beginning to develop appropriately. The governing body has continued to work hard on behalf of the school and its overview of financial matters, for example, is good. It has not devoted as much energy to scrutinising and understanding data about achievement.

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Annex A

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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards ¹ 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	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
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	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Students

Inspection of Aldersley High School, Wolverhampton WV8 1RT

Thank you for contributing to our knowledge of the school by discussing with inspectors what you consider works well and what you would like to see improved. We judged the school to be satisfactory and here is a summary of our findings.

- The main strengths.
- You behave well and the school is a calm place to learn.
- Students with learning difficulties are well supported and make good progress.
- The proportion of students gaining five or more good grades at GCSE or equivalent level continues to improve and is in line with most other schools.
- Most lessons are satisfactory or better and there is much good teaching.
- The humanities department is particularly good at knowing your strengths and weaknesses and using this information to help you learn effectively.
- The headteacher and senior staff have a clear view of how they want to make the school even more successful and are carefully making detailed plans.
- The main areas for development.
- Students in Year 12 do not feel well prepared for the type of work they have to do in the sixth form. We have asked the school to look at the courses it provides and to improve the support it gives to sixth formers.
- Students in the middle sets do not achieve as well as they might, especially in English and mathematics. We have asked the school to check on your progress more carefully so that extra support can be provided in good time.
- We would like to see all your lessons being of the same quality as some of the best work we saw. You enjoy lessons in which you can participate actively and we agree that there is scope for more teachers to plan work of this nature.
- Data are not always used well to give the senior team and governors clear messages about strengths and weaknesses across the school.

I wish you well and trust that you will continue to be such good ambassadors of your school.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday Her Majesty's Inspector