

Aston Manor School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103508
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308342
Inspection date	16 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Gwendoline Coates HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	737
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ray Linforth
Headteacher	Heather Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	21 February 2005
School address	Phillips Street Aston Birmingham B6 4PZ
Telephone number	01213 598108
Fax number	01213 805 648

Age group	11-16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- The extent to which students with broadly average to above average attainment are sufficiently challenged.
- The quality of teaching and learning and in particular the assessment of students' learning in lessons.
- The effectiveness of systems to set appropriately challenging targets for students and monitor their progress.
- The quality of middle leaders.

Evidence was gathered from the school's data, observations of lessons, meetings and discussions with groups of students from all year groups, and meetings with curriculum and pastoral middle managers and the senior leadership team. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Aston Manor School, a specialist technology college, is a smaller than average school. It is a truly multicultural school whose largest groups of students are, in order: Bangladeshi (24%), Black Caribbean (22%), Pakistani (13%), Black (9%), and White British (8%). A very high proportion of its students do not speak English as their first language, and many have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A very high proportion of the students are eligible for free school meals and the majority live in areas of relatively low socio-economic status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Aston Manor School is a good school with some outstanding features. The headteacher and her staff have established a culture where high expectations and a fully inclusive ethos are the norm and where the school's motto, 'All different, all equal, all achieving', accurately reflects what the school is about.

Students' achievement is good overall, and often outstanding. Their standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are low, and although key aspects such as language difficulties hold back their progress in Key Stage 3, the school's data for 2007 show a considerable improvement in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. As a result of good teaching and learning and excellent care, guidance and support, students' progress picks up speed as they progress through the school. They make outstanding progress in Key Stage 4 and leave Year 11 with broadly average results at GCSE. In 2007, 56% of the students left school with five or more GCSEs at grade A* to C and all students left school with at least one pass at GCSE. All groups of students make at least good progress and many, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language, make outstanding progress.

Students really enjoy school, and this was confirmed in every one of the inspection questionnaires returned by parents. They rate their lessons highly and have excellent relationships with their teachers. One parent commented, 'My son would like to be in school every day of the year, he likes it so much.' Behaviour in lessons, around the school and on entering and leaving the school is exemplary. One parent observed that they were 'impressed with the way students conduct themselves out of school'.

Students' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is outstanding. In this multicultural school, they show mutual respect, demonstrate excellent awareness of each other's cultures and have a very clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Older students have the opportunity to become prefects, and students from each year have nominated representatives on the school council. Students have a good understanding of how important it is to adopt a healthy lifestyle and all ages rate the meals provided at lunchtime very highly. All students are involved in regular physical activity as part of the mainstream curriculum and many join in after-school and weekend sporting activities.

Joining the school can feel 'nerve-racking', according to one Year 7 student, but excellent care, guidance and support from day one mean that new students soon feel secure. Students' very good attitudes to learning and good attendance and punctuality are monitored in every lesson, every day, and this information is shared daily with parents via the students' planner. Even at the end of the day, teachers are in evidence in the streets around the school, ensuring that students keep very safe and remain orderly as they walk home. Parents suggest that the headteacher and staff are always available to help them with concerns and issues they have about their children. Safeguarding procedures are robust and any students at risk are quickly identified. Students say that they are not aware of any bullying or racism in the school and all are very confident about who to contact if it did occur. Students are very loyal to the school and recognise that in many respects it provides a haven of calm and safety in their often difficult lives, as well as a place full of opportunities to fulfil high aspirations. One student said that Aston Manor is 'a little community that I like belonging to'.

Students contribute to the local community by getting involved in fund raising activities for various charities, including supporting a school in the Cameroon. The development of their workplace skills is good and this is helped by the very good support they get in developing their literacy and numeracy skills, and in the high expectations about their behaviour, attendance and punctuality. Students are confident, helpful and pleasant individuals. Past and present students have achieved excellent academic and sporting success and they provide strong role models for younger students, in terms of their dedication and hard work.

Teachers have good subject knowledge. They set high aspirations for students and there is a good focus in lessons on how to improve to meet individual targets or to achieve the next level in their work. Lessons usually have good pace, and teachers use differentiated activities and questioning that challenge and stretch students of all abilities. However, in some cases learning activities and the challenge of the work are the same for all. This can mean that some pupils, and particularly those of higher ability, are not pushed as much as they could be. The best lessons make use of a range of strategies, such as effective questioning and peer assessment, to assess students' understanding, but this is not yet a consistent feature of all lessons.

Students are given clear information about their target grades, the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Pastoral and academic monitoring and tracking systems are being continually improved in order to ensure that underachievement is quickly spotted and support provided, whether in regular one-to-one sessions with teachers and mentors or in the many revision and booster classes.

Specialist school status has enhanced the curriculum and all subjects now benefit from the provision and use of a range of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, as recommended in the previous inspection report. A good range of courses is offered in Years 10 and 11, including vocational options for students of all abilities. There are out-of-school activities to suit the interests and needs of all students and the take-up is good. 'My child is always doing something after school or on Saturday', commented one parent. The range of sporting activities is particularly good. The school is working hard to improve some areas of the curriculum, such as the provision for enterprise education. Provision is still constrained by the buildings and the physical space available to the school. Despite this, the curriculum gives students good opportunities for their personal development and aims effectively to broaden their experiences and challenge preconceptions about what they can achieve, whether in terms of their academic study, sporting opportunities, the Challenge Days that involve rock climbing and enterprise activities, the Year 11 revision residential or the school prom.

The excellent leadership provided by the headteacher is complemented by that of her dedicated and committed deputy. Together with the rest of the senior management team, they form a highly effective leadership group that has a thorough and incisive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, which results in highly effective improvement planning. They provide very good direction that is absolutely focused on using challenging targets to raise students' achievement and the standards they attain.

Middle leaders are committed to providing every opportunity for students to do well. However, while strong leadership and clear vision, accountability for their area of responsibility and a very good understanding of priorities for improving the attainment of students are clearly demonstrated by some middle leaders, this is not yet consistently good in all subject areas. The senior leadership team recognise this and have recently put in place clear line management systems to provide effective intervention and support. Very good monitoring procedures to support teachers and to ensure the effective tracking of students' progress are also in place.

The school's involvement in teacher training enables it to 'grow its own teachers' and its strong induction and continual professional development programme for new and existing staff contributes to their good teaching skills and the excellent care, guidance and support they provide for students. The school has taken effective steps to promote improvement since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, in lessons, teachers consistently challenge students of all abilities, including the more able, and that ongoing assessment of students' learning is a consistent feature.
- Develop the ability of all middle managers with responsibility for subjects to lead and be accountable for their area of responsibility to a good standard.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, 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
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

17 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Aston Manor School, Birmingham, B6 4PZ

It was a pleasure to meet many of you on the day of the inspection. Yours is a good school with some outstanding features.

Many of you start in Year 7 with quite low levels of attainment, but good teaching and excellent support ensure that you make good and sometimes outstanding progress by the time you leave in Year 11. This year, 56% of Year 11 students achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, which is about the same as the national average.

It was very clear to me that you really enjoy your education at Aston Manor, that you have excellent relationships with staff and with each other and that the school is a place where you feel very safe. All of your teachers are absolutely committed to ensuring you achieve as well as you can, in both academic and sporting areas. However, just occasionally, groups such as more able students could be pushed even further in lessons. The headteacher and the school's senior managers are very good at spotting things that can be improved even further, and have realised that in some subjects even more could be done to support your progress. In spite of this, your school's motto, 'all different, all equal, all achieving,' truly reflects what is going on every day in your school.

To make the school even better, I have asked the headteacher to ensure that:

- in lessons, all of you, including the more able students, are consistently given challenging work and all teachers check your progress and understanding regularly
- the staff who lead subject areas are as skilled as possible in ensuring that you all achieve as well as you possibly can.

You can help your teachers to meet these challenges by continuing to behave really well, by attending regularly and punctually and by working as hard as you possibly can to achieve your targets.

Best wishes to you all.

Gwen Coates Her Majesty's Inspector

Aston Manor School

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Grade: 2

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of calm and safety in their often difficult lives, as well as a place full of opportunities to fulfil high aspirations. One student said that Aston Manor is 'a little community that I like belonging to'.

Students contribute to the local community by getting involved in fund raising activities for various charities, including supporting a school in the Cameroon. The development of their workplace skills is good and this is helped by the very good support they get in developing their literacy and numeracy skills, and in the high expectations about their behaviour, attendance and punctuality. Students are confident, helpful and pleasant individuals. Past and present students have achieved excellent academic and sporting success and they provide strong role models for younger students, in terms of their dedication and hard work.

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Students are given clear information about their target grades, the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve. Pastoral and academic monitoring and tracking systems are being continually improved in order to ensure that underachievement is quickly spotted and support provided, whether in regular one-to-one sessions with teachers and mentors or in the many revision and booster classes.

Specialist school status has enhanced the curriculum and all subjects now benefit from the provision and use of a range of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, as recommended in the previous inspection report. A good range of courses is offered in Years 10 and 11, including vocational options for students of all abilities. There are out-of-school activities to suit the interests and needs of all students and the take-up is good. 'My child is always doing something after school or on Saturday', commented one parent. The range of sporting activities is particularly good. The school is working hard to improve some areas of the curriculum, such as the provision for enterprise education. Provision is still constrained by the buildings and the physical space available to the school. Despite this, the curriculum gives students good opportunities for their personal development and aims effectively to broaden their experiences and challenge preconceptions about what they can achieve, whether in terms of their academic study, sporting opportunities, the Challenge Days that involve rock climbing and enterprise activities, the Year 11 revision residential or the school prom.

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which results in highly effective improvement planning. They provide very good direction that is absolutely focused on using challenging targets to raise students' achievement and the standards they attain.

Middle leaders are committed to providing every opportunity for students to do well. However, while strong leadership and clear vision, accountability for their area of responsibility and a very good understanding of priorities for improving the attainment of students are clearly demonstrated by some middle leaders, this is not yet consistently good in all subject areas. The senior leadership team recognise this and have recently put in place clear line management systems to provide effective intervention and support. Very good monitoring procedures to support teachers and to ensure the effective tracking of students' progress are also in place.

The school's involvement in teacher training enables it to 'grow its own teachers' and its strong induction and continual professional development programme for new and existing staff contributes to their good teaching skills and the excellent care, guidance and support they provide for students. The school has taken effective steps to promote improvement since the last inspection and has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that, in lessons, teachers consistently challenge students of all abilities, including the more able, and that ongoing assessment of students' learning is a consistent feature.
- Develop the ability of all middle managers with responsibility for subjects to lead and be accountable for their area of responsibility to a good standard.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	
The effectiveness of boarding provision	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, 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
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B



17 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Aston Manor School, Birmingham, B6 4PZ

It was a pleasure to meet many of you on the day of the inspection. Yours is a good school with some outstanding features.

Many of you start in Year 7 with quite low levels of attainment, but good teaching and excellent support ensure that you make good and sometimes outstanding progress by the time you leave in Year 11. This year, 56% of Year 11 students achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, which is about the same as the national average.

It was very clear to me that you really enjoy your education at Aston Manor, that you have excellent relationships with staff and with each other and that the school is a place where you feel very safe. All of your teachers are absolutely committed to ensuring you achieve as well as you can, in both academic and sporting areas. However, just occasionally, groups such as more able students could be pushed even further in lessons. The headteacher and the school's senior managers are very good at spotting things that can be improved even further, and have realised that in some subjects even more could be done to support your progress. In spite of this, your school's motto, 'all different, all equal, all achieving,' truly reflects what is going on every day in your school.

To make the school even better, I have asked the headteacher to ensure that:

- in lessons, all of you, including the more able students, are consistently given challenging work and all teachers check your progress and understanding regularly
- the staff who lead subject areas are as skilled as possible in ensuring that you all achieve as well as you possibly can.

You can help your teachers to meet these challenges by continuing to behave really well, by attending regularly and punctually and by working as hard as you possibly can to achieve your targets.

Best wishes to you all.

Gwen Coates
Her Majesty's Inspector