

The High Arcal School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103873
Local Authority	Dudley
Inspection number	308444
Inspection date	13 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Ted Wheatley

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Denzel Smith
Headteacher	Joanna Mary Manson
Date of previous school inspection	10 May 2004
School address	High Arcal Drive Sedgley Dudley DY3 1BP
Telephone number	01902 838038
Fax number	01902 838039

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: • whether the school had clearly recognised underachievement in a few subjects and dealt with them, • how well the school has improved leadership and management where there have been weaknesses. Evidence was gathered from details of current standards and achievement, examination of pupils' work and school documents, observation of lessons, discussions with governors, the headteacher and senior staff and discussions with pupils. The quality of pupils' personal development and well-being were examined, but the quality of the school's care, support and guidance were not investigated in detail. However, inspectors 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 the report.

Description of the school

The school is larger than average. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils who do not have English as their first language is very low and a very small number are in the early stages of learning English. Attainment on entry to the school is below average and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average.

The headteacher took up appointment in December 2006 and had been acting in the post since July 2006. There have been two other appointments to the senior team in recent months.

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 school where pupils achieve well and some achieve very well. Standards are fractionally above average and this represents good achievement taking into account below average starting points. Pupils' achievement is improving year on year as a result of the school's continual drive to improve teaching and the curriculum.

In English, mathematics and science standards are broadly average and all pupils achieve well. Standards in science in Years 7 to 9 are above average. The most able pupils do really well because of challenging teaching and a wide range of activities that helps broaden their experience and understanding. The least able pupils and the very small number of pupils who do not have English as their main language achieve well. The school carefully analyses pupils' achievements and has accurately identified where there has been some underachievement in information and communication technology (ICT) and modern foreign languages. It has introduced changes that are leading to improving standards.

The school is well led and managed and the headteacher provides a very clear direction for the school's improvement. She is well supported by senior staff, subject leaders and other staff. The school's evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses is very good. There is a clear focus on helping pupils achieve as well as they can and in providing a curriculum closely matched to their individual needs and that catches their interest. The school has a well-planned programme for improvements in teaching and learning, the curriculum and in leadership and management. It has implemented support and training for staff to help achieve the planned improvements and made new management appointments where they have been needed. The capacity to continue improving is good. Governors have a very good grasp of the school's effectiveness, provide good support and set the headteacher challenging targets.

The curriculum is satisfactory overall, and it is good for Years 10 and 11 where it is thoughtfully planned to provide a wide and improving range of choices for pupils. This is supported through an extensive network of links with schools, colleges and businesses. The impact of improvements in the curriculum has been to increasingly engage pupils' interest, provide a wide range of learning experiences and different qualifications and to prepare pupils well for future life. Pupils who had otherwise started to lose interest in school have been re-vitalised and their attendance has improved. Support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and improving – the school having taken note of relatively lower achievement of these pupils in the past has set up activities and support to make sure they are fully engaged in their work. These pupils' progress has consequently improved. The school has rightly recognised that it also needs to make changes to the curriculum for Years 7 to 9. It is currently evaluating Key Stage 3 provision with a view to providing a wider range of activities and opportunities than it currently does. In particular, the school has identified a small but significant number of pupils who need individually planned programmes to help them sustain their interest in school and to improve their attendance. The school is also keen to provide enterprise opportunities for all pupils.

Specialist college status has been good for the school, providing significant ICT resources, training and development, very good support for other schools and very good links with the community. However, the science curriculum has been slow to improve although plans to do so are now advanced and partially implemented.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Pupils enjoy school and work hard. They behave well and pay careful attention to ensuring their own safety and that of others. Except for a very small minority, pupils attend school regularly. Year 7 pupils, who have recently arrived in school, are already developing in confidence because of the warm welcome they have received from staff and from other pupils. All of this contributes to pupils' successful learning. Pupils have a growing awareness of how to stay healthy, which has been further supported by their involvement in planning appealing but healthy school meals. They make a valuable contribution to the school community. For example, they act as prefects and school council members. Pupils feel that the school takes their views seriously; the school recently redesigned pupils' planners and homework diaries in the light of their comments. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is satisfactory, although a small number of pupils have a limited knowledge and understanding of the range of cultures within Britain. Their well-developed social skills and good basic skills prepare them well for the next stage in their lives.

Teaching is good and contributes effectively to pupils' good progress. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and as a result pupils work hard and, in the main, concentrate well. Teachers have good subject expertise and use it well to motivate and enthuse learners. Pupils are willing to take the risk of being wrong in their responses to questions in class, because they know their answers will be treated with respect. The purpose of lessons is made clear to pupils, allowing them to judge how much progress they have made. Most pupils are aware of their learning targets and are given good quality guidance on how to improve their work. Some older pupils said: 'We know what GCSE grades we ought to achieve and teachers make sure we know what to do to reach them.' Nevertheless, marking is inconsistent. The best marking tells pupils how well they are making progress and is very clear about what pupils need to do to improve. Occasionally, there is too little guidance over long periods of time. Occasionally, teaching assistants are not deployed effectively, so they cannot make a significant contribution to pupils' learning. In a few instances, pupils are allowed to chatter too much when they are working which slows their progress.

While too little evidence was collected to make an overall judgement about the quality of support, care and guidance, there were some strong indications of valuable provision, reflecting the school's positive evaluation. Arrangements to ensure pupils' health and safety are good. The very effective arrangements to ensure that the transfer from primary to secondary school is a pleasant experience for pupils help them to settle quickly into their new school. The few incidents of bullying or racism are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils appreciate the contribution of their form tutors to their well-being. Older pupils say they are supported well in making decisions about their future and have valuable opportunities for work experience. Year 11 pupils said: 'We get a lot of help from teachers and careers people from outside school to help us choose what we want to do.' Academic guidance is good and helps pupils improve the quality of their work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is matched to the needs of individual pupils.
- Make sure that marking consistently informs pupils about how well they are achieving and gives them guidance on how to improve.

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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 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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The High Arcal School, Sedgley, Dudley, DY3 1BP

We enjoyed the day we spent in your school. Thank you for being friendly and helpful to us. We spoke to several of you in meetings, lessons and around the school and what you told us helped us gain a clear picture of your school.

These are the main things we found out about your school.

- You go to a good school where the staff work hard to make it an even better school.
- You make good and sometimes very good progress.
- Teaching is good. The range of subjects you study and the opportunities you have to learn are increasing all of the time.
- You behave well and enjoy school and take on responsibilities willingly.
- The great majority of you attend school regularly and attendance is improving.
- The school is a safe place and you learn about healthy lifestyles. Most, but not all of you, eat healthily and do some physical exercise.
- You enjoy the many out of school activities the school provides.

To improve things further, we have asked the school to do the following.

- Make sure that what you learn in Years 7 to 9 is closely matched to your abilities and interests.
- Make sure that marking always tells you how well you are doing and explains what you need to do to make your work even better.

With best wishes

T Wheatley Lead Inspector

14 September 2007



Dear Pupils

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T Wheatley
Lead Inspector