

# Aldridge School - A Science College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104263
<b>Local Authority</b>	Walsall
<b>Inspection number</b>	308555
<b>Inspection dates</b>	16–17 April 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Clive Kempton 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 category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	1286
6th form	196
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Keith Holland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Anthony Harrison
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 September 2004
<b>School address</b>	Tynings Lane Aldridge Walsall WS9 0BG
<b>Telephone number</b>	01922 743988
<b>Fax number</b>	01922 740119

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<b>Age group</b>	11-18
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Aldridge School became a specialist Science College in 2003. It is a large oversubscribed school with a thriving sixth form. The pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and their attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Whilst most pupils come from local partner primary schools, a number attend from further afield. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. Fewer pupils than average are eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of pupils are White British, although 13 different minority ethnic groups are represented in the school. The school is a cohesive community.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

Aldridge Science College is a satisfactory and improving school. It is emerging from a difficult period of its development with renewed energy and enthusiasm. New staff, improved systems for the tracking of pupils' progress and improving standards in mathematics have contributed to a better quality of education.

Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards and attain results in line with national averages in GCSE examinations. This represents satisfactory progress overall. In the sixth form, standards are also broadly average and pupils' achievements are also satisfactory. For a number of years, mathematics has been the weakest core subject. This trend is changing. The school's data clearly identify that pupils are now making much better progress in mathematics and higher standards are predicted for 2008 tests and examinations at all key stages. In Key Stage 3, good transition arrangements with the primary schools contribute to pupils making good progress and attaining higher standards in the core subjects, especially in mathematics and science. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress.

The inconsistencies in standards and achievement are due to the variable quality of the teaching, which is satisfactory overall. During the inspection, almost all lessons observed were at least satisfactory or good. None were judged as outstanding. In the more successful lessons, teachers establish good relationships with pupils. Teachers have high expectations, good subject knowledge and motivate pupils by their tangible enthusiasm for the subject. However, in too many lessons, teachers talk too much at the expense of pupils' learning and do not include enough stimulating learning activities to involve pupils more effectively. These missed opportunities are the principal reason why pupils do not make as much progress as they could, especially at Key Stage 4. The curriculum is currently no better than satisfactory because of the narrow range of vocational courses on offer. The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are also satisfactory but improving. This is because academic tracking procedures are now much more robust and increasingly used by staff to identify underachievement. Timely intervention programmes ensure that these underachieving pupils receive good support and quickly catch up.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and are the strongest features of the school. The range of charity work is impressive and includes fund raising to support local charities particular to the school. Attendance is good and pupils generally behave well in and around the school. They develop healthy and active lifestyles through the popular after-school clubs and are provided with a good range of leadership opportunities, such as the Junior Sports Leader initiative and the mentoring programme. Pupils enjoyed the creative partnership between Year 12, Year 7 and local primary schools to produce a multicoloured dreamcoat inspired by the musical Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, which is on display in the school foyer. Older pupils appreciate the part they played in designing their new school uniform. The high quality musical events contribute significantly to pupils' cultural and spiritual development as well as enhancing their confidence and self-esteem when performing to their appreciative audiences.

The quality of leadership and management across the school is satisfactory. The determined leadership of the headteacher has strengthened management at all levels, particularly in the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of the school. The senior leadership team has an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and, as such, has a good capacity to

make the necessary improvements identified in this report. However, development planning is not sufficiently focused on the few key issues that would raise standards with clear measurable outcomes. The school's science college status has had a positive impact on achievement in science and through its work with partner primary schools. Whilst most of its challenging specialist school targets have been met in science, some have been missed in mathematics, its subsidiary specialism.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils enjoy their studies in the sixth form and contribute well to the life of the school through various activities, including paired reading and supporting classes in Key Stage 3. Pupils appreciate the quality of the personalised feedback they receive from teachers, enabling them to improve their work. Curricular provision in the sixth form is satisfactory. It is currently narrowly focused and has a very limited vocational element, although this is being addressed. This has resulted in around half of the pupils leaving at the end of Year 11 to follow courses in neighbouring colleges.

Personal development is satisfactory because of the limited provision of important areas of personal and health education. Opportunities are offered for the pupils to contribute to the life of the school through positions of responsibility. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, and in some subjects, good. The system of monitoring pupils' progress has started to be used to address individual performance issues. The school is particularly proud of the very high proportion of pupils who go on to follow courses in higher education. Leadership and management of the sixth form is satisfactory.

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

- Ensure that all lessons have precise, accessible and measurable learning objectives that are regularly reviewed during the lesson to check on pupils' learning.
- Ensure that all teachers consistently challenge pupils to become more actively involved in their learning.
- Ensure that school development planning is sharply focused on the few key issues that will raise standards.

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.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

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

Achievement is satisfactory and standards in the main school and sixth form are broadly average. Pupils enter the school with standards that are broadly average. They make good progress in English, mathematics and science in Key Stage 3 and attain above average standards by the end of Year 9. Secure transition arrangements ensure that pupils in Year 7 have a good start to their secondary education. Good quality science activities undertaken in partner primary schools have contributed to higher standards of science being attained in Key Stage 3.

At Key Stage 4, whilst standards in most subjects are above average, a minority, including mathematics, are below average. As a result, by the end of Year 11, the overall percentage of

pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades in GCSE examinations is average. This benchmark when mathematics and English are included is also average. Historically, the weaker performance in mathematics has depressed these headline figures. However, recent improvements in the teaching and management of mathematics demonstrate an upward trend. Overall progress in Key Stage 4, therefore, remains satisfactory.

Standards in the sixth form are broadly average, although they vary between subjects. The school is taking robust steps to tackle the small number of subjects that do not do as well as others. With relatively demanding entry requirements, most pupils who start Year 12 complete the two-year courses and make satisfactory progress.

Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, relative to their starting points. They receive good quality support in lessons. The school has been particularly successful in improving standards in reading for pupils who need extra support.

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

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. They know and support the school's values and build positive relationships with each other and their teachers. Pupils enjoy coming to school and attendance is good. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is generally good as well. Pupils move around the building sensibly, even though some of the staircases are very narrow. They report that they feel safe in school, and say that bullying is not a major concern. If it does occur, they say it is dealt with appropriately by the school. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and there is a high participation rate in the impressive range of enriching additional activities on offer.

Pupils are satisfactorily prepared for each stage of study and for the world of work. Whilst levels of literacy are well developed, skills in numeracy, although improving, are not as strong. Pupils respond enthusiastically to the work-related programmes on offer, such as enrichment days for enterprise and work experience. Many also take advantage of opportunities to develop leadership skills, for example, by mentoring younger pupils or taking on wider school responsibilities.

Pupils have a healthy awareness of the dangers of drugs, alcohol and the Internet. They take advantage of the water coolers around the school and are keen to participate in physical education and extra-curricular sport. They are appreciative of the school's efforts to introduce healthier food and more pupils are having a school lunch.

There are many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. Charity events organised by pupils and community initiatives such as Rosie's Helping Hands and a Creative Partnership transition project flourish. Pupils take part in decision making through form representatives, house and school councils. One pupil commented, 'We have a voice but we don't always get what we want.' They speak positively of the strong community spirit reinforced through the house system. They are developing a satisfactory understanding of what it means to be a citizen in multicultural Britain.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The teaching and learning in the main school and sixth form are satisfactory overall. There are examples of good teaching in some areas. The school has a secure and accurate system for monitoring the quality of the lessons which involves middle managers. The school is aware of areas that need to be improved and has a mechanism to initiate and implement the required changes. This system needs further development to ensure its impact benefits pupils by improving the quality of teaching and driving up achievement. The teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects.

In good lessons, with clearly focused objectives, pupils behave well and the learning is brisk, with the teacher's questioning used perceptively to check understanding and further deepen pupils' knowledge. These lessons have clear learning objectives that build upon previous knowledge. However, in the less successful lessons, the learning objectives are too broad. There is too much input by the teacher and missed opportunities to involve pupils, resulting in a lack of progress and pace. Assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory. Better examples indicate how the pupils can make further progress.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is broad and balanced, contributing well to achievement. At Key Stage 4, the school has developed a good range of science courses reflecting its specialist status. This has resulted in improved results in science, followed by a good uptake of science courses in the sixth form. Effective partnerships to extend provision have been established, including, for example, working with a local college to provide vocational opportunities for a small group of disaffected pupils in Key Stage 4. The range of vocational courses available to pupils at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is currently too narrow. The school has clear plans in place to improve significantly the vocational opportunities for pupils who are now making choices for both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. These pupils benefit from good access to the curriculum and well designed programmes to improve their weak literacy and numeracy skills. Arrangements for teaching citizenship identified at the last report have improved and are now satisfactory.

The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities, which are popular with pupils and contribute well to health and enjoyment. Enrichment days broaden pupils' educational experience and have been used to develop pupils' understanding of work-related learning and enterprise. The provision for gifted and talented pupils is planned well.

## Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The school takes pride in the good care it provides for pupils to promote their well-being. As a parent said, 'My son went through a rough time and was at a very low ebb. Teachers spotted this and were extremely understanding.' Guidance leaders make a significant contribution to the pastoral care of pupils and are now developing their role to provide more effective academic guidance. The school has robust systems in place for tracking pupils' progress and identifying underachievement. Senior leaders and heads of core subjects are using these effectively in Key Stage 3. These procedures have been introduced recently into Key Stage 4 but their full impact on tracking results has yet to be realised. An effective induction programme exists for Year 7 pupils joining the school. Pupils are well informed about progression routes at critical times in their school career. The success of this support is reflected in the progression of almost all pupils into the sixth form, further education, employment or training.

The needs of vulnerable pupils and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well catered for. Child protection procedures are robust.

## Leadership and management

**Grade: 3**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management across the school are satisfactory. The school is led by a committed headteacher who is determined to improve pupils' standards and achievement. He is well supported by a senior leadership team who collectively have ensured that the school acted on the points raised during the last inspection. Through a collaborative leadership style, they have made an accurate self-evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for further development. However, the translation of these areas for improvement into action, with clear criteria for measuring success, is not precise enough in the school's development plan.

Middle management is now more consistent. Heads of subject areas have improved in their effectiveness since the last inspection and they are using data more thoroughly to inform their subject development plans. The use of data by heads of year, known as guidance leaders, is more embryonic. Departmental self-evaluation has become part of the annual review cycle, although subject leaders have not been sufficiently involved in writing the whole-school self-evaluation document. Increasingly, they are being held to account for the standards reached in their subject area and are taking more responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of their department.

Governance is good. Governors are regular visitors to the school and support the school well in all aspects of its work. They have had limited involvement with the self-evaluation writing process, although they are aware of the school's strengths and development points and increasingly hold the school to account for its standards. The head boy and head girl play a valuable part in the leadership of the school by chairing the school council, leading assemblies and representing the pupils' voice to senior managers.

Other professionals who work in partnership with the school are positive about their involvement. Partnership working is strong. One commented, 'The dedication and working partnership is a

blueprint for good work.' Parents, too, are very supportive of the school and proud to send their children to Aldridge. One commented, 'My daughter developed, flowered and enjoyed her time here.'

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

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> 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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	3	

### The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
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?	3	3

<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.

## Annex A

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	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	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

18 April 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Aldridge School–A Science College, Aldridge, WS9 0BG

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school earlier this term. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn. I thought you would like to know the outcomes of the inspection and what the school could do to improve.

- We think you go to a satisfactory school that is improving quickly.
- Your parents are very positive about Aldridge School.
- You behave well in lessons and around the school.
- A lot of you take part in after-school clubs and activities. You should all try to do at least one a week.
- You could all attain higher standards, especially in mathematics at Key Stage 4.
- The science college status has provided some good opportunities to improve the science facilities and learning opportunities.
- Your teachers work hard and want you to do well.
- The sixth form students set a good example and are good role models.
- The house system supports your personal development well. You have managed to raise a lot of money for charity.
- Those of you who need extra help get the support you need.
- Your headteacher leads the school well and is determined to improve your standards.
- You have lots of opportunities to take on responsibility in school and to contribute to the community.
- The school makes sure that you are well prepared to join Year 7 from your primary school.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher and senior staff do these things.

- Ensure that all teachers tell you what you are going to learn in each lesson, check that you are understanding the work during the lesson, and that you have learned it at the end.
- Ensure that all teachers consistently provide more exciting activities in lessons so that you become more involved in your learning.
- Ensure that the plans the senior staff write to raise your standards have clearer targets.

Clive Kempton HMI Her Majesty's Inspector

**Annex B**

18 April 2008

Dear Pupils

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Clive Kempton HMI  
Her Majesty's Inspector