

Eckington School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112943
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	311063
Inspection dates	30 April –1 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Nada Trikić 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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1731
6th form	226
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Joe Birkin
Headteacher	Mr Edward Middlemass
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2004
School address	Dronfield Road Eckington Sheffield Derbyshire S21 4GN
Telephone number	01246 432849
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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 and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

A larger than average school, with specialist engineering status. Eckington is a stable school community and draws pupils from neighbouring villages and across the local authority border. The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds with a small number from different minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is rising although none are at an early stage in learning English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is below average.

The school has gained accreditation for Artsmark Silver, Basic Skills, Investors in People, Careers Mark, Football Association Charter Standard, and a Healthy Schools Award. The school has also gained a national mentoring network award and the Financial Management Standards in Schools accreditation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to the achievement and standards of all learners, and the management of behaviour.

Despite the hard work of senior leaders and teachers, overall effectiveness and achievement are inadequate as there has been insufficient improvement since the last inspection, and a significant number of pupils do not make the progress expected given their attainment on entry to the school. This is partly explained by staff turnover, which has disrupted the learning of pupils, and limited the capacity of leaders to make improvements. In addition, weaknesses in teaching, assessment, tracking of progress, curriculum and lesson planning, and leadership and management have contributed to a trend of underperformance. The school has made progress recently in tackling these issues, through more effective leadership and management, which is now satisfactory. Current targets are increasingly challenging, supported by regular tracking of progress, and leading to improvement, especially in Key Stage 4. Leaders and teachers are developing their skills and confidence in the use of assessment data but this is not a consistent feature across the school.

Standards at the end of Year 9 have fluctuated in recent years. In 2007 overall standards decreased linked to weaknesses in English, and a decline in mathematics. Recent improvements in provision have resulted from greater staff stability, higher expectations, better planning and preparation for tests, and increased moderation of pupils' work. In Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more higher grade passes has been significantly below the national average for 3 years. School data indicates an improvement in the current Year 11 in English and mathematics arising from a sharper focus on achievement, early entry in GCSE English and tailored intervention for identified pupils. However, there is still much to do to demonstrate consistently satisfactory progress from Years 7 to 11.

The quality of teaching and learning, although satisfactory, remains too variable, ranging from inadequate to good. Low-level disruption is a feature of too many weaker lessons and impacts on the engagement of pupils in learning, relationships, and rates of progress. Although systems are in place to check the quality of lessons with opportunities for professional development to support improvement, the impact of this has been too slow. The satisfactory curriculum has recently broadened to provide different routes to learning including vocational courses, and opportunities linked to the engineering specialism, for example the introduction of apprenticeships.

Personal development and well-being of pupils are satisfactory overall as is the quality of care, guidance and support. Pupils report that they feel safe in school, and they adopt safe practice as they move around the large site. Most pupils enjoy school as reflected in improvements in attendance, and positive relationships. However, behaviour is judged to be inadequate as a significant minority of pupils interfere with classroom learning, and behaviour is not consistently managed across the school. This is a concern for pupils and parents. Pupils benefit from good quality careers guidance to support progression to the sixth form, further education, training or employment.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that the effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory. Students enter the sixth form with broadly average standards and in 2007 progress was as expected at A level, although performance in AS was below average. Current standards and progress are satisfactory because of the impact of target setting, and tracking arrangements. Students benefit from good care, support and guidance from the careers service, tutors, and head of sixth form. The curriculum is satisfactory; it offers a good range of AS and A2 courses but is limited to one vocational course at Level 3. Students behave maturely, contribute to the school community, and enjoy their learning experiences. However, they are critical of the limited facilities for personal study and access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is satisfactory. In the best lessons, students are challenged by a range of engaging activities and encouraged to take an active part in discussion. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The sixth form leader is setting a new direction and there are early signs of planned improvements, for example in recruitment and progress in AS.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure consistency in lesson planning to provide more opportunities for active engagement in lessons in order to accelerate rates of progress across the school with a specific focus on English, and cross-curricular literacy.
- Improve the management of pupil behaviour to ensure that learning is not disrupted.
- Further refine the use of assessment information, supported by training, to ensure progress is effectively tracked to support timely intervention.
- Focus leadership at all levels on raising standards and achievement, and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils enter the school with broadly average standards. The progress pupils make is too variable across subjects and different groups. In 2007, standards and achievement declined in English and the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level 5 was significantly below the national average, especially for boys. Steps have been taken to improve extended writing skills although it is too soon to evaluate improvement across the school. In 2007, standards in mathematics and science were broadly average although fewer pupils attained the higher level 7.

In Key Stage 4, standards have not improved sufficiently in recent years and the progress made by pupils has declined. Although standards in English and mathematics are broadly average, in 2007 Year 11 pupils made significantly less progress than expected. Girls achieved less well than boys, against the national trend. In 2007, GCSE performance was strongest in business studies, drama, French, physical education and statistics. Current Year 11 pupils are aware of their expected grades, and the progress they are making.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities benefit from specific provision to support progress through learning workshops, and in-class support from teaching assistants. Progress

is more variable where teachers do not use information provided to tailor lessons to meet individual needs.

Statutory targets have been set using a suitable range of information but have not been consistently achieved or used to support improvement through appropriate planning of teaching and learning. Leaders recognise the need to strengthen consistency of teacher assessment to ensure accuracy and reliability of progress data.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development are satisfactory but their awareness and understanding of Britain as a diverse society is under developed. Pupils understand the benefits of a healthy lifestyle but do not receive the full entitlement to physical education in Key Stage 4 limiting opportunities for regular exercise. Teaching about drugs and sexual health takes place effectively in extended tutor sessions but this limits the scope for input from external agencies in Key Stage 3.

Pupils' enjoyment of school is inconsistent. They enjoy lessons in which teachers engage them actively in learning. However, weaker teaching is interrupted by low-level disruption, which interferes with learning. A significant minority of pupils continue to disrupt lessons. Pupils and parents express concerns about behaviour. Some pupils show a lack of respect and this is reflected in the high number of exclusions. However, the school provides an orderly environment and pupils feel safe. Inspectors found pupils to be mature and sensible when talking with them about aspects of the school's work. The school forum provides an opportunity for pupils' involvement in decision-making and consultations although it does not contribute strongly to the development of the school. Some pupils make a positive contribution in the wider community, for example in link work with primary schools.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching ranges from good to inadequate. In the main, lessons are satisfactory, but there is not enough consistently good teaching to lead to a significant improvement in levels of achievement. Satisfactory and inadequate lessons tend to lack pace and variety, and do not develop pupils' independent learning skills, often because they are too teacher-directed and expectations of pupils are too low. When pupils are insufficiently interested and engaged in lessons low-level disruption becomes a barrier to learning. Marking does not always provide helpful feedback for pupils to improve.

Good lessons take place in a calm and orderly environment, characterised by positive relationships between teachers and pupils, a brisk pace, and a structure that allows pupils to see the links between their learning. In these lessons, teachers use assessment information well to meet pupils' learning needs, and adjust lesson plans in line with pupils' progress. In addition, these lessons often use technology such as laptops and whiteboards effectively to provide interest and variety. The school is aware of the variability of teaching and has a broadly accurate picture

of its quality although evidence from observations indicated that this is over generous at times. Despite giving considerable attention to professional development, and sharing of good practice, progress on increasing consistency has been slow. Plans to improve teaching are not focused sufficiently on developing the skills of individual teachers.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Since the last inspection, the curriculum at Key Stage 4 has broadened to meet the needs and aspirations of a wider range of pupils. New courses, some in partnership with local colleges have commenced. Although these developments are a valuable enhancement of provision, and there has been a positive response from pupils, the changes have been too recent to have an impact on levels of achievement. School leaders recognise the need to improve continuity in vocational provision from Key Stage 4 into the sixth form.

Specialist engineering status has led to a significant improvement in technology facilities, partnerships with industry, and greater links with primary schools, supporting transition. However, it has yet to make a substantial difference to the wider curriculum, or to the range and quality of teaching approaches. Leaders recognise the need to further develop ICT and literacy in order to promote the economic well being of pupils.

The school provides extra activities, particularly in sport, dance and drama, that are valued by pupils and parents. The number of educational visits to enrich the curriculum and promote learning outside the classroom is limited.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care, guidance and support for pupils overall is satisfactory. There is effective support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, and peer mentoring is a useful addition to this. Pupils speak highly of advice received from the careers service, and guidance about subject options. Pupils settle quickly in to the school because of good transition arrangements with primary schools. Child protection and other safeguarding procedures are securely in place.

The quality of academic guidance is developing but not consistent. Procedures for target setting are in place and most pupils are aware of their subject targets. However, pupils are not sufficiently involved in target setting and progress tracking to raise aspirations, identify areas for improvement, or to influence adjustment to targets. The role of the tutor in this guidance process is still developing as part of the whole school approach to raising achievement. Pupils value teachers' written comments, which provide suggestions on how to improve performance. Only some teachers give this guidance consistently. Strategies for managing and improving behaviour are not consistently applied, and systems to control classroom disruption do not always resolve the problem.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The head teacher has a sound knowledge of strengths and weaknesses across the school. Senior leaders and governors review extensive plans for improvement regularly. However, this self-evaluation places too much emphasis on the completion of tasks. Plans are not sufficiently focused and pragmatic about what is required to improve the progress and achievement of pupils, with measurable indicators, and regular checks to ensure that standards are rising. Consequently, self-evaluation and action planning have not had sufficient impact upon standards since the last inspection. Improvement in the management and use of assessment information is now assisting leaders in identifying pupils at risk of under performing, and in reviewing provision. This is shown in results from early GCSE entry in English and modular results in mathematics in Key Stage 4, which will have a positive impact on standards, confirming the school's capacity to improve.

Whilst many subject and pastoral leaders are effective, with some of the best practice in the sixth form, some lack the necessary skills to challenge weak practice and provide the support and direction needed to bring desired change. Subsequently there is a wide variation in learners' experience across subject areas. Middle leaders are held to account through regular meetings with senior staff, with improvement points identified. Improving outcomes in English and mathematics at Key Stage 4 demonstrate the impact of this process. Senior leaders acknowledge that systems for managing classroom disruption need to improve further, alongside the need to engage pupils more actively in lessons. Steps taken to extend courses in Key Stage 4 are engaging more pupils in work related learning.

Governors rightly recognise that aspects of the school's work have not progressed sufficiently because of the information they have received from senior leaders. Although committed to the school's improvement governors do not routinely gather first hand information about provision through visits to departments.

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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?	4	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	4	
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	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	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?	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	4	
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	4	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
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?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

2 May 2008

Dear Pupils/Students

Inspection of Eckington School, Eckington S21 4GN

Thank you for being so welcoming when we came to inspect your school. You told us that you felt safe in school and we noticed that movement around the site was orderly. We enjoyed talking to you and were impressed with the sensible and mature contribution you made to discussions about aspects of the school's work. Younger pupils told us how much the induction week had helped them to settle into the school. Older learners were complimentary about the careers guidance they receive.

Many of you were keen to tell us what you enjoyed about the school, but you were also honest and constructive about what you felt needed to improve. Your opinions were important in confirming what staff, parents and governors told us. We decided that there needed to be key improvements in Key Stage 3 and 4. The quality of lessons varies a great deal and although there are some good lessons too many are not sufficiently planned to challenge and interest you, or to meet your individual learning needs. You told us that you learn best when lessons are lively and teachers check that you understand the work. We noticed that you also enjoyed opportunities to work with each other to discuss your learning. Most of you behave well and want to learn, and we agree with you that not all pupils have responsible attitudes and cooperate in class. This disrupts weaker lessons and prevents other pupils from learning. We have asked all the school's leaders to focus on increasing the proportion of good lessons so that you can progress at a faster rate, especially in literacy, and to keep checking that standards are rising. We have also asked the school to improve systems for managing the behaviour of those pupils who disturb lessons.

There have been improvements in the ways that teachers collect information about your progress. However, we think you should be more involved in tracking your progress against targets so that you know exactly what you have to improve to achieve or exceed them. We judged that the school's sixth form was satisfactory. Students told us they appreciate and value the support and guidance they receive to support progress, and to plan for the future.

You all need to play your part and to take responsibility for improving your school to make it a place where everyone has a chance to succeed. A team of inspectors will return to check on the progress the school is making.

Our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely Nada Trikić Her Majesty's Inspector