

Archway School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115723
Local Authority	Gloucestershire
Inspection number	312043
Inspection dates	13–14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Nick Green HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1136
6th form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	B Oosthuysen
Headteacher	Colin Belford
Date of previous school inspection	23 February 2004
School address	Paganhill Stroud GL5 4AX
Telephone number	01453 763242
Fax number	01453 766093

Age group	11-19
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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

The school is average in size. It is a specialist technology college and one of four partner schools in the Stroud Post-16 Consortium. Most students are of White British heritage from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. Less than 5% come from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is below average. Just under half of the students come from areas where the number of adults with higher education is below average. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, although the number with a formal statement of special educational needs is below. Students' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Archway is a satisfactory and improving school. As one parent wrote to inspectors, 'The school has improved a lot in the last six months and is moving forward all the time.' Standards are broadly average by the end of Years 9 and 11 and the sixth form. In relation to students' starting points when they enter the school, their progress and achievement are satisfactory. However, too few students achieve the higher grades in national tests and examinations. Standards are not yet consistently high enough in English and science, and boys particularly are underperforming. This is because teaching and learning, whilst improving, have yet to achieve a consistently good standard across the school. After an unsettled period in the senior leadership of the school, when students' enjoyment and achievement were adversely affected, the clear direction of the relatively new headteacher and the effectiveness of the restructured senior leadership team have set staff and students clear expectations for improvement. These are focused firmly on raising achievement and standards and promoting students' personal development. The school monitors teaching and learning well; self-evaluation clearly identifies its key areas for development and effective action is being taken to promote improvement. A significant rise in results in Year 9 last year and clear evidence of rising standards and improved behaviour in Years 10 and 11 this year show the school has satisfactory capacity to improve. However, not all middle managers are making sufficient use of data to set targets, monitoring their subjects with suitable rigour, or doing enough to share good practice. The great majority of parents are supportive of the school and feel they are consulted; a minority are concerned about students' behaviour and say that the school does not seek their views or those of their children. However, inspectors judge that behaviour is satisfactory and the school does take account of parents' and students' views. As one parent wrote, 'The teachers are approachable and willing to address any concerns and issues.' Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. They enjoy school, adopt healthy lifestyles and are willing to take on responsibilities. Attendance is satisfactory. Students also develop secure competence in workplace and enterprise skills. The school provides a satisfactory level of care, guidance and support for all students, particularly the most vulnerable and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Suitable arrangements are in place for safeguarding students.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and often good. Teachers communicate learning objectives clearly to students, and generally use their subject expertise well in their planning and teaching. However, students are not always challenged sufficiently and poor behaviour is very occasionally allowed to disrupt learning. Academic guidance is improving, although it is not yet sufficiently consistent across the school to ensure that students always know what they need to do to improve. The school's curriculum is satisfactory. A variety of courses is offered which meets most students' needs and capabilities, although there is not a sufficiently wide range of 14–19 pathways. Extra-curricular activities enrich students' learning and make a satisfactory contribution to their enjoyment, to their personal development and to their achievement. However, the school's specialist status has limited impact on this.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Standards attained by students are below average, although there are variations in quality between subjects; standards in some practical and vocational courses are higher. In respect to their attainment on entry to the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress and their

achievement is satisfactory, as are retention rates. Attendance is also satisfactory and monitored carefully. Teachers are aware of the needs of students and the tutor system is supportive. Students enjoy being part of a small sixth form and believe they are looked after well. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory because of the satisfactory care, guidance and support they receive. They are prepared well for higher education but do not feel as effectively guided for employment or training.

Teaching is satisfactory and often good. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and use ICT resources well. Lessons are suitably paced, demanding and enjoyable. However, there is inconsistency in the effectiveness of teachers' planning and teaching to meet the wide range of students' ability and to enable them to work independently. The consortium provides a broad curricular choice, including vocational courses, and there are appropriate enrichment activities, including optional work experience in Year 12. However, the number of 14–19 pathways is limited, and some very small teaching groups, resulting from the duplication of courses across the consortium, constrain the range of teaching and learning. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory; suitable monitoring, evaluation and review are undertaken. The head of sixth form is successful in ensuring that communication and cooperation with the consortium are effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement for all groups of students, particularly in English and science.
- Improve teaching and learning by engaging students more effectively, challenging them more rigorously and increasing opportunities for them to work independently.
- Ensure that assessment is used consistently by all staff to inform their planning for teaching and learning and to provide students with feedback on how to improve in order to meet the needs of all students more effectively.
- Develop the curriculum through establishing a sufficiently wide range of 14–19 pathways and by using the school's specialist status more effectively to enhance all aspects of learning.
- Raise the quality of all middle managers' practice to meet that of the best.

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

Standards in Year 9 have risen over the last three years and are now broadly average, although the number of students achieving the higher levels in national tests in English and science is below the national figure. Given the starting points of Year 9 students when they join the school, their progress and achievement are satisfactory overall and good in mathematics, but the school has identified that standards, particularly those of boys, could be higher and is continuing to use the strategies that have already successfully improved students' performance.

Standards at the end of Year 11 have been well below average in the last two years and some groups of students' progress and achievement were inadequate. The current Year 11 students' standards are higher. This was reflected in their work seen during the inspection, which was of a broadly average quality. Results in early-entry GCSE examinations and modular tests already

completed also indicate that students' achievement and standards are now satisfactory. These improvements result from the school successfully identifying students who need additional support and providing a range of strategies to raise their performance. Better behaviour and attitudes to work have also contributed to this. Most groups of students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, make satisfactory progress but there remain particular weaknesses in English and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students enjoy school and say they are taught and supported well. Attendance is just below average and improving. Students' attitudes in class and around the school are generally good; they work together cooperatively and show enthusiasm in lessons. They are very positive about the impact of the 'behaviour for learning' system used by the school and report that bullying is rare. However, behaviour is only satisfactory overall because a minority of students occasionally disrupt the learning of others. Students feel safe, adopt safe practices and recognise risks and how to prevent them. They have a good approach to adopting a healthy lifestyle and appreciate the improvements made by the school for healthy eating and the good facilities used by large numbers for regular physical exercise.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, as shown by their positive responses to school assemblies and the way they engage with the school council to raise important issues about the life of the school. They respond well to other opportunities for taking responsibility in the school community, through their roles as library assistants and mentors and buddies to their peers. They regularly raise money for charities, although their involvement in the wider community is underdeveloped. Students secure skills for their future economic well-being through work-experience and enterprise activities. Their progress in literacy, numeracy and ICT contributes to this satisfactorily. Because of this, students are, as one parent wrote, 'developing into confident, mature young adults'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teachers generally plan their lessons effectively and communicate learning objectives clearly to students. They have strong subject knowledge and use ICT well to enhance lesson presentation. Examples of good teaching were seen where students were enthused and encouraged to decide in which way they learned best. In most lessons, relationships between teachers and students are conducive to effective and enjoyable learning. As one parent wrote, 'The staff are dedicated, friendly and helpful.' However, this good teaching and learning is not yet consistent across the school. Students are not always sufficiently engaged in learning, and very occasionally, learning is disrupted through poor behaviour, and students who are more able are not sufficiently challenged or encouraged to work as independently as they could. Students' progress is usually monitored closely in lessons and through assessment systems. Teachers are increasingly using assessment data well to set challenging and realistic targets

and to provide students with feedback on how to improve. However, this practice is not yet sufficiently embedded to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school evaluates its curriculum regularly. Recently, much has been done to strengthen it, for example, by allocating additional time for the teaching of English, mathematics and science and for literacy support. The impact of curricular development is already evident in improved standards in Year 9 and is beginning to be seen in the upper school. Statutory requirements are met and in Years 10 and 11, there are appropriate routes to help students develop and pursue their interests. This works well for most students, but some, especially boys, are not offered courses at a level appropriate to their ability and needs. The consortium ensures that a wide range of courses is available, but progression and continuity in the Archway-based 14–19 curriculum are not yet flexible enough to provide a sufficiently wide range of alternative pathways.

An appropriate programme of extra-curricular activities ensures that students can develop a range of sporting, artistic, aesthetic and cultural skills. These are highly valued by students and taken up by a significant number. The school is rightly proud of the quality of its drama and music productions. Personal development days, covering themes such as business enterprise, enrich the curriculum. These are an integral part of a well-structured programme of personal, social and health education across the school. The impact of the school's specialist status in technology is evident in outreach work with local primary schools and in improved ICT resources. However, it has yet to make a significant impact on enhancing the whole curriculum.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Staff show commitment to the care of students and to identifying and meeting their needs. The support and guidance they provide contribute well to encouraging students' enjoyment and achievement and to promoting their health and safety. As one parent wrote, 'I have been hugely impressed by the care, attention and support given to my daughter.' Another, whose daughter has a disability, wrote of her pleasure with the school's 'consideration of her needs and concerns'. Procedures for the induction of students into Year 7 are good and students of all ages report that there are a number of adults to turn to for support and advice. Recently introduced systems for raising attendance and improving behaviour are having a beneficial impact on students' attitudes, although they have yet to reduce significantly the number of short-term exclusions. Child protection arrangements are in place and the school has suitable procedures for safeguarding students. There is an effective multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of vulnerable students, including those in the care of the local authority. Students receive suitable guidance about their future academic or employment opportunities. They are well informed about their progress and are aware of their targets. However, they are not always clear about what they need to do to improve as not all students receive consistently effective guidance about the next steps in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

After a period of significant turbulence in the senior leadership of the school, the relatively new headteacher has clearly analysed the school's areas for development and introduced suitable strategies to address them. He provides clear strategic vision and direction and is supported in doing this by a highly effective deputy headteacher and an experienced leadership team that executes its responsibilities well. Together, they are gradually overcoming the school's barriers to raising performance. Morale has been improved and staff share and support the headteacher's drive for raising standards. The value placed on all members of staff has created an ethos of teamwork and collaboration, and there is a whole-school commitment to improvement. While middle managers' effectiveness is growing, there are variations in their use of data to set targets, in monitoring of subject performance and in sharing good practice and challenging weaknesses. The leadership and management skills of middle managers are being developed through additional training and guidance from senior leaders.

The school's self-evaluation procedures take account of the views of students, parents and staff and result in a mostly accurate identification of strengths and areas for development. Effective systems are used to monitor and improve the performance of teachers. The leadership of the school sets challenging but realistic targets to raise standards. The school's leaders satisfactorily promote equality of opportunity and the personal development and well-being of all students. Governors are kept well informed about the school's performance. As a result, they have a good awareness of the school's achievements and priorities for improvement. They support and challenge the school satisfactorily.

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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?	3	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3

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	3	

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	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	2
The attendance of learners	3	3
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	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

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	2
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	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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

20 November 2007

Dear Students,

Inspection of Archway School, Stroud, Gloucestershire GL5 4AX

Thank you for the help you provided to the inspection team when we visited the school. We enjoyed meeting members of year groups and we learned a great deal from our discussions with you in lessons and around the school. Your school provides a satisfactory education and is improving.

Standards are average in Year 9, Year 11 and the sixth form. In relation to your attainment when you enter the school, your progress and achievement are also satisfactory. We were pleased to see that results in Year 9 improved considerably last year, and the improved standards in Year 10 and 11. However, there is still room for students, particularly boys, to achieve higher grades, and standards are not yet consistently good enough in English and science. Teaching is satisfactory and often good but not consistently effective in ensuring that all of you achieve as well as you can. Your teachers have good subject knowledge; they plan well and most lessons are orderly.

Your personal development and well-being are satisfactory. You enjoy school and your attendance is satisfactory and improving. Many of you show pride in your roles as representatives on the school council, as library assistants and as mentors and buddies to other students. The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive from staff is satisfactory, as is the guidance you receive on your progress and targets. The curriculum you receive is also satisfactory, as it meets most students' needs.

The clear direction and effective leadership and management of the headteacher and senior teachers are helping the school to improve. To assist this, we have asked the school to raise achievement and standards, particularly in English and science, through more consistently good teaching that challenges all students and encourages you to work independently. We have asked that assessment should be used more consistently by teachers in their planning and teaching to give you better guidance on what you need to do to improve your work. We have also asked the school to develop more combinations of courses between Years 10 and 13 and to use the school's technology status to enhance the curriculum. We are asking some heads of subjects to improve their practice. This can be helped by all of you striving to do your very best in tests and examinations. Best wishes with your studies.

Nick Green Her Majesty's Inspector