

Great Barr School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103550
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	323857
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Reporting inspector	Gwendoline Coates HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	2366
Sixth form	296
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Leigh Crowe
Headteacher	Catherine Mary Abbott
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2006
School address	Aldridge Road Great Barr Birmingham B44 8NU
Telephone number	01213 666611
Fax number	01213 666007

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	8–9 October 2008
Inspection number	323857

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Great Barr School is one of the largest schools in the country. Over a third of students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest of which are Black Caribbean and Indian. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average and the percentage of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is lower than the national average. In the sixth form, girls outnumber boys and the percentage of students for whom English is an additional language is greater than in the school overall. The school achieved specialist science college status in September 2005.

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 S13 (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 meeting government requirements for safeguarding students in the school.

Inspectors drew the school's attention to its failure to meet all the current Government requirements relating to safeguarding. Action to tackle this weakness is an urgent priority. The school, supported by the local authority, has made a commitment to resolve this matter as quickly as possible and has immediately implemented interim procedures to ensure students' safety. Despite the school's many strengths, failure to meet these requirements affects the judgement on the school's overall effectiveness and that of the sixth form, as well as those for leadership and management, including governance, and care, guidance and support.

Great Barr School is a popular and oversubscribed school. Under the thoughtful and well-focused leadership of the headteacher and her senior leadership team, the school has taken effective steps to promote improvement since the last inspection, with a particular focus on the introduction of behaviour management strategies and developing the quality of teaching and learning. The school works well in partnership with a wide range of organisations to promote students' well-being, including support agencies, other local schools, the extended schools cluster of which it is a member, and local businesses. The good work that is being done through its specialist science college status is having a very positive impact. Internally, it is leading to improvements in the school curriculum and is supporting the improving quality of teaching and learning. Externally, it is contributing very well to work in partner primary and secondary schools and to local community projects. Much of this work supports the school's contribution to community cohesion very well. The focus on developing middle managers to take full accountability of their subject areas, the well thought out strategy to create a large group of advanced skills teachers to support improvements in teaching and learning, and the well-balanced leadership team indicate that the school has good capacity to bring about the necessary improvements.

Students join the school with attainment that is broadly average, make satisfactory progress and attain standards overall that are broadly average to below average. Achievement in science at Key Stage 3, in mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4 and achievement overall for boys are recognised by the school as areas that need improvement. A wide range of intervention strategies have been implemented to bring this about however, monitoring and evaluating the impact of the wide range of actions to raise achievement are at present insufficiently developed.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. The house system and vertical tutor groups help this very large school to create a sense of community, where students feel they belong and where they feel safe. Many students make a positive contribution to the school as prefects, of which there are 'loads, all there to help you,' as one Year 7 student put it.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and improving. Comprehensive and effective training opportunities have been provided for teachers, which are having a positive impact on the structure of lessons and on the behaviour management strategies used in lessons. The induction of new teachers is good and ensures that they feel confident and well supported in this very large school. Overall, the curriculum provided by the school is satisfactory, it is good

at Key Stages 3 and 4, but the provision of vocational courses in the sixth form is limited and hence does not meet the needs of all students as well as it might. Academic and pastoral support and guidance for most students in all key stages are good and are based on detailed monitoring systems and very clear analyses of individual needs. Students know their targets and are given good advice on how to improve further. However, in some cases, individual targets lack sufficient challenge.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

Many students join the sixth form with levels of attainment that are below the national average. Although provisional 2008 examination results show a substantial increase at both A level and AS level performance, standards remain below the national average at the end of Years 12 and 13. Achievement overall is satisfactory, although the small proportion of students following vocational courses perform better than those following the traditional AS and A level courses.

Students' personal development is good and students have a high level of satisfaction with the courses they have chosen. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall with some good and some outstanding lessons seen. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to work independently and activities are varied and challenging. Students speak highly of their learning experiences, particularly within the extra-curricular opportunities provided in performing arts. They recognise the positive impact on their learning of the very good relationships that exist between teachers and students. A system for tracking students' progress is in place, which the school has identified as an area for further development. There is a good programme of advice and guidance in place for students applying to higher education, which includes aspects of financial management. Students are proud to be part of the school.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. Failure to meet government requirements on safeguarding affects the overall judgement on the effectiveness of the sixth form.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the school complies fully with current Government requirements for safeguarding.
- Monitor and evaluate the impact of the actions to raise achievement.
- Ensure targets for all students are sufficiently challenging.
- Develop the range of vocational provision in the sixth form.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students join the school in Year 7 with attainment that is broadly average. Between Year 7 and Year 11 they make satisfactory progress and overall the standards they attain at Key Stages 3 and 4 are broadly average to below average. Provisional figures for 2008 indicate that performance overall at GCSE is in line with the national averages, although the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics is below the national average. The school recognises that students can do better, given their attainment on entry, particularly boys at Key Stage 4. Whilst students' performance in English has improved, that in mathematics, at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, and in science at Key Stage 3 has been particularly disappointing in the last two years. However, lesson observations and current data on Year 9 and Year 11 indicate that actions undertaken by the school are beginning to

have a positive impact on students' achievement. The achievement of students from different minority ethnic groups is often better than the school average and that of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities does not vary significantly from the school average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good because the school's expectations have been made explicit through its Behaviour for Learning strategy. Students learn in an inclusive environment where, through effective pastoral systems, they feel safe and valued as individuals. Most students clearly enjoy their time at school and participating in the many activities it has to offer. This is also evidenced by rates of attendance which are good and improving. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is satisfactory. Students feel safe and say that bullying or racist incidents are rare. They are confident that any instances will be dealt with effectively.

Members of the elected school council take pride in their responsibilities. They feel that their suggestions and opinions are listened to and acted upon. Students have a good regard for safety and an awareness of risks to their personal health and well-being. High levels of participation in physical activity and a clear knowledge of healthy food enable students to develop a good awareness of healthy lifestyles. Students respond well to the opportunities to take responsibility and make satisfactory contributions to the community, although these are not as well developed for students in the sixth form. They have a clear understanding of the many different cultures within their school and feel the relationships that exist are positive and supportive. Their preparation for later economic well-being is satisfactory because skills in literacy and numeracy require further development.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but evidence from lessons and discussions with staff indicate good progress towards improving the overall quality of lessons. The school has used its specialist status well to increase the number of advanced skills teachers across subjects and to recruit, train and retain teachers, particularly in mathematics and science. Consistent expectations of planning and behaviour lead to lessons having clear objectives, a positive working atmosphere, a good focus on keeping students informed of how well they are doing, and a check at the end of what has been learnt and understood. The best lessons are fun and engage students in practical activities that motivate and interest them. Where lessons are less successful, students are not encouraged to think enough for themselves or work together in pairs or groups, and teachers miss opportunities to ask probing questions. The e-learning portal provides good access for staff to select interesting and motivating resources, such as video clips, together with clear information on students' progress so that work can be set at the correct level. This is all supported by a well thought out training programme to improve teaching and learning across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. A recently developed 'Learning to Learn' skills based course for Years 7 and 8 students has the potential to improve learning skills and thus achievement, but it is too early to evaluate its impact. In Key Stage 4, the range of pathways includes an increasing number of vocational or work related courses that provide appropriate opportunities for all groups of learners. However, this is not the case in the sixth form where the provision of vocational courses is limited. A new personal development programme clearly identifies opportunities for learners to develop both their economic and personal well-being. Students' learning is enhanced by a wide variety of educational visits and there are formal links with a number of community business partners. The school's specialist science college status provides a useful focus for such enrichment and has had a significant impact on ensuring the introduction of wide range of different courses in science at Key Stage 4 that meet the needs of all students. Students participate in and enjoy an extensive range of extra-curricular sporting and cultural activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Students' personal development is supported by sound systems and structures for care, guidance and support. Despite the school's large size, these ensure that students feel well supported and that staff know them well. Staff demonstrate strongly caring attitudes and students receive effective support and guidance at times of transition from primary school to Year 7 and from Year 11 to Year 12. Students say that they are able to talk with teachers about any of their concerns. Students' conduct is closely monitored and the very effective support provided for those who experience difficulties in learning or behaviour ensures that their progress is comparable to that of their peers. To tackle underachievement, the school has put in place more rigorous tracking of students' performance, followed up with a good range of intervention strategies. Students know their targets and receive guidance in how to improve their work, both through marking and through individual mentoring. However, in some cases individual targets lack challenge.

Despite its many strengths in this area, the school's failure to meet current safeguarding requirements means that care, guidance and support are judged inadequate.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher's clear vision is to develop the school as a community of mature learners. She is ably supported by a strong leadership team, who are helping her to drive improvement throughout the school and are clearly focused on raising achievement. Together, they have been successful in developing a common purpose and commitment amongst staff. Actions are having a clear impact on improving outcomes, in particular the personal development and well-being of students. In general, challenging targets are used to raise standards, although in some instances, students' individual targets are not as challenging as they might be. Self-evaluation processes are effective at whole school level and are developing well at subject level, although opportunities for gathering the views of students, particularly those in the sixth form, are not fully developed. Middle managers, effectively supported by the leadership team,

are fully accountable for their curriculum areas, and are well placed to identify, challenge and address underachievement within their specialist areas. Plans are in place to improve the school's internal review systems and enhance the systems for monitoring the quality of provision to evaluate more effectively the impact of improvement strategies on raising achievement. The school has made great efforts to recruit suitably qualified staff and now has a full complement of teachers in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.

Equality of opportunity for all is promoted within the school and appropriate systems and policies are in place to meet statutory requirements in relation to racist and bullying incidents. The school effectively promotes community cohesion and has a very clear understanding of the communities it serves. This is enhanced by the very strong community links and projects developed through its specialist science college status.

In most respects, the governing body fulfils its statutory duties satisfactorily, providing adequate levels of challenge and support and in monitoring the school's work. However, in the one key area of safeguarding, the governing body has not ensured that the school meets current Government requirements. As a result, governance is inadequate and leadership and management overall are satisfactory.

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.

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
---	-----------------------	--------------

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	4
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	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

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/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
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	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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?	4	4

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	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
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	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

10 October 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Great Barr School, Birmingham B44 8NU

Inspectors really enjoyed meeting so many of you when we visited Great Barr School recently. This letter explains how we judged your school.

The headteacher, the senior leadership team and all of your teachers and support workers are committed to ensuring you are all well cared for and achieve as well as you can. However, inspectors found that some of the Government's requirements about safeguarding are not in place. Once alerted to this, the headteacher took immediate action to put this right. As a result, despite some real strengths in several areas of the school's work, some of our judgements have to take account of this situation.

The standards you reach by Year 9, Year 11 and in the sixth form are similar to the national averages and the progress you make is satisfactory. The school knows that many of you can do better and it has introduced lots of ways of supporting groups of you to improve further, especially in mathematics and science and boys in particular. Most of you speak very positively about the house system and vertical tutor groups, which help to make you feel safe and confident around the school. Observing lessons, seeing you around the school, and in our discussions with many of you, we judged that you enjoyed attending Great Barr School. You know that staff are committed to providing you with good academic and pastoral support and guidance, and you have good relationships with your teachers. E-learning at Great Barr School is an exciting development that will help you to improve your studies. Most of you know your targets and understand how to improve your work. The curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 is good but, although plenty of subjects are offered in the sixth form, not enough vocational courses are provided. Many of you take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities that are available.

- We have asked your school to do the following four things:
- ensure that procedures for safeguarding meet current government requirements
- monitor and evaluate how well the additional support you are getting with your studies is working
- ensure targets for all students are sufficiently challenging
- develop the range of vocational provision in the sixth form.

Best wishes

Gwen Coates Her Majesty's Inspector