

# Alderbrook School and Arts College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	104110
<b>Local Authority</b>	Solihull
<b>Inspection number</b>	323967
<b>Inspection dates</b>	19–20 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Driscoll

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>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	1300
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Annette Scott
<b>Headteacher</b>	William Sedgwick
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14 June 2006
<b>School address</b>	Blossomfield Road Solihull B91 1SN
<b>Telephone number</b>	0121 704 2146
<b>Fax number</b>	0121 711 4123

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<b>Age group</b>	11–16
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Alderbrook School is a very large specialist college for the arts. It has also been granted Leading Edge status, particularly for its work using a programme called Building Learning Power, to help pupils learn more effectively. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the school is above average, and the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is very high because the school houses a specially resourced unit for pupils with moderate learning and speech and language difficulties.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Alderbrook provides a good education for its pupils. Outstanding progress is made by gifted and talented pupils because they receive a good degree of challenge in lessons and there are many highly effective extra activities provided for them. Most pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, achieve well, as a result of the good curriculum and teaching they receive. They improve their standards from average on entry to the school to above average by the time they leave. Progress has improved significantly, and is now outstanding, in English in Years 7 to 9, where all teachers are consistent in their approach to the curriculum. In English in Years 10 and 11, where progress is satisfactory and standards are average, individual teachers have too much freedom to decide what is taught and to what depth, so progress differs from class to class. The impact of the school's work on Building Learning Power is clear as pupils become more adept at assessing their own and others' work, in order to identify for themselves what they need to do to improve their learning.

Pupils' personal development is equally as good as their academic progress. They are friendly, well behaved and work hard in lessons. They play a particularly good role in the school and local communities, and have a good understanding of communities further afield. However, too many are late to school and lessons, which reduces their achievement. The school has not developed a culture where pupils see punctuality as important because lessons do not start or finish on time and they are not sufficiently encouraged to hurry to lessons. In most other respects, the care, guidance and support that pupils receive is good. Vulnerable pupils receive outstanding support, so they are successful at school and invariably move to further education or employment when they leave the school.

The school has improved well since it was last inspected, as a result of good leadership and management. The tracking of pupils' progress and the subsequent use of data to set challenging targets, is outstanding. This, together with the impetus provided by the school's specialist status, has helped drive the school forward. Variations in progress by different groups have been ironed out. However, variations remain between subjects because some key policies, such as those on attendance and punctuality, do not provide sufficiently clear guidance and are not implemented consistently. Nevertheless, the school's leaders have demonstrated good capacity for taking the school further forward.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure lessons start and finish on time and encourage pupils to move to lessons more quickly so that they develop a greater sense of urgency in arriving punctually.
- Ensure that all pupils studying English in Years 10 and 11 are taught the same topics at a level that is appropriate to their ability.
- Ensure that policies provide clearer guidance to staff and are implemented consistently.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress in most subjects, including mathematics and information and communication technology. Progress in English in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, and standards are broadly average. This is in stark contrast to the outstanding progress now being made by pupils in Years 7 to 9 in English. Achievement has improved significantly in English in Years 7 to 9, but improvements in Years 10 and 11 have been slowed by a high turnover in staff and

unavoidable absence. Progress in dance and drama is outstanding, resulting in very high standards, as befits the school's specialist status. Some groups' achievement was satisfactory last year, but the school has successfully tackled any underperformance and now all groups are making at least good progress.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils enjoy coming to school because they have many friends and positive relationships with the staff. Pupils are considerate and polite, and they work well together in pairs or groups. Attendance is average but improving each year. However, punctuality is an issue both at the start of the day and in lessons. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and that if issues arise there are specific adults that they could go to who will deal with these issues immediately. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe, such as being aware of the potential dangers of social networking websites. Behaviour is good around school, and especially so in lessons where pupils maintain their concentration very well. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle, and are keen to participate in sport. The proportion making healthy choices at lunchtime is improving rapidly. Many pupils take part in the huge range of opportunities to participate in the performing arts at school, community and national level. This broadens their horizons and provides them with a good understanding of different cultures. This is further boosted by timetabled lessons and focus days which ensure a good understanding of the way that others live, both in this country and internationally. Pupils have a strong voice in the school through the many councils and groups where they discuss issues and express their opinions and points of view. Pupils leave the school well prepared for the next stage of their education, with very few not continuing into further education or training.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The school's work on Building Learning Power is having a very positive impact on the progress of pupils. Pupils are confident when working independently and in small groups. They are particularly good at evaluating their own work, and that of others, to identify where it can be improved. Much of the planning uses information on what the pupils already know, understand and can do, to set work that is demanding for all groups of pupils, especially the gifted and talented and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. However, this is not consistent within and between subjects, so middle ability pupils are sometimes given work that is too easy or hard for them. Marking also varies across the school. In some subjects, it is exceptionally detailed, but there are also cases where work goes unmarked for too long.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum provides a broad and balanced range of courses that meet the needs of individual pupils particularly well. A wide range of vocational and academic opportunities are available, especially in the arts. The school's specialist status has been used well to improve resources and to provide exciting opportunities for pupils to learn in the community and with businesses and other arts organisations. Most subjects plan courses that build on what pupils have already learnt. However, in English in Years 10 and 11, teachers decide which topics they will teach,

and the level of difficulty, rather than applying a consistent approach across the classes. There is a good range of extra activities, especially in the outstanding provision in the arts and to stretch the most gifted and talented. The structure of the school day is not effective in promoting punctuality. There are no signals for the end of lessons, and clocks are not synchronised, so lessons frequently finish early or late. This has a knock on effect for the next lesson, where pupils may arrive early and disturb the lesson, or late and the start has to be delayed. Pupils are well informed about health, safety and other aspects of personal education because this aspect of the curriculum is comprehensive and well planned.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school provides good quality care for pupils. Pupils praised all staff for the support and encouragement they provide. Procedures for child protection and safeguarding learners meet current requirements. Vulnerable pupils receive outstanding support, especially in overcoming any personal difficulties they may be having, so they are able to make up any ground lost and achieve as well as their peers. The additional support provided by the specially resourced centre is sensitive, well coordinated, and very effective in promoting the well-being of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The systems for tracking progress and setting challenging targets at a whole-school level are outstanding. However, a few staff are not sure how to apply the results when planning lessons or providing feedback to pupils. Pupils are routinely involved in evaluating their own progress, and know how well they are doing. The school now makes contact with parents on the first day of their child's absence. This has helped halve the rate of persistent absenteeism. Punctuality remains an issue, as too few staff are around the school to encourage pupils to hurry to lessons.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

The school's leaders make outstanding use of data to monitor the work of subjects, so they gain a very clear and totally accurate picture of the progress made by different groups of pupils. This allows them to identify the most important areas for improvement and tackle any inconsistencies so that all are able to make equally good progress. Attendance and punctuality are not analysed to the same extent, so actions to improve these aspects are implemented more slowly. Other aspects of the school's work are evaluated well. Excellent use is made of case studies to check on the quality of care provided, and governors keep a very firm hold on finances. Governors also hold the school's managers to account well in order to promote improvement. Some policies, such as those on attendance and punctuality, do not provide clear enough guidance to staff, so they are not implemented consistently. The school has carried out a detailed audit of the needs of pupils in terms of learning about communities, and implemented an effective plan to raise understanding of how pupils can become good citizens.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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**Overall effectiveness**

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<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.



## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

23 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Alderbrook School and Arts College, Solihull, B91 1SN

Thank you very much for your help when we recently visited your school. You were all polite and made us feel welcome. Your views helped us gain a clear picture of the education you receive.

You go to a good school, where you make good progress and leave with GCSE results that are above the national average. This is partly because you receive good teaching and the work and courses you follow are well matched to your abilities. The English course in Years 7 to 9 is now very well planned, so you make outstanding progress. We have asked the school to make the same sorts of changes to the course in Years 10 and 11, so you can do better in your English GCSE examinations. Your good results reflect your own hard work and good behaviour in lessons. We were impressed by how well you work in groups, especially when you are asked to assess each other's work. One area where you let yourselves down is in getting to school and lessons on time. It is not helped by lessons finishing early or late, so we have asked the school to do something about this. However, you can help yourselves by not stopping for a chat and moving between lessons as quickly as possible. You could also ask your parents to drop you off in plenty of time, and we have asked the school to have more teachers around to stop you dawdling.

You told us that you feel safe at school, and we can see why. The staff take good care to help you should any problems arise. Those of you who find learning more difficult are given good help so that you can make equally as good progress as others. Your school continues to get better and better because the headteacher and others who run it know the most important things to improve, and how to tackle them. Some of the guidance they give to teachers is not entirely clear, so they do not all apply rules the same way, especially when checking your attendance and punctuality. We have asked the people who run the school to check that everyone knows what they should be doing, and make sure that they are doing it.

With all best wishes for your futures.

Yours sincerely

David Driscoll

Lead inspector