

Aston Fields Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116957
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	326503
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Mary Davis

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	586
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Richardson
Headteacher	Julia Adams
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2006
School address	Drummond Road Bromsgrove B60 2ET
Telephone number	01527 876026
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Age group	9–13
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Aston Fields Middle School serves the community in the south east of Bromsgrove. The school population reflects the socio-economic diversity of the catchment area. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. However, the proportion of students who have statements of special educational needs is below average.

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, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector 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 progress made by students in Key Stage 2.

Students make inadequate progress in their work to the end of Year 6. There has been a declining picture over a three year period and in 2008 rates of progress were very low when compared to the national average, particularly in English and mathematics. Senior leaders, while recognising the underachievement, have not yet taken sufficient action to reverse this trend. They have been too focused on using strategies such as booster classes to raise standards and have only recently recognised that the overall quality of teaching in the classroom needs to be improved. They have set insufficiently challenging targets and have not monitored the impact of their actions sufficiently frequently to ensure students meet their targets. In too many lessons all students are set the same work resulting in the most able students not being sufficiently challenged and the least able receiving insufficient support. The school's leaders have taken more positive steps during the current academic year with the result that progress in Key Stage 2 is showing signs of improvement, particularly in mathematics.

In Key Stage 3 students make rapid progress. They are provided with a more exciting curriculum that provides opportunities to undertake active and creative tasks. This is enriched by a wide range of events such as forensic workshops for Year 7. Although there are outstanding elements to the curriculum, including a wide range of extra-curricular activities that are greatly enjoyed by the students, in Key Stage 2 the opportunities for enrichment are fewer. Therefore the curriculum is judged to be satisfactory overall. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory because, although some good and outstanding teaching was seen during the inspection, it is inconsistent across the school. Students' personal development and well-being are good. Although some parents expressed concern about poor behaviour, students behaved well during the inspection and were welcoming and polite to inspectors. Year 8 students say that behaviour has 'improved massively' since September when a new system of rewards and sanctions was introduced. Students work well with each other and older ones support younger ones. This is particularly true of Year 8 students who are well prepared for their future by undertaking a variety of leadership roles such as prefects and sports leaders and they are trained as peer mentors. As a result they are mature and responsible young people. Students' understanding of how to stay healthy is good and the school council has ensured that healthy menus are available in the canteen and report that it is growing in popularity. Students greatly value the sporting opportunities offered and there is a good take-up for after-school activities. Most students enjoy coming to school and their attendance is good.

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The school has a caring ethos and pastoral care is particularly strong. Students value the support offered by their teachers and learning mentors. Younger students are glowing in their appreciation of the work of the Year 8 peer mentors and feel there is always someone to talk to should they have a problem. Students feel safe, and vulnerable students are well supported. Although the school strives to involve parents in their children's education some parents express concern about the level of communication between school and home and feel that their concerns are not being addressed. Academic guidance is inconsistent. Although students identified as underachieving are regularly mentored, the quality

of the marking of their work and the advice given about how to improve it are inconsistent, with the result that too many pupils do not know how to reach their targets.

The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily and has developed partnerships with a variety of international schools. The religious education curriculum, greatly enjoyed by the students, ensures they understand and respect the diversity of faiths in modern British society.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher, supported by her senior team, is deeply committed to securing quality in every aspect of the school's work. She works closely with the senior team to ensure that all middle leaders and teachers take responsibility for raising standards and achievement. The leadership team is well supported and challenged by the governing body, which takes an active role within the school. Although the school's effectiveness is not as good as at the time of the last inspection, strategies introduced in recent times to improve the quality of teaching and students' behaviour have been effective. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in Key Stage 2 by ensuring that full and frequent use is made of all assessment information to track students' progress, set challenging targets and ensure that underachievement is quickly identified and remedied.
- Ensure all teachers make full use of assessment information to inform their lesson planning so that work is precisely matched to the needs of all students.
- Ensure that students are regularly informed about the progress they are making, so that they have a better understanding about how they can improve their work and reach the targets set.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

In mathematics, Years 7 and 8 students follow a condensed course that enables them to be formally tested a year early. By the time they leave at the end of Year 8, standards have risen to above average. The school's own accurate testing shows that standards are also above average in English and science. This represents good progress from Key Stage 2 to 3. However, the standards reached by students at the end of Year 6 are only broadly average, though they were above average in the national tests at the end of Year 2. This is reflected in the fact that students' rate of progress to the end of Year 6 is in the bottom 10% nationally. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that although Key Stage 2 students are now making better progress, they are still likely to fall significantly short of the most challenging targets. There is no significant difference between the performance of different ethnic groups. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Cultural richness is celebrated in terms of art, music and drama opportunities. Students greatly enjoy working with professional practitioners in these areas and the art display, including the students' own work, is inspiring. The very effective religious education curriculum enables students to learn about other faiths, to examine their impact on today's British society and to reflect on their own beliefs and opinions. Students throughout the school have a variety of opportunities to take

on roles of responsibility such as house captains, prefects and trained mentors in Year 8. The school council are proud of their achievements in representing their peers, and sports leaders enjoy working with Year 4 students to aid their transition to the school. Students have a strong sense of community and show their concern for the global community through the work of the eco committee. Events such as the Dragons Den day and opportunities for teamwork, together with students' developing leadership skills, prepare them well for their economic well-being. Most students enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their learning, particularly when the teaching is good or better although enjoyment is less evident in Key Stage 2.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Relationships between students and teachers are good and are founded on mutual respect. Students work well together and when given the opportunity they work well independently. Where the teaching is most effective, lessons are well planned to include a variety of active tasks that challenge their thinking and enable them to articulate their reasoning. Teaching assistants are well deployed to ensure that students' needs are met. Learning mentors are particularly effective in managing students with emotional difficulties to enable them to achieve alongside their peers. Classroom management is good and clear routines are evident to ensure the smooth running of the lesson. Students value the subject knowledge of their teachers and their willingness to provide extra help if they need it. Some parents, however, are concerned that students are not working as hard as they would expect, including at home, and are concerned about the lack of feedback on homework tasks which some parents and students think are insufficiently challenging or relevant to their current studies. In some lessons there is too much teacher direction and as a result the pace of learning is slow. Here students are not actively engaged in their learning or challenged in their thinking. Lesson objectives frequently focus on activities for the lesson rather than what is to be learned. Teachers do not consistently evaluate the learning that has taken place, or use assessment information to plan for the differing abilities within the class, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Students are offered a broad curriculum, including programmes of support for literacy. Students throughout the school learn French and facilities for art, textiles, food technology and other specialist subjects are impressive, enabling students to experience a wide variety of creative activities. An artist in residence working with students resulted in inspiring work to be exhibited in Worcester cathedral. There are good opportunities, mostly in Key Stage 3, to explore business and enterprise and theatre and media to promote enjoyment and engagement. A wide variety of special days, projects and extra-curricular activities are provided for which there is a high take up. The number of students receiving instrumental lessons is high and students greatly enjoy the variety of visits and events that enrich their normal curriculum. However, the curriculum in Key Stage 2 is more restricted and allows little scope for personalised learning. Opportunities are being missed to use the exciting special events such as the forensic day to stimulate writing and other cross-curricular explorations.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school has a supportive environment where pastoral care is a strong feature. Adults lead by example and the peer mentors in Year 8 are proud of the contribution to the care of younger and vulnerable students that they are able to give. Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet current requirements and vulnerable children are well cared for in partnership with relevant outside agencies. New measures for assessment and tracking the progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are in place. Improving attendance has been a recent focus and as a result levels have improved to above the national average. Academic guidance is less effective as too many students are vague about their targets and the school's performance tracking and assessment procedures are not consistent enough across all subjects to give an accurate picture of current achievement and standards. Comments made by teachers through the marking of pupils work provides insufficient information to enable them to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders and managers are focused on promoting standards and encouraging the personal development of all students. Middle managers are involved in the self-evaluation process and are held accountable by senior leaders and the governing body. The devolved leadership has a clear view of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has worked hard to ensure that by the time students leave in Year 8, their attainment and personal development is good. However, until recently they have not sufficiently addressed the underachievement in Key Stage 2, or monitored their actions to address this soon enough. This, together with the setting of targets that are insufficiently challenging, has resulted in the declining rates of progress seen at Key Stage 2. Now, the improved monitoring in mathematics and initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and the variety of the curriculum in this key stage are resulting in students making better progress. However, there has been insufficient time for these recent developments to show the full impact across all subjects.

Governors care for the school and are anxious to promote community links. They have supported the leadership in its drive for improvement but have not always challenged them with sufficient rigour.

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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?	4
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
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
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	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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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
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**

8 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Aston Fields Middle School, Bromsgrove B60 2ET

My colleagues and I enjoyed our visit to your school. We were particularly impressed by the welcome you gave us and your help in finding our way around the school. You told us you enjoy school but because your progress is not fast enough in Key Stage 2, we have given the school a notice to improve. This means that an inspector will visit your school sometime next year to look at the progress your school is making. These are our main findings.

- Standards by the end of Year 8 are above average, but by the time you reach Year 6 you have not made sufficient progress, particularly in English and mathematics.
- We do not think that the school tracks your progress frequently enough or sets you challenging enough targets. This results in your progress in Years 5 and 6 being too slow.
- You enjoy school, particularly when lessons are demanding. Your attendance and behaviour in lessons are improving. We were impressed by the large numbers of you who take roles of responsibility and who care for younger ones.
- The teaching you receive is satisfactory but tasks in lessons are not always matched closely enough to your needs. You do not always get the information you need to know how to improve your work.
- The curriculum that you follow is satisfactory and there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, and particularly exciting events such as working with professional artists and taking part in science and business workshops. However we feel that students in Years 5 and 6 do not have enough opportunities like this.
- The good care you receive enables you to feel safe and well supported.
- The leadership is working satisfactorily to ensure that things improve in the future.

In order to take your learning to new heights, we have asked the school to set you challenging targets, to ensure it frequently monitors your progress and informs you about how well you are doing and that teachers challenge you effectively according to your individual ability. We have asked the school to raise standards and achievement in Key Stage 2. You can help by always working hard to achieve your targets.

Yours faithfully

Mary Davis

Lead inspector