

# Alcester High School Technology College

Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	125750
<b>Local Authority</b>	Warwickshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	328396
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 September 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Margaret Jones HMI

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>	Secondary
<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)	831
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Dean
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annabelle Guyver
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	23 November 2005
<b>School address</b>	Gerard Road Alcester B49 6QQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01789 762285
<b>Fax number</b>	01789 400095

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Alcester High School and Technology College is a secondary modern school, which serves the communities of Alcester and Bidford-on-Avon, including the surrounding villages. It became a specialist technology college in 1998 and achieved music specialist status in 2006. Attainment on entry is broadly in line with national expectations although, because of the proximity of several selective schools, there are fewer higher attaining students in the school than usual. The number of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly in line with the national average. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school has gained the Healthy Schools Award.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Alcester High School and Technology College is a good school where students are extremely well prepared for their future working lives. The headteacher has succeeded in improving the school's reputation in the community and establishing its unique identity as a specialist technology and music college. She has united the staff and senior managers in a clear focus on raising achievement. The school is a happy place where students enjoy their learning very much. Students are well cared for and parents are overwhelmingly positive in their support for the school. The introduction of vertical tutoring and a house system have been a great success and have created a respectful atmosphere in which students thrive. Parents like the new system and, as one said, 'It builds confidence by enabling the children to meet regularly with different children of different ages and build a good rapport with one teacher.' The school has made good improvements since the last inspection. Systems for monitoring and evaluation are excellent. The potential for further improvement is outstanding because of the strength and experience of the senior management team, the positive involvement of middle managers and the outstanding support from the governing body.

Standards are average overall but this represents good progress. This is because of the significant proportion of students who reach above average standards despite the school having fewer more able students than most secondary schools, and the students who are extremely successful in the vocational qualifications they take. Academic progress increases in relation to the time spent at the school, as a result of successful strategies to manage behaviour, motivate students and engage them in their own learning. The quality of teaching and learning is good across the school and is reflected in good achievement. However, in a few lessons, the tasks teachers set do not always match the abilities of different students and this adversely affects performance. GCSE results dipped in 2007, especially in English, but rose again in 2008 to broadly in line with the national average. The school's increasingly challenging targets are being met, and sometimes exceeded.

Students understand well the need for healthy and safe lifestyles. A wide range of activities out of school time complements and supports students' good personal development. Provision for careers education and guidance is well organised and effective, and students enthusiastically take part in a variety of enterprise activities. Active house councils feed into the school council and the students involved enjoy participating in discussion and decision-making. Students' social and moral development is good, but their spiritual and cultural development is only satisfactory. One reason for this is the lack of high quality provision for citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Apart from this aspect, the curriculum meets the needs of the students well. Specialist status has enabled the school to develop an exciting and extensive range of experiences to provide the right learning pathways to meet the individual needs. Information and communication technology (ICT) is thoroughly embedded within a well-planned curriculum and is extensively used in teaching to support good learning. The music specialism has enabled teachers to explore and introduce new approaches to learning to enrich the experiences of students. These have captured the imagination of students and stimulated their enthusiasm for school.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by ensuring the work set by teachers closely matches the learning needs of all students.

- Improve citizenship and PSHE by evaluating and then updating provision.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement is good and, despite some fluctuations, improving. The school works effectively to boost students' self-confidence and as a consequence, they enjoy learning and do well. Standards are broadly average and a significant minority of students reach above average standards. In general, the school has met its specialist school targets. However, in 2008 these were not fully met because the targets were changed when the school gained music specialist status, and option choices were adapted (especially in technology) to accommodate the wider range of music courses on offer.

The most able students and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well. The increasing range of vocational and applied courses (initiated mainly through specialist school status) is successfully engaging those students who lack motivation so that their achievement is improving. They achieve extremely well in vocational qualifications. The very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as their peers.

Standards in English have fluctuated in recent years, mainly as a result of staffing changes, and this has been the case to a lesser extent in other subjects. Standards have improved but there are still some small pockets of underachievement. These are a result of occasional insufficient match of work to learning needs. ICT skills are good and well supported by specialist school funding. The school has accurately identified weaknesses in reading among younger students as a factor that limits learning in many subjects. However, it has successfully introduced intensive support to deal with this.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Personal development and well-being are good. Students have positive attitudes towards the school, are punctual to lessons and want to do well. They enjoy learning very much, particularly when lessons include a range of different activities. Most students are able to build friendly and supportive relationships with each other and with school staff. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and the number of exclusions is extremely small for a school of this size. Attendance is in line with national averages. Students understand thoroughly the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle. Large numbers participate in sporting and other extra-curricular activities, and meals in the recently refurbished dining room are increasingly popular. Students feel safe in school and know whom to turn to for help. The incidence of recorded bullying and racist incidents is extremely low. Most students act safely and responsibly in school, showing good awareness of specific hazards in practical subjects.

Students enjoy discussing moral and social issues and participate enthusiastically in charity fund raising and community events. Art and music make a powerful contribution to spiritual and cultural development, although these aspects are less well developed elsewhere in the curriculum. Students' outstanding contribution to the community includes taking on additional responsibility as house captains, sports captains and school leaders. The very successful development of vertical tutoring has provided older students in particular with opportunities to develop leadership skills and a sense of social responsibility. Students are extremely well prepared for the world of work or continuing education. Very few of last year's leavers are not in education, employment or training. Most students develop good literacy and numeracy skills

and are well placed for further study. Those following vocational courses acquire valuable workplace skills which are well matched with the needs of the local economy.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good relationships with students and most manage behaviour in lessons well. Lessons are carefully planned with well paced activities, which involve students actively in their learning. For example, in a Year 7 science lesson the teacher fully developed students' understanding of acids and alkalis by involving students in high quality discussion, questioning and investigative work. Staff and students use ICT extensively to enhance learning. Books are carefully marked and students know what they have to do to improve. In a few lessons, not enough is expected of more able students, whilst lower attaining students struggle to understand the work set. Not all teachers consistently check that students have understood the work covered in the lesson. Teaching is monitored very carefully in the school and a well structured programme of training supports teachers and helps them to keep up to date.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school has made some brave decisions and has been innovative in developing the curriculum. The school's core offer at Key Stage 4 is significantly enhanced by an outstanding vocational provision that is under constant revision. The choice offered to students provides them with access to learning pathways tailored to individual needs. The school's investment in these programmes is considerable, contributes significantly to each learner's success and represents its intention to translate dreams into realities. Experiences in music have prompted plans to broaden and improve the provision at Key Stage 3 to develop students' skills for learning. Provision in citizenship and PSHE is not as well organised. Learning opportunities to develop cultural and spiritual awareness are missed, and schemes of work are fragmented and outdated.

Students have access to a very wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. They participate extensively in charity work and their engagement is a reflection of the school's commitment to developing extended services and a wider community spirit. Students benefit from a well organised work experience scheme, which raises their self-esteem and helps them to build business links.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

Care, guidance and support are good. The school sets a priority on providing all students with a well rounded education as indicated by good levels of care, support and guidance. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and child protection procedures are well understood by staff.

Staff know their students well and are seen by students as truly caring people dedicated to helping raise their achievement. There are effective strategies for managing the more challenging behaviour of a small number of students, although these are not always consistently applied

by staff. The student services team is very approachable and is highly regarded by students who know that they will be listened to and given help. The school makes good use of the data it collects and has strong systems to track the progress of all learners including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The needs of vulnerable students are promptly identified and appropriate actions taken to enable them to make progress. The school works well with parents and has recently hosted a parenting class as part of its Extended School Service.

The school enjoys productive links with both its primary and secondary partners. Students arrive prepared for their transition to secondary school. Students value highly the careers education and guidance they receive which helps them in their future choices. The school works very effectively with a wide range of external agencies.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good. The leadership team works together efficiently and is very experienced. It knows the school well and has accurately identified areas for development, so that the school has an exceptionally clear sense of direction. A clear system of line management accountability is in operation and managers at all levels understand what is expected of them. Middle managers take full responsibility for the work of their departments or pastoral area and work well with senior managers to implement change. For example, the move to vertical tutor groups and a house system has been implemented effectively and the positive impact evaluated thoroughly. Monitoring and evaluation are outstanding. Lesson observation is meticulous and accurate and has helped the school to move forward by providing support and challenge for weaker teachers.

Governors make an excellent contribution to the work of the school, giving freely of their time, support and professional expertise and sympathetically holding the school to account for its performance. Funding for the school is tight but finances are well managed and the school provides good value for money.

The school promotes community cohesion well. The support for other schools and institutions is very good. Specialist status funding supports technology teaching in primary schools, and various music activities in primary schools and a local Catholic secondary school. There is significant support for wider community music and ICT activities, and one instance of improving the literacy skills of a company's work force.

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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	1

**Achievement and standards**

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3
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	3
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	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

## 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	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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	1
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**

26 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Alcester High School and Technology College, Alcester, B49 6QQ Thank you for all the help you gave us when we visited your school on 24–25 September. We enjoyed talking with you. You told us how much you enjoy being at Alcester High School and Technology College. It is a good school with a happy atmosphere. We thought you would like to know what was good about your school and how we thought it could get even better.

- The school is well led and managed and there is a very good team spirit among the staff and governors, who want you all to do your very best.
- Becoming a specialist technology and music college has brought many benefits to your work.
- You have a wide choice of vocational courses to meet your individual needs.
- Teaching is good and you achieve well in your subjects.
- You show motivation and enjoyment in your lessons. Most of you behave well, get on well together and look after each other.
- You enjoy the wide range of clubs, music, sporting and arts activities.
- You told us that you feel safe in school and are well looked after. There is very good guidance and support for those who need it and excellent preparation for your future working lives.

In order to improve further we have asked your teachers to:

- make sure that the work set always matches your individual abilities
- reconsider the way citizenship and PSHE are organised. We wish all of you success in your studies and thank you once again for your help with this inspection.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Jones Her Majesty's Inspector