

Eckington School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112943
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	331577
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Ahson Mohammed

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1600
Sixth form	227
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Joe Birkin
Headteacher	Mr Patrick Cummings
Date of previous school inspection	30 April 2008
School address	Dronfield Road Eckington Sheffield Derbyshire S21 4GN
Telephone number	01246 432849
Fax number	01246 434401

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

The school serves an established community and draws students from neighbouring villages and across the local authority border. It has specialist engineering status and is slightly larger than an average school. The majority of students are from White British backgrounds with a very small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportions of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are eligible for free school meals are both much lower than the national averages.

The school has gained accreditation for Artsmark Silver, Basic Skills, Investors in People, Careers Mark, Football Association Charter Standard, and a Healthy Schools Award. The school also holds a national mentoring network award and the Financial Management Standards in Schools accreditation.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

This is a satisfactory school, which is transforming and improving at a rapid rate. The school is beginning to benefit from the purposeful and very good leadership and management of the new headteacher. As one parent commented, 'the recent change in management has contributed to a much happier and welcoming environment'. This reflects a typical parental view, with others referring to 'a more positive attitude to learning'. Leadership is satisfactory overall. The leadership team has established a secure foundation by improving the morale of staff and students. This has enabled greater parental involvement and also improved significantly students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons and around the school. The school has implemented successfully its new motto of 'Respect, Progress and Succeed' across the school. The leadership team have become empowered to drive initiatives rapidly. Their enthusiasm is infectious and staff are keen to improve further. Middle managers are becoming increasingly more accountable, although there are still inconsistencies. Many students speak enthusiastically about how the school has changed and how there is greater focus on behaviour and achievement. One student said, 'It has got much more serious'. The students value the ethos of the school where they can go for guidance and care for any number of concerns. This approach makes a major contribution to the good care and guidance provided for the students.

Overall, the students achieve satisfactorily from average starting points. Students in the current Years 10 and 11 are making satisfactory progress and are on track to achieve above their targets. This is an improvement after a previous trend of significant underachievement in Year 11 in national examinations. Results at GCSE have steadily improved. This is the outcome of better teaching and more focused use of assessment data for planning the next stage of learning. Progress is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 with broadly average standards. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because they are supported effectively in their learning. One parent commented 'without the support and help in and out of the school my son would not be the boy he is today'.

The personal development and well-being of the students is good. Students increasingly enjoy coming to school. They say it is safe and recognise that it is improving for their benefit. Behaviour has improved significantly and is now good, along with the positive working relationships between adults and students. The students have a good understanding of how to live a healthy lifestyle and they participate enthusiastically in the good range of extra-curricular activities offered to them. Students are increasingly involved in the school and local community.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory and improving rapidly. The school's own work and the support from the local authority are starting to ensure consistency and rigour in quality and in checking that lessons meet the needs of all students. This has led to the students' steady progress. However, there are still some inconsistencies in challenging the more able students. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum that is developing, responsive and carefully planned to meet students' individual needs. The engineering specialism is used effectively to enhance provision. The school is already thriving on the change in ethos. With its clear agenda for improvement, fuelled with a good team spirit, it has sound capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

This inclusive sixth form currently provides a satisfactory education for its students. Standards attained are broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. At the time of the inspection, inspectors were unable to spend time with sixth form students, or to observe sixth form lessons because of examinations. Consequently, the inspectors are unable to comment on the personal development and well-being of the students, or the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form. However, there is no evidence to suggest that they are different from the main school. Students benefit from improved care, support and guidance before entering the sixth form. The appointment of a sixth form pastoral assistant has further improved early intervention strategies. The care, support and guidance provided for students are good. The sixth form curriculum is satisfactory and has improved to include a broader range of traditional A levels along with vocational courses. Changes to the curriculum are largely driven by student demand and numbers of students enrolling on new courses are increasing. The sixth form works well in collaboration with other schools and colleges to extend the choice available to students. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The strengths and recent developments in sixth form provision are indicative of improved leadership and this is confirmed by the quality of current planning for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure sufficient challenge for potentially high attaining students to raise standards.
- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching in order to improve the quality of learning.
- Develop the strategic role of middle managers to monitor more effectively the impact of any improvements made both in standards and learning.

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

Standards and achievement continue to improve and school data indicate the school is firmly on track to gain increased success. In 2008, the Key Stage 3 national tests showed Year 9 students made satisfactory progress to gain broadly average standards in mathematics and science although they were below average in English. Since the last inspection, the school has worked effectively to ensure its assessment systems are more robust, particularly for English. Standards attained by current Year 9 students are average in English and mathematics and above average in science, representing satisfactory progress overall.

In the 2008 GCSE examinations, the Year 11 students achieved average standards making satisfactory progress. However, potentially higher attaining students gained fewer A* and A grade passes than expected nationally. There was some significant success for the large majority of students with learning difficulties, who attained higher than expected standards compared with similar groups nationally. The good achievement of students with learning difficulties is underpinned by a thoroughly professional learning support team, whose work is praised by parents.

The school is now much sharper in setting itself suitably challenging targets by comparing its performance against the top 25% of schools nationally. School data show most of the current Year 10 and 11 students are meeting or slightly exceeding these targets, but this has yet to be validated by the 2009 examinations. The proportion of students potentially gaining higher A* and A grades has yet to increase to a level which would raise overall A* to C performance above the national average. Nevertheless, the school is making good progress in developing and implementing strategies to improve the performance of its higher attaining students who are now making satisfactory progress by Year 11 in English and mathematics. Consequently, Key Stage 4 students are making satisfactory progress overall and attaining standards which compare with the national average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students are friendly, confident and able to communicate their ideas clearly. They behave well in lessons and around the school. They adopt safe practices in the classroom and as they move around the school buildings, showing respect for each other and the adults who care for them. Many students say they enjoy their lessons and this is reflected in the improving pattern of attendance throughout the school. They say they feel safe at school and there are few incidents of bullying or racist behaviour. When incidents do occur students are confident that the matter will be dealt with quickly and effectively. Their spiritual, moral and social development is good but they have limited understanding of the broader national and global cultural aspects of life. They take part in a range of charitable events, many of which are organised by the sixth form, including collecting and distributing hampers for the elderly at Christmas.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

While teaching and learning are satisfactory overall there are also features of good, and at times outstanding, practice, observed in a number of subjects, for example, mathematics, science, drama, design technology, geography and German. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is good. Lessons have an encouraging and positive atmosphere and the use of information and communication technology to reinforce students' learning is steadily becoming more effective. When teachers provide stimulating tasks and use questions effectively to challenge students' responses, students develop confidence, build on what they have previously learned and develop effective thinking skills. As a result they undertake tasks enthusiastically and with assurance, and are eager to learn. Students themselves say they learn best when lessons include regular opportunities for discussion and for working in small groups. However, in some lessons teachers explain too much, allowing too little time for students to contribute ideas or justify their opinions. Planning does not always allocate sufficient time to review progress in order to consolidate students' learning. Most lessons include provision and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those identified as at risk of underachieving. Opportunities to increase the challenge for more able students are sometimes missed.

Students' work is marked regularly and they are informed about their levels of attainment. Nevertheless, guidance for further improvement is not always clear. Students may know what aspects of their work require improvement but do not always know how to set about this.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

There is a well-planned curriculum in place and this is beginning to have a positive impact on students' performance. The school has monitored the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development across the subject areas to ensure students receive a well-balanced experience. The school's engineering specialism has positively influenced the expansion of vocational courses available including Young Apprenticeships for students in Key Stage 4 and there are strong links with national energy and regional engineering providers. A number of GCSE courses now begin in Year 9 to give students greater flexibility and opportunity for success. As a result, students are prepared satisfactorily for their future, whether for work or education. The school ensures that work-based learning placements are closely matched to students' interests and future aspirations. Positive links are being forged with partner schools, for example in the development and promotion of the new Diploma courses. There is a varied programme of well attended enrichment activities available including sport, performing arts and a range of clubs linked to curriculum areas and students' needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school is strongly committed to meeting the needs of individual students; its provision for those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is a significant strength. Parents of such students praise staff's efficiency and professionalism which has helped their children make good progress. Liaison with the school's partners in primary schools is very good and young students make a confident start to secondary education. Students' progress is carefully monitored. As a result of good dialogue between subject teachers and form tutors intervention systems are promptly put in place to ensure students have the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Although expectations of more able students are high, there is not enough consistency in planning to ensure suitable challenges for them.

The school has good links with agencies which support students' well-being. This includes a particularly innovative programme which encourages young people with weight issues to follow a structured series of fitness activities. Students say they feel safe in school. All statutory requirements for safeguarding meet current requirements. Many students expressed their appreciation of teachers' willingness to help resolve problems by regular meetings on a one-to-one basis. They say that bullying is becoming increasingly rare and is swiftly dealt with. Students whose behaviour leads to temporary exclusion are carefully supported as they resume normal lessons. Very few students re-offend. Links with other schools and colleges in the area are well established, and students are well advised about the choices and opportunities available both in Year 9 and Year 11.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders and managers at senior levels have succeeded in bringing about rapid improvement. The school recognises the variation in the effectiveness of middle managers. This is being successfully addressed through coaching and mentoring which enable staff to benefit from high quality support. The headteacher is relatively new in post but has already gained the respect of staff and students. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the changes made at

the school. Leaders and managers have set challenging targets for performance, which they are meeting and in some cases exceeding. Self-evaluation is good. Leaders have a realistic and self-critical view of the school's strengths and what needs to improve. The school's monitoring of teaching and learning has become more rigorous and, consequently, school leaders have a good understanding of where teaching is most effective. They evaluate lessons accurately and have put in place suitable systems to share good practice, for example through the weekly collaborative planning sessions.

The school's promotion of equality of opportunity and elimination of discrimination is good. This is exemplified by the progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion. It enables students to learn about different faiths and traditions but they do not have enough opportunities to learn about life in more diverse areas of the United Kingdom. The school is developing increasingly close links with the local community, in which its reputation is growing. Governors have an appropriate knowledge of their school and are active in setting priorities for the future. They have helped to ensure that the school makes good use of resources and have successfully appointed key members of staff who are serving the school well.

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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?	2	3
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/or disabilities make progress	2	

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.

²IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	IE 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	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	IE ²
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?	2	2

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	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
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	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	

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

8 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Eckington School, Eckington, S21 4GN

Thank you very much for the warm welcome you extended to us when we visited your school recently. We spoke with many of you in class and around the school. We would particularly like to thank those students who gave up their time to speak with us. We were very impressed with your positive attitudes to learning and each other.

Many significant changes have taken place at your school. You rightly told us 'it has become more serious'. The leadership team have established a school where you all feel valued and where you feel safe and enjoy your lessons. We judged your school to be satisfactory and improving rapidly.

There is good care and support available for each of you, whatever your circumstances. You told us how much you enjoyed the range of courses and all the other interesting opportunities you have beyond the classroom.

To improve the school further, we have asked the headteacher and governors to:

- raise the standards achieved by all, especially those of you who are more able
- increase the proportion of good or better teaching in order to improve the quality of learning
- develop the roles of middle managers to monitor your work more effectively so that they can make relevant changes needed to improve your learning.

You can help by making sure you attend regularly, understand the lesson content and become more 'serious' about your own learning.

We wish you all the very best and hope to read about your successes in the near future.

Yours faithfully

Ahson Mohammed

Lead inspector