

Aston Fields Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116957
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	343763
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Rob Hubbleday HMI

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 of pupils on the school roll	583
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Richardson
Headteacher	Stephen Cox
Date of previous school inspection	4 June 2009
School address	Drummond Road Bromsgrove B60 2ET
Telephone number	01527 876026
Fax number	01527 574798
Email address	office@astonfields.worcs.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. They observed 31 lessons and the same number of teachers and held meetings with groups of pupils, governors and staff. They observed the school's work and looked at assessment data, a range of improvement plans and the school's evaluations of progress. The responses to pupil and staff questionnaires were considered and 131 parent and carer questionnaires were analysed.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- The extent to which improvements in teaching, the use of assessment and the curriculum at Key Stage 2 have led to improved achievement.
- The degree to which the school caters for individuals and groups, such as pupils with special educational needs, gifted and talented pupils and the potentially vulnerable.
- The extent to which leaders and managers at all levels are driving improvement through monitoring provision and taking effective action.

Information about the school

Aston Fields Middle School serves the community of south east Bromsgrove. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average as is the proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds. Very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average but the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school was given a notice to improve when it was last inspected because significant improvement was required in relation to the progress made by pupils at Key Stage 2. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2009. The school holds many awards, including Healthy Schools status, Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark, Eco-Schools Green Flag, Investors in People and the International School Award.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

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. Its overall effectiveness is now good. Concerted action by a new leadership team, with the willing support of staff, has had a marked impact on the quality of provision at Key Stage 2. The curriculum is more stimulating and teachers have a much clearer understanding of how to maximise learning for different groups of pupils. The school has successfully boosted the use made of assessment information in lessons. Largely as a result, the quality of teaching across the school has improved and is now good. There is no teaching which is less than satisfactory but there are still occasions when teachers do not expect enough of pupils, give them insufficient feedback or fail to correct misunderstandings as soon as they appear. The pupils' achievement in Years 5 and 6 is now satisfactory or better and across the school as a whole is good. The school has had considerable success in improving standards in writing but, at both key stages, achievement in mathematics and science remains higher than in English. Reading standards are above average but the school is aware that pupils could make more even more progress.

The pupils' personal development is at least good and their behaviour, attendance and contribution to the school and wider community are outstanding. The pupils remark that there is little misbehaviour because lessons are more interesting, teachers are better at telling them how to improve and rewards and sanctions are clearly understood and consistently applied. They relish opportunities to take on responsibility and they engage fully in decision-making about their own learning, for example through the regular academic guidance meetings between individual pupils and a teacher. The school's care, guidance and support are outstanding and all staff play their part in enabling the pupils to feel completely safe. The school goes the extra mile to support potentially vulnerable pupils and is beginning to play a leading role in instigating inter-agency action where required. The school is outward-looking and there are real strengths in the international links it has forged and in its charity work. It recognises, however, that there are gaps in the range of ways it fosters understanding and provides first-hand experience of different cultures closer to home.

The governing body is rightly proud of what has been achieved since it appointed the headteacher. Its 'Ofsted' committee of three members is developing ways to hold the school to account in a rigorous but supportive manner but the governing body depends heavily on the school for information and evaluation. Nevertheless, the school has shown that it has at least good capacity to sustain further improvement. In some respects, its capacity is even better than this. Its knowledge of its own strengths and

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weaknesses is exceptionally well-founded, insightful and influential in determining priorities. Strong leadership within the school stretches beyond the headteacher and the school's track record since September is one of systematic and rapid improvement towards outstanding performance. The school acknowledges that many developments are not yet fully embedded but the inspection team endorses the questionnaire response of one pupil who wrote: 'The school has improved big time'.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to outstanding by further strengthening the consistency with which teachers use assessment information to plan and adapt lessons and provide feedback to pupils.
- Raise achievement in English by improving the progress which pupils make in reading.
- Develop the pupils' awareness and understanding of the diversity of cultures within the wider community.
- Improve the quality of governance further by considering how to extend the sharply focused approach to monitoring the school's performance which the 'Ofsted' committee is developing.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Achievement is good and all groups of pupils enjoy learning and tackle work enthusiastically in lessons. They are self-motivated and respond positively to opportunities for independent and group work. When activities are well adapted to their needs they maintain a high pace of work. They appreciate receiving feedback about the quality of their work and take seriously the frequent opportunities to comment on their own and others' efforts. The pupils make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 2 and this quickens as they move through the school. By the end of Year 8, all have made good progress. Many make outstanding progress in mathematics and science to reach attainment that is often well above average. Their progress in English is catching up, especially in writing, and attainment is above average. Gifted and talented pupils thrive as do those with special educational needs. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

An overwhelming majority of pupils say they feel entirely safe at school and are entirely confident that the school will deal with any matters that arise. Exemplary behaviour contributes hugely to the quality of learning, a feature commented on by the pupils themselves. Their maturity ensures that they make the most of opportunities to take on responsibilities as prefects, peer mentors or members of the school council. Their contribution extends beyond the school through links with the local arts festival, the local partnership of churches and a range of charities. The pupils participate keenly in a large number of initiatives to develop understanding about sustainable approaches to local and global issues.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is good because a large majority of it enables pupils to make good progress and there is none which is inadequate; some is outstanding. All of the teachers plan lessons with a view to meeting the needs of different groups so that all are challenged, though in practice expectations are not always accurate. The best lessons are stimulating and fast paced with plenty of opportunities for the pupils to contribute. In these lessons the pupils are given very clear information about what they need to do to succeed and the teachers are usually quick to spot and intervene when pupils are struggling. Teaching which is only satisfactory sometimes misses signs that pupils lack the necessary understanding or knowledge to attempt new work, or does not tell pupils clearly enough how well they are doing, either in class or through marking.

The school has begun to enhance the quality of its curriculum at Key Stage 2 by adopting some of the recognised strengths of its Key Stage 3 provision. In particular, the pupils have appreciated the greater emphasis on creative arts and more active ways of learning, for instance through practical work in science, problem-solving in mathematics and making links between talking and writing in English. Lessons in

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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learning how to learn effectively have also been welcomed. Enrichment activities are also a marked feature of the school's work and many are recognised by a range of awards. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that it provides lessons which take account of the particular needs of gifted and talented pupils and those with special educational needs. The school offers outstanding care, guidance and support to enable all pupils to make the most of these opportunities. Particular attention has been paid to potentially vulnerable pupils, all of whom are known as individuals. The responses to the pupils' questionnaire were emphatically positive on this point.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher's exceptional leadership and management have ensured that the staff are clear about the school's potential and understand what they need to do to achieve it. He is extremely well supported by a cohesive and committed team of senior leaders and middle managers who are rapidly developing new skills and confidence under his guidance. A range of monitoring activities ensures that each department and member of staff is held accountable for the pupils' success. Detailed information about the pupils' achievement has been used very effectively to reset targets and ensure they are suitably challenging. Improvement planning has sensibly embraced the whole school but there has been a particular focus on Key Stage 2. Rigorous monitoring and advice, coupled with consistently high expectations about implementing the school's new policies on learning have had significant success in lifting the quality of teaching and learning.

The school's highly effective systems for evaluating assessment data have ensured that it is well placed to promote equality by identifying whether any particular groups are performing less well than others. There is no overall trend but the school is aware of slight variations within individual year groups. The creation of a new post for an intervention manager has been influential in ensuring that the school responds appropriately to any such warning signs. Safeguarding procedures are robust and governors play an important part in guaranteeing that the government's requirements are met. The school has made a good start in developing its understanding of how it promotes community cohesion, and meets requirements, but it recognises that some aspects of this provision are underdeveloped.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Many of the written comments on the parent and carer questionnaires reflected concerns from the past about issues such as the variable quality of teaching and homework, some incidents of misbehaviour and a lack of information about children's progress and how to support them. A few parents and carers were not convinced that the school had remedied these issues but many thought that there had been a significant improvement since the last inspection because of the new headteacher. The inspection team found that the school was searching in its self scrutiny and recognised previous failings. The school was keen to tackle any remaining weaknesses and the inspectors judged that it was very well placed to do so.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aston Fields Middle School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 131 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 583 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	41	31	84	64	5	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	48	37	73	56	7	5	1	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	28	21	82	63	17	13	1	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	24	85	65	12	9	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	29	22	89	68	6	5	2	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	15	90	69	15	11	2	2
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	15	91	69	13	10	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	25	19	86	66	7	5	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	21	89	68	10	8	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	23	18	82	63	15	11	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	15	84	64	11	8	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	36	27	82	63	4	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	38	29	80	61	8	6	2	2

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



17 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Aston Fields Middle School, Bromsgrove B60 2ET

The inspection team enjoyed meeting you and hearing your views about the school. I have written my report and this letter explains what we found.

The inspectors were impressed by many things which had got better since the last inspection. We think that your school is now good and in some ways is outstanding. Many of you told us that behaviour is much better because your lessons are more interesting. We agree with this view. The teachers track your progress very carefully and know what type of work you need to help you reach higher standards. You told us that your headteacher made sure that everybody knew what was expected of them. Again we agreed with this. We think that the teachers are working very hard to make every bit of the school as good as it can be by regularly checking how well they are doing. We saw how you played your part in the school's success by joining in with activities enthusiastically and taking on responsibilities, such as being prefects.

The school is very good at knowing what it needs to do to continue improving. We agreed with the headteacher that it would be helpful to focus on these areas:

- making the teaching even better so that you are always clear how to improve your work
- giving more attention to your progress in reading - you can help by trying particularly hard with this
- developing your understanding of different ways of life in Britain
- asking the governors to get to know even more about the school.

I wish you all the best for your future success.

Yours sincerely

Rob Hubbleday

Her Majesty's Inspector

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