



Aston Fields Middle School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116957
LEA Worcestershire
Inspection number 279963
Inspection dates 17 May 2006 to 18 May 2006
Reporting inspector Brian Cartwright HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary	School address	Drummond Road
School category	Community		Bromsgrove
Age range of pupils	9 to 13		Worcestershire B60 2ET
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01527 876026
Number on roll	607	Fax number	01527 574798
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Julia Adams

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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

Aston Fields is in the south-eastern outskirts of Bromsgrove, one of four middle schools serving two high schools. Pupils of all abilities from a full range of socio-economic backgrounds attend the school. Most pupils walk to school. There are low numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, low numbers of pupils with statements of special educational need and average numbers of pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Aston Fields gives a satisfactory education to pupils, and adequate value for money. Standards attained by pupils are currently broadly in line with national averages, and represent satisfactory progress during the time they have been at the school. The pupils' personal development is good, as are many aspects of the care and support pupils receive day by day. The school has good links with outside agencies and local schools. All staff are appropriately well qualified and fully committed to ensuring the pupils' success, so pupils enjoy school and behave well. Some features of the curriculum encourage high performance, for example the early entry of all Year 8 pupils for the mathematics Key Stage 3 tests. There are some outstanding examples of individual creativity from pupils.

In the school, there are examples of outstanding teaching, excellent marking practice, and good planning. But these are not consistent across all years and subjects, because of inadequate monitoring and evaluation by the school of the impact of its teaching and learning policies. The school knows of its strengths, and agrees with the overall satisfactory judgement. However, it has not consistently identified the causes of underperformance, and therefore lacks clear solutions to tackle them. Teachers are not consistently using their good information about pupil progress to plan appropriately challenging lesson activities for every ability. In many areas, the school has not made sufficient progress since the previous inspection. Despite this, the school does have the capacity to improve because of the competence of its staff, the good attitudes to learning of its pupils, and the willingness of its leadership to respond to the challenges.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve self-evaluation to clearly identify the critical aspects that need improvement, and what actions will achieve this.
- Ensure the implementation of actions to bring about improvement.
- Use information about the pupils' progress consistently to plan lessons in order to fully challenge every learner.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The current progress of pupils across the school as a whole represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils arrive in Year 5 with broadly average academic attainments. Standards seen in Year 8 match the national average, with some above average performance in Year 8 mathematics. There is some high quality creative writing, often in unlikely settings. For example a science homework provided one pupil with the scope to write a brilliantly entertaining interpretation of the geological rock cycle with the tale of a rock called Douglas. His rather unfortunate experiences of the forces of nature ended with his ultimate descent into 'the soil collective', and final resting place as a roof slate.

The school teaches the final two years (5 and 6) of Key Stage 2. Evidence of the standards in Year 6 seen during this inspection are now broadly at expected levels. However, in 2005 the Year 6 results were not good enough overall, and inadequate in mathematics. Then, overall progress throughout Key Stage 2 was well below national expectations. Some of the factors causing that poor performance were unique to the 2004/05 year and have now been successfully resolved.

Different groups of pupils make broadly similar progress, and the school has responded to slight differences between boys and girls evident in the previous year's results. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress, thanks to good support by the skilled special needs team, including excellent work by learning mentors.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The school works well together to make sure that the pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Assemblies cover a range of events and religious festivals, supported by a weekly prayer that is shared in class tutorials. A sound citizenship education programme adds to the good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. There are many opportunities for pupils' trips both in Britain and abroad, and links with international schools. A number of charities benefit from the pupils' fundraising.

Almost all pupils enjoy school and act sensibly and courteously towards each other and staff. Inspectors observed consistently good pupil behaviour and attitudes to learning, confirming a recent local authority observation, although a small minority of parents did not think behaviour was good. Attendance is good and exclusions minimal, aided by good support from learning mentors. Pupils feel safe because the school deals with bullying well, although sometimes not as quickly as pupils would hope for.

The school promotes healthy lifestyles systematically in all years through health and physical education, and the school council has played an important part in developing healthier options in the dining room. However, take up is still limited as many pupils continue to bring unhealthy snacks and drinks to school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Most teachers of Years 7 and 8 have good subject expertise. These specialist skills are also effectively used in foundation subjects in Years 5 and 6. The management of pupils' behaviour is good and in most lessons pupils concentrate well and work diligently. In some particularly successful lessons, teachers employ a variety of learning styles to stimulate and engage the wide range of ability of the learners. Here, work matches pupil ability well, with opportunity for paired work, discussion, experiment, and extended writing.

There is no systematic whole school approach to lesson planning. Assessment data to plan future lessons is not used consistently. Some pupils are assessed accurately and are made fully aware of their progress and what they need to do to improve. In science, pupils complete a simple review after each topic that sets out what they should learn better. An outstanding example in music involved pupils confidently using national criteria to evaluate each other's work. However, marking does not always lead to clear targets for improvement. While pupils with learning difficulty are supported very well, teachers do not regularly plan for tasks that challenge the more able.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets statutory requirements and the needs of most pupils. Links between Years 6 and 7 in English, mathematics and science are not secure and require further improvement. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities which are enjoyed by a large number of pupils. All pupils, including talented pupils, get exciting opportunities to extend their skills in the expressive arts course in Years 7 and 8. The fast track mathematics course in Years 7 and 8 provides a good opportunity for pupils to make rapid progress. Provision for literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Information and communication technology (ICT) is well funded but not being used effectively by pupils across the curriculum. Some high quality projects in the community have been tackled in the past. Work related aspects of learning are not yet fully developed but good practice is evident in the theatre element of the performing arts course.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The school is a community in which the pupils feel safe. The vast majority of parents believe that their children are well cared for. Pupils are aware of what to do if they have any problems and feel that these issues are dealt with successfully. Adults in school know their pupils well, especially the staff who support those with learning needs, or otherwise vulnerable. The special needs coordinator and her team of staff make a valuable contribution to guiding and supporting these pupils. Good links are made with outside agencies and parents are generally kept well informed. Child protection procedures are in place and staff are fully conversant with them.

There is an effective programme to ensure that Year 5 pupils have a smooth transition to this school and for Year 8 to the high schools. The reward system and behaviour consequences are well understood by pupils and are applied consistently.

There has been an improvement since the last inspection in assessing how well pupils are doing, but not all teachers use this information in their planning. Heads of year and tutors are effective in their oversight of the pupils' personal development but apart from Year 7 are not yet fully involved in academic mentoring. Pupils know the levels at which they are working at but need more rigorous guidance about how to reach their targets.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. School leaders consistently promote good care for pupils, exemplified by the very effective approach to mentoring vulnerable learners. Difficult staffing circumstances in 2004/5 understandably affected pupil achievement at Key Stage 2, and compromised the capacity of the remaining senior leaders to improve standards. Parents and pupils have appropriate opportunities to contribute to school review, and they consider that the school is providing a good education. The school does well to ensure all groups of learners are equally well provided for.

Subject coordinators track pupils' progress well and observe colleagues teaching. However, in the past, the school's evaluation of teaching and learning has not exposed the reasons for underperformance, and consequently the development plan was not precisely enough tailored to resolve the problems. Solutions already exist within the school, but excellent practice by talented staff is not being shared across the school. Some key policies are inconsistently applied. For example, there is no systematic monitoring of either planning or the scrutiny of pupils' work. Good information about pupils' progress is not used consistently well enough at a day to day level to inform lesson planning, or to ensure a coordinated approach to intervention and support, where pupils need help. As a result, the school has struggled to meet its past performance targets. A good, albeit very recent, internal report on teaching and learning has accurately identified the key issues.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and have been rightly concerned about Key Stage 2. They have sought advice from the local authority, and visited similar schools, to try to better understand this issue. They have recently instigated a 'learning walk' to improve their knowledge of school life. Financial management is satisfactory, with good day-to-day procedures and a budgetary analysis that keeps governors well informed. Accommodation is good and well cared for. However, despite significant resources dedicated to ICT, there are ongoing concerns about reliability and access to networked services. The use and subsequent impact of ICT on learning are not evaluated. Despite some important shortfalls, the management and leadership has the capacity, and genuine commitment at all levels, to respond swiftly to the inspection's findings.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for your courtesy and helpful conversations during our visit to your school. We spoke with many of you in meetings, and around the school, and were impressed with your enthusiasm and good behaviour.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education, so that you can be confident of making sound progress as you go from Years 5 to 8. In particular, you are developing good personal qualities, such as hard work, consideration for those around you, and a pride in your own achievements. When you find learning to be a bit difficult, the school is good at helping you make progress. You are fortunate to work in pleasant buildings with caring staff, and are lucky to have so many extra activities available.

To help make the school better still, we suggest that your teachers should give you more guidance on how you can improve your work and meet your targets. You, in turn, should take notice of this advice and continue to try your best. Teachers may also set you work that you will find a bit more difficult than in the past, but this is because they know that, if you really concentrate, you will be able to manage.

We have every confidence in your good attitudes to learning, and in the quality of your teachers, headteacher and supporting staff. We think that together you will quickly find school to be even more rewarding, as you master more skills and achieve higher results.