

Yardleys School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103520
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336099
Inspection dates	9–10 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	917
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Gardner
Headteacher	Rosemary Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	7 March 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time observing 37 lessons of 37 teachers; they met with teachers and support staff, middle and senior managers, groups of students and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at governing body minutes, safeguarding records, analyses of school performance data and reports of local authority visits. Parents completed 66 questionnaires.

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

- the causes of the sharply rising standards
- the impact of targeted support for groups of students from minority heritage backgrounds
- the consistency of lesson plans that provide for the range of abilities and prior knowledge of students in the class
- the effectiveness of governance.

Information about the school

The school is a specialist science college, set in an area of East Birmingham experiencing high levels of socio-economic challenge. About half the students are eligible for free school meals. This is approximately three times the national proportion. Most pupils are from minority ethnic heritage backgrounds, and about half are of Pakistani heritage. The proportion of pupils for whom English is a second language is well above the national average. About half the pupils are on the schools register of special educational needs, and this is well above average. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is also above the national average. The school has achieved many awards, notably Healthy Schools Award, International School Award, Arts Mark, Sports Mark, Green Flag ECO schools, and Investors in People.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This outstanding school exemplifies the very best in educational provision, showing that young people can achieve exceptionally well, irrespective of circumstances that for many would put them at risk of failure. Excellent leadership from the headteacher has developed outstanding teaching and learning, and created an exuberant learning ethos. Users cherish the relatively new building, which contains wonderful examples of how to celebrate and display students work in every nook and cranny. The quality of student work in the main atrium is impressive, reinforced by the lively, friendly and enthusiastic attitudes of the students who congregate there in their hundreds. Students are cheerful, considerate, very hard working and thoroughly enjoy school. They throw themselves into learning in and outside of the classroom because teachers have captured their interest and enjoyment of study. One student noted that 'teachers go off at tangents – it is really interesting and you think 'oh my goodness!''

Almost every aspect of the school's work has improved substantially since the previous inspection. Standards in public examinations have risen rapidly since the previous inspection and continue to climb. The average attainment of pupils arriving in Year 7 is well below average. By the time they leave in Year 11, overall attainment is above average. This represents outstanding progress, and is all the more exceptional when compared to other students in similar settings nationally. The school's outstanding track record of improving performance is grounded in secure, continuous monitoring and evaluation of student outcomes by managers at all levels.

Classroom teaching and learning is outstanding, because teachers insist on students' full participation throughout most of the lesson. Teachers provide a wide range of learning activities; these meet the needs and interests of most students well, and in the very best lessons the tasks are further tailored to individual students. Teachers mark work consistently well, providing very good advice on what students should do to improve. Students often respond by correcting the work, or carrying out an additional task but this response is not yet routine for every class.

Governors retain a deep commitment to ensuring the school continues to serve its local community. They have good information from school leaders on its ongoing performance, but are not yet fully and systematically involved in evaluating the school independently from the school's own (and excellent) review practices. Although statutory policies are up to date, review of the impact of these policies by the governing body is inconsistent.

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The specialist science college status is at the heart of the school's excellent partnerships. These include strong working ties with: local primary schools that ensure good transition to secondary school; post sixteen providers that support very high participation rates in science and information and communication technology courses; teacher training institutions that bring national expertise and advice to enhance teaching, and strong links to the wider national science, mathematics and engineering education community. The science department leads on many aspects of teacher training, the school-wide environmental policy, and in curriculum development. The school has routinely exceeded its statutory and specialist targets.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the effectiveness of assessment by:
 - providing more opportunity for students to reflect upon and respond to feedback from teachers
 - ensure more systematic planning of lesson activities matched to individual pupil prior attainment and knowledge.
- Ensure governors independently review and evaluate school provision, guided by external partners as well as internal school reports.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Most measures of academic standards in 2009 were above average. Those for English and mathematics GCSE were not, although were much better than in 2008. Students still made good progress in English and mathematics. Overall progress was outstanding for almost every student. Boys, including those from minority heritage backgrounds, attained much better than the national picture. Students with learning difficulties or disabilities also made excellent progress. Current Year 11 students performed even better in mock examinations, compared to last year, particularly higher ability students. Good-humoured, open and friendly dialogue between teachers and students reinforces a delightful working ethos in lessons. Students are keen and proud to show staff and visitors what they have learned. Students concentrate hard in lessons and show commitment to learning in class. They take up the many and varied additional learning opportunities provided by the school in high numbers. Most students attend additional sessions in key subjects to help improve their grades. The high quality internet-based virtual learning environment (VLE) is well used by learners of all ages. It contains bespoke and commercial interactive learning tasks, and the school monitors activity on these. That data also helps shape lesson planning.

Students told inspectors that they feel safe in school, and older students affirmed that incidents of poor behaviour have reduced substantially. They consider that the recent move to vertical form groups has eliminated previous concerns of older students appearing intimidating to younger ones and exclusions are now lower than

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the national average. Students know how to stay safe, exercise well and eat healthily. The school canteen provides good meals, the school insists all students participate in two hours of sport lessons each week, and many students also participate in the additional sporting activities after school. Participation in these by boys is higher than for girls. The school has a number of different student groups and individuals that take on responsibility for a range of projects. There is a strong ECO council, and students are proud of the schools 'Green Flag' ecology award. Students are generous in their financial support of a wide range of charities. There are good and developing international links, including schools in Pakistan and Rwanda. The school provides an 'entitlement' for students to experience a wide variety of visits and trips, to the countryside, the seaside, the space science centre in Leicester as well as a foreign visit and residential stay.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

How effective is the provision?

Almost all teaching is good, with much that is outstanding. There are many examples of excellent practice with high levels of challenge. Practical activities are used effectively to teach concepts, students assess each other's work, and teachers skilfully direct questions, to particular students, that require a full verbal response. In a mathematics lesson, students pounced upon the work to correct a 'wrong' maths exam answer. A science student expressed surprise and disappointment when she exclaimed 'is it over already?' at the end of the lesson. Teachers regularly and accurately assess student work, and identify what needs improving. The school has excellent student achievement data that is usually used well to plan lessons matched

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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to students’ prior attainment.

The good curriculum matches the needs and interests of most learners. Excellent partnerships with other providers enhance the range of subjects available at Key Stage 4, enabling a diverse range of ‘pathways to success’. Vocational studies are particularly effective in ensuring students maximise their potential. The VLE empowers students by giving them out-of-hours access to good learning material, and participation is high. There are excellent arrangements to support literacy across the curriculum, with very strong support for students such as those recently arrived with very low levels of English. Similar school-wide support for numeracy is under development. The reduction in volume of courses with a view to improving progress for higher attaining pupils is beginning to have the planned effect.

Care, guidance and support for all students are outstanding. One student encapsulated the commitment of every member of staff when she said ‘I’d say they are really committed to the job. They do more than the job really is, you know, not just for the money... they care about what students get out of it’. A sophisticated but simple to use school-tracking database gives staff fingertip access to every aspect of a student’s progress and welfare. School staff treasure students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Individual staff know individual students well; they understand and effectively meet their needs using external agencies where necessary. The vertical forms have two tutors per group; usually one is a teacher and the other a support staff member. High quality staff training has provided all of them with the skills they need to guide and support students and meet and advise parents.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
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 leads by example; her high expectations of what young people can and should achieve are underpinned by her determination to ensure provision is up to the job. Her senior team share that ambition, as do teaching and support staff. Senior managers systematically monitor the impact of the school’s work, including the effectiveness of partnerships. There is no hesitation about trying something new, providing another extra-curricular club, seeking advice on how to further improve teaching. Within the school, students and staff cooperate well to establish an amicable and friendly working ethos, irrespective of the very wide ranging backgrounds that they represent. The school does not have a systematic plan to

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address wider local community cohesion challenges, but it knows what those challenges are. Some echo national and international difficulties; the school itself is a beacon of how those different communities can work in harmony.

Procedures to ensure the safety of students are robust and rigorously applied. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training, as do governors. Governors have excellent information on school performance provided by school leaders. However, notes of their meetings do not consistently record governor’s evaluation of that performance, or their evaluation of the impact of some statutory policies. Policies related to equality of opportunity, are working exceptionally well, as evidenced by the high achievement of all learners, the high uptake of science for girls in further education, and very low numbers of students who do not find successful employment, education or training when they leave school. Staff represent a wide range of heritage backgrounds themselves, at all levels; students can see excellent role models for their own future ambitions.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

Almost all responses from parents were supportive of the school, mirroring the schools own regular surveys of parental opinion. Unanimously parents agree with inspectors that the school is well led and managed, and the school keeps their child safe. A very small minority felt the school was not helping their child to have a healthy lifestyle, but inspectors judge that the school does provide well for this aspect. It notes, however, that some girls are reticent about participation in sports.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Yardleys 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 66 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 917 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	22	33	40	61	4	6	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	31	47	34	52	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	27	41	37	56	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	29	44	67	3	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	23	35	42	64	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	29	41	62	5	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	12	18	43	65	9	14	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)	17	26	46	70	2	3	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	15	23	47	71	3	5	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	26	39	33	50	6	9	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	14	21	46	70	5	8	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	18	27	47	71	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	27	41	36	55	3	5	0	0

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 all 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 pupils' 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.



11 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Yardleys School, Birmingham, B11 3EY

Thank you very much for your positive welcome and friendly conversations we enjoyed during our inspection of your school. We have judged your school to be outstanding. Through the dedication and enthusiasm of your teachers and support staff, you are achieving exceptionally well. Your headteacher's excellent leadership has ensured outstanding teaching and learning. We were very impressed by your cheerful, lively, considerate and very hard working attitudes. We also appreciated how well you are looking after the new building. It contains wonderful examples of your work on display; every space has something to interest and celebrate.

We agree with you, and your parents, that the school keeps you very safe, and provides you every opportunity to stay fit and healthy. The curriculum that you study is interesting, responsive to your needs and interests, and also gives you every opportunity to take part in additional activities, clubs, trips and visits. The VLE is also becoming an important part of your achievements as it gives you the resources to study and learn beyond the classroom. School leaders, however, agree with inspectors that there are a couple of features of the school that could still further improve. Some lessons could give you activities matched more closely to your individual talents and skills. More time for you to reflect upon, and then respond to the good marking and verbal advice you receive should give you the chance to maximise the effectiveness of assessment. Governors should be more consistently monitoring the performance of the school for themselves.

Best wishes for your future success.

Yours sincerely

Brian Cartwright
Her Majesty's Inspector

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