

Queen Elizabeth's Mercian School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124418
Local Authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	340562
Inspection dates	19–20 November 2009
Reporting inspector	David Driscoll

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	926
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brenda Dainter
Headteacher	Kevin Debney
Date of previous school inspection	0 January 2007
School address	Ashby Road Tamworth Staffordshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 39 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the data on students' performance, including their current progress, safeguarding records, plans for the future, and records of the school's own monitoring of its performance. The responses to 116 parent questionnaires were analysed, alongside responses to questionnaires from staff and students.

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

- whether boys and those following the alternative curriculum are making enough progress
- the use of assessment to set suitably demanding work for all groups of students
- whether sufficient account is taken of the impact of provision when judging its effectiveness, so that effective actions can be taken to drive the school's improvement

Information about the school

Queen Elizabeth's Mercian School is situated close to the centre of Tamworth. The number on roll has fallen since the school was last inspected. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is above average. The proportion of students from a minority ethnic background is below average and very few are at an early stage of learning English.

The school was awarded specialist status for music with information and communication technology (ICT) in 2005. The school holds the Sportsmark, Artsmark and Eco Schools awards. The school has joined with others in the area to provide a greater choice of courses for 14 to 18 year olds. In 2008, the school became a National Challenge school as the proportion of pupils leaving with five or more GCSEs at grade C and above, including English and mathematics, fell below 30%.

In 2008, proposals were put forward for the school to be closed as part of the reorganisation of education in Tamworth. In June 2009 it was confirmed that the school would remain open, but would convert to an 11 to 16 school in 2012.

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?

4

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

4

Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

The information gained from assessments is not analysed in sufficient depth to provide the school's leaders, including governors, with a clear picture of how well students are progressing in different subjects and classes. This makes it difficult for leaders to accurately judge the effectiveness of provision, and teaching in particular, in order to identify where improvements need to be made. Lessons are checked frequently and regularly, but the evaluations are over-generous because they take too little account of the impact of teaching on the students' learning, leaving leaders with a false impression of the school's overall effectiveness. Standards in Year 11 have fallen from average to low since the school was last inspected because the progress made by students is inadequate. Teaching is not meeting the needs of students in Years 7 to 11, because not enough account is taken of their prior knowledge, skills and understanding when planning lessons. As a result, the work is not pitched at the right level for groups or individuals. Teaching in the sixth form takes more account of students' ability, so they make satisfactory progress. Some staff have lost confidence in the school's leadership and do not feel able to play a part in helping the school to improve.

The school has made significant improvements in some areas since it was last inspected. Most aspects of personal development are now good, including behaviour. Attendance is now average and continuing to rise. These improvements are a result of better care, guidance and support and also because of the impact of the school's specialist status. The school is a centre for music in Tamworth, which means that students have many opportunities to engage with a range of different groups and communities. Students feel particularly safe and well looked after because the school's leaders have ensured that they always have an adult to turn to.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching is consistently satisfactory or better by making use of accurate assessments to set suitably challenging work for all pupils
 - Improve the quality of self-evaluation by:
 - carrying out more rigorous analysis of data to provide a clearer picture of

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students' progress in each subject and class

- taking greater account of students' learning and progress when evaluating teaching
- Take steps to ensure that all staff feel part of the school's drive for improvement

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

4

Students join the school with standards that are broadly average. Examination results at the end of Year 11 are falling, and are low, because of widespread underachievement. Low standards were evident in the work seen by inspectors. In lessons, too many students, both boys and girls, failed to make enough progress. Students of higher ability quickly completed all the tasks they were given, because they found the work too easy, while those of lower ability struggled to complete work. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities do better than other students, and make satisfactory progress, because teaching assistants help to tailor the work to their specific needs. Progress for the very few students who are at an early stage of learning English is inadequate. Standards in science, a concern at the last inspection, have improved, but overall, standards have fallen, despite the school exceeding the National Challenge benchmark in 2009. Students have a firm enough grasp of the basic skills to prepare them for later life, but are not being extended to attain the standards of which they are capable.

Students behave well both in and out of the classroom. In lessons they concentrate and work hard. Students are polite and respectful to adults, and helpful to visitors. Students express a strong desire to lead healthy lifestyles and enjoy the many opportunities to take part in sporting activities. They demonstrate their good capacity for quiet reflection in assemblies and in subjects such as history. A high proportion play a strong role in the local and wider community through the school's specialist status.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	4
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	4
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2

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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Pupils' behaviour	2
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 Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Students like and get on well with their teachers. Lessons often make good use of technology to set the scene, and students are always clear about what they have to do. However, after the introduction, the same work is often given to the whole class, rather than adapting tasks to the ability of the students. The main problems lie with assessment. Teachers of some subjects, such as English, mark work frequently to make accurate assessments of students' progress and then use the information gained to plan lessons that meet the needs of differing ability groups. In other subjects, there are weaknesses in either marking or the checking of students' progress during lessons that lead to inaccurate assessments and too often the information gained is simply not used when planning lessons. The curriculum is cleverly planned to ensure that almost all students follow their first choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11. In all years, the curriculum is well-planned to meet the demands of the National Curriculum or examination requirements. However it is not sufficiently adapted to meet the needs of the very few students who are at an early stage of learning English. Around 10% of students followed an 'alternative' curriculum last year, which led to high levels of underachievement. This course has now been discontinued.

Systems to improve behaviour and attendance are working well. Since the previous inspection exclusions have fallen from a high level to below average, while attendance is no longer inadequate. The introduction of mixed-age tutor groups, has led to a greater sense of security and integration. The Oasis centre plays a strong part in changing students' attitudes for the better, and the result is seen in lessons where students want to do well.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	4
	4
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team has improved pastoral care, with resulting improvements in students' personal development and provision for ensuring equality. Racist incidents are now very rare and always challenged appropriately. The school adopts good practice across all areas of its safeguarding procedures. Parents are happy with what the school provides, and particularly the lines of communication that are open to them. Reports are frequent and informative. Parents feel very comfortable about approaching the school with any concerns they may have. Much has been done to improve community cohesion. International links are now good, although links with schools that are in areas different from Tamworth are more limited. However, the same success is not reflected in teaching and academic standards. Checks on lessons by the school's leaders suggest that teaching is good, when it is inadequate and leading to widespread underachievement. The analysis of data on students' progress shows that they are underachieving, but not why or in which classes. In responses to the questionnaire, a much higher proportion of staff than usually seen is unhappy with aspects of senior leadership. In particular, they say they do not feel valued by senior leaders. The leaders have been unsuccessful in embedding ambition. Governors' attention has been focused on the reorganisation proposals and on meeting National Challenge targets with the result that they have neglected their monitoring duties.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	4
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	4
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	4
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
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	4

Sixth form

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

Students in the sixth form have a wide range of courses from which to choose, helped by the good links within the consortium of schools. Nevertheless, the range of vocational courses is more limited. Students are well looked after and receive good guidance on areas such as application to university. Guidance as to which A level courses to follow is less effective. Some students start courses to which they are not suited, so the drop-out rate is relatively high for some subjects. Teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have a good command of their subjects and mark work accurately. This allows them to quickly identify where students have not fully understood the work. Students are content to sit and listen in lessons, rather than playing an active part themselves. Some teachers allow them to do this, and fail to promote students' independent study skills, which will stand them in good stead for their futures in such aspects as research and investigation. The sixth form runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and there are sound plans for its development.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

Parents are generally happy with all that the school provides. A few parents have concerns about the way that behaviour is managed. The inspectors found that the improved systems for dealing with any misbehaviour are working well, with internal and external exclusions falling rapidly.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Queen Elizabeth's Mercian 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 116 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 926 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	37	32	69	59	10	9	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	31	27	75	65	9	8	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	45	39	67	58	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	27	77	66	6	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	20	17	86	74	5	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	20	17	78	67	13	11	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	15	76	66	12	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)	23	20	75	65	6	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	24	21	81	70	6	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	24	21	65	56	13	11	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	16	70	60	13	11	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	26	22	76	66	4	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	35	30	74	64	5	4	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 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



21 November 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Queen Elizabeth's Mercian School, Tamworth, B79 8AH

Thank you for all the help you gave inspectors when we visited your school. We found you to be polite and friendly. We were impressed by your behaviour, both in lessons and around the school. You told us that behaviour has improved, and we found this to be the case, because the school now has better systems for managing poor behaviour and for encouraging you to behave well in the first place. You told us that you feel safe in school, and we agree. Staff take good care of you and ensure that you have someone to talk to if you have a problem. Your attendance has improved, although some of you could still do better in this respect.

Unfortunately, we found that the school is not doing enough to enable you to learn as quickly as you should or to reach the standards of which you are capable. You work hard in lessons, but frequently the work is too easy for the most able among you, or too hard for those who are struggling a bit. We have asked your teachers to take more account of what you already know, understand and can do when giving you tasks, so they are better matched to your abilities. This is already done in the sixth form, so students there are making satisfactory progress. Those of you who find learning difficult have additional help and are making satisfactory progress.

Your school is not as good as it should be. Standards are low and you are not making enough progress. The senior staff who run the school have not thoroughly understood this because they do not carry out accurate checks on the way in which teachers help you to learn. We have also asked them to analyse the data on your progress in greater depth, to find out exactly where and when you are not making enough improvement.

Yours sincerely

David Driscoll

Lead inspector

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