

King Edward VI Aston School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103555
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	308356
Inspection dates	12–13 March 2008
Reporting inspector	Brian Cartwright HMI

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

Type of school	Grammar (selective)
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	756
6th form	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Toby Norris
Headteacher	Colin Parker
Date of previous school inspection	9 February 2004
School address	Frederick Road Aston Birmingham B6 6DJ
Telephone number	01213 271130
Fax number	01213 287020

Age group	11–19
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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

This is a smaller than average secondary selective boys grammar school in north Birmingham in an area of significant socio-economic deprivation. It is one of seven King Edward VI foundation schools in Birmingham. Half the students are from Asian backgrounds. About a third of students' first language is not English although none is at an early stage of learning English. There are very few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The attainment of students on entry is exceptionally high, and they come from over 65 different primary schools. The school has recently built new laboratories, workshops and art facilities. It has specialist sports college status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

King Edward VI Aston is an outstanding school. Two carefully planned strands underpin the school's successful maintenance of a lively, dynamic learning culture. First, students achieve the very highest of academic standards as a result of the excellent progress they make through the school. Second, they develop outstanding personal qualities thanks to a rich, varied taught curriculum and an extensive programme of additional activities beyond lessons. As one parent said, 'The school is able to maintain a balance between academic studies and a life out of school.' Teaching is good, characterised by staff expertise and excellent teacher–student relationships that encourage debate and ensure students enjoy the challenge of learning difficult new topics. The net result is a school ethos that creates enthusiastic, responsible and very well behaved students who thoroughly enjoy school life, throwing themselves into hard work, and play, with gusto.

Teachers really enjoy teaching here. There is a virtuous circle set up where teachers can give of their best, students respond positively, which produces yet more enthusiastic teaching. The school personifies Proverbs 15:12; 'A wise teacher makes learning a joy'.

The senior leadership team is determined to improve standards still further. This gentle but irresistible resolve to do even better is personified in the headteacher's approach to monitoring and evaluation. He consults and considers the views of students and parents before making evolutionary changes to the curriculum to better match learners' aspirations. Although the classroom delivery of teachers is excellent throughout the school, inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that there are inconsistencies in the application of school assessment and marking policy in the main school; as another parent good-humouredly suggested, 'I would appreciate it if teachers who set homework actually marked it.' It means opportunities are occasionally missed to give feedback on what could be done better the next time.

The school's sports college specialist status has made an outstanding contribution to boosting the quality of the students' learning experiences. There are numerous extra-curricular opportunities to engage in sport and take on positions of responsibility. For example, many older students qualify as junior sports leaders. The impact of specialist status is evident in students' positive attitudes to learning. A particular strength is the link with local primary schools which make extensive use of the sporting facilities. The school has made exemplary use of the specialism via the initiatives of the teaching and learning forum in raising the quality of teaching through whole-school training.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an excellent sixth form that fosters individualism, academic excellence and the joy of learning and 'taking part.' There is flair and imagination in the way that senior leaders work – seeing the students as partners in school improvement. As a consequence, there is a shared responsibility for making the school as successful as possible and a shared responsibility for finding solutions to problems if they occur. Students have a strong sense of personal responsibility, sharing in and making an important contribution to the school as a whole and in particular the education of younger boys. The sixth formers are outstanding role models and ambassadors for the school. They serve the school extremely well, helping it achieve its ambitions and future targets. This helps them develop the skills and qualities beneficial in their future

studies and employment. They leave the school confident, thoughtful, insightful, tolerant and with strong moral responsibility for caring for others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the consistency of the application of the school's assessment policy, particularly in respect of day-to-day marking.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are exceptionally high and achievement is outstanding in Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Students arrive with very high Key Stage 2 standards. The school meticulously analyses these and other test results to set challenging and personalised targets for every student, subject and class. Almost all students hit these targets, and the academic progress this represents is outstanding. The school is not content with this, but continues to set even higher threshold targets for the number of pupils attaining A*/A grades at GCSE, and A grades at GCE A Level. These indicators are increasing over time. It has excellent progress tracking systems that ensure students who need some extra help get the attention necessary. There are some subjects at Key Stage 4 that are not doing as well as others, although the previous barriers presented by poor accommodation for art and design and technology have been resolved. Changes to the modern foreign language curriculum in Key Stage 3 are designed to improve outcomes in Key Stage 4.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

A major strength of the school is the outstanding personal development of students. Excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development together with outstanding behaviour and attendance – and the sheer enthusiasm and thirst for learning – make a powerful combination that contributes to outstanding academic achievement. The school successfully encourages boys to see themselves as responsible citizens with a moral conscience. The school council takes its responsibilities very seriously indeed. Healthy food is available and the council is continuing to work with caterers to further improve quality and price. In combination with plenty of sporting activities, students are developing healthy lifestyles. They have written their own school policies, for example on bullying and 'banned articles.' They take a keen interest in ensuring the rules they have made are followed. There are very few instances where the school rules are broken. On the rare occasion when boys have been temporarily excluded they return to a forgiving community and say they learn from their mistakes. Boys feel safe and well cared for and are confident that if they experience problems 'there is very prompt and effective action.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teaching and learning are good overall and outstanding in the sixth form. Students find teaching stimulating and value the continuous verbal guidance given by teachers which enables them to move forward towards even higher levels of attainment. Teachers' high expectations ensure students respond positively and are well motivated. As a result, students enjoy their learning enormously. Effective classroom teaching is characterised by teachers' very secure subject knowledge, a brisk pace and clear explanation of ideas and tasks. Students know exactly what they have to do and try hard as a result. There are excellent relationships between staff and students. Teachers expect students to give opinions backed up with justification. Skilful questioning ensures that students provide very full answers. For example, in an English lesson on Shakespeare in Year 9, the teacher's infectious enthusiasm enabled students to get to grips with the complexities of a play and use thinking skills of a high order.

Marking and assessment is beneficial where it diagnoses weaknesses, provides specific guidance on how to improve, and is acted upon by students. This good practice is not consistent, however, with occasional examples of superficial or missing marking apparent in some Key Stages 3 and 4 subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding in both the main school and sixth form because it fully meets the future needs and current interests of students. The school is very responsive to the views of students and parents as it continues to refine the taught formal curriculum. Recent changes include the provision of a better choice of modern foreign languages for Year 7 students whilst creating options for extra study of design and technology, art and music in Years 8 and 9. Changes to the Key Stage 4 taught curriculum are planned to minimise excessive coursework demands, whilst maximising chances for students and staff to explore specialist interests. The sixth form is essentially academic in nature, with further choices added this year. Nevertheless, it does effectively cater for the vocational aspirations of students as most continue to university studies. Almost all Year 11 students stay on to the sixth form, and the others remain in education, employment or training.

A vast number of additional activities engage almost all students; some 55 different choices this term, which implies staff on average are each offering more than one extra-curricular option. This wide range of extra opportunities is a major factor in developing students' motivation, enjoyment and responsibility. The very high participation rates confirm the inclusive nature of King Edward VI Aston School's provision for all students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school provides outstanding care, guidance and support for all of its students, emphasising the importance it gives to treating each child as an individual. Students are encouraged to express their individual identity. The school is rightly proud of maintaining high standards of behaviour. A mutual respect permeates the whole school and the positive relationships it generates make students feel happy and secure. Students identify many possible sources of support available if they have difficulties, including sixth form peer mentors, who also provide excellent role models for the younger students. Students' achievements are shared, celebrated and rewarded well and their emotional well-being is strongly supported. The school is rigorous in ensuring students' safety. In response to some parental and student concerns the school has worked closely with local police to develop 'safer routes' to school, with additional transport available between school and the local rail station.

Partnerships, community links and the use of outside agencies underpin the very good provision of career education and guidance and the work related curriculum. Sixth form students speak very highly of all aspects of care and guidance, particularly the support they receive with applications for higher education or training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher, with his senior team, has accurately analysed how provision contributes to the outcomes for pupils. The school's many strengths and occasional weaknesses have been securely identified. The gentle determination of senior staff to further improve outcomes is evident in the rising standards, increasing curriculum choice, and very high level of staff commitment to the school. Middle managers are very enthusiastic, well supported in their monitoring roles, and benefit from excellent cooperation with each other.

The school 'puts great value in developing rounded pupils,' as one parent observed, and remains true to this mission. Students from many different backgrounds work and play harmoniously together; their energy, humour and enthusiasm for school is quite remarkable and a testimony to the success that school leaders, managers and staff have achieved in sustaining a culture of positive, high expectations. Governors are informed by the school of student progress although they have a relatively limited experience of day-to-day school life. The school enjoys relatively high per-pupil funding levels compared with other selective boys' schools, and uses it well to improve accommodation and facilities.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
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	2	
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	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

14 March 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of King Edward VI Aston School, Birmingham, B6 6DJ

Thank you for your very positive welcome, and the good-humoured discussion we enjoyed during our recent inspection visit. The sense of liveliness, energy and commitment by you to your school is a testimony to your efforts, and the excellent work of the staff of the school in developing your character and your potential to the full. By the time you have reached the sixth form you are showing very high levels of personal maturity and responsibility.

You are attending an outstanding school, which continues striving for even better performance. Because the headteacher and his team of staff are fully committed to both your academic and personal development, you have access to a very broad academic and extra-curricular programme. The substantial subject expertise of teachers, and the excellent level of dialogue and debate between you and them, is stimulating your thinking and, incidentally, motivating the teachers, because your success is their reward.

Lessons are outstanding. Because of the good verbal feedback you get, most of you are well aware of how you are progressing, and what you might do to improve. However, occasionally, your work is not always marked in a helpful way and this has resulted in teaching being judged as good overall. Some of you are ignoring the advice given when your work is marked, because staff do not always check up to see if this has been done.

I am confident that you will enjoy future success in whatever you choose to do, thanks to the excellent education you are receiving here.

Yours sincerely Brian Cartwright Her Majesty's Inspector