

Arrow Vale Community High School and Specialist Sports College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	116946
Local Authority	Worcestershire
Inspection number	319478
Inspection dates	4–5 June 2008
Reporting inspector	John Mason

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	724
6th form	134
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Vacant Position
Headteacher	Peter Woodman
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2007
School address	Green Sward Lane Matchborough West Redditch B98 0EN
Telephone number	01527 526800
Fax number	01527 514255

Age group	13–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Arrow Vale is a smaller than average secondary school, serving the local community, and was the first in the country to become a specialist school focusing on sport. The numbers on roll have been declining in recent years, while the proportion of students eligible for free school meals has been growing. The proportion of students with specific learning needs is above average. The vast majority of students are of White British backgrounds. Very few students are in care or at an early stage in learning English. The school was given notice to improve when it was inspected in 2007 and staff turnover has been high.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school no longer requires significant improvement.

Arrow Vale provides a satisfactory standard of education for its students. Through the good, clear-sighted leadership of the headteacher and his senior team, teachers now have a robust vision for improvement. Most weaknesses identified in the 2007 inspection are being successfully addressed.

Standards reached by students are now broadly average. GCSE results in 2007 showed a marked improvement on earlier years, with the proportion of students gaining five A*-C grades being much closer to the national average. The current Year 11 is maintaining this improving trend. Overall, standards in English, mathematics and science are still lower than nationally expected standards, limiting how well students can also do on many other courses.

Students' achievement is now satisfactory because teaching has improved to become also satisfactory overall. Despite the substantial turnover in staffing, staff absence has been much reduced and the students' education is less frequently interrupted. A stimulating programme of professional development for teachers is helping them become more creative and engaging in the classroom. The excellent practice of the best teachers is being well shared with others. The staff have a renewed vitality and are working hard to achieve the targets for increasing good lessons set by leaders.

The satisfactory curriculum has many good elements, including many new vocational courses and well-conceived pathways suited to students' aptitudes and ability. However, provision for students with learning difficulties is less well developed and the provision for gifted and talented students is at an early stage. The tailoring of lessons to students' differing learning needs lacks consistency.

The school provides good care, guidance and support for its students. Very effective action has been taken, often impressively involving external agencies, to reduce fixed term exclusions and substantially improve attendance. Attendance is now above average for secondary schools nationally and for upper schools in Worcestershire. Students appreciate the good pastoral care and relationships they share with their teachers. They feel safe in school. Bullying and vandalism have also sharply receded. The good feedback they receive on their regular assessments and the support they receive to reach challenging targets are helping students' achievement to improve.

Students' attitudes in all years have become much more positive. Their enjoyment of school is good. Their personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The renewed momentum of the school's specialist status has helped students become more aware of the importance and enjoyment of exercise and good nutrition, but not all students follow a healthy diet yet. Disruptive chatter in some classes, especially in Year 9, detracts from of learning for many students.

The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. It knows its strengths and weaknesses well and works unstintingly to improve provision. It has invested well in facilities and resources. The specialist sports college is rapidly making greater impact on raising standards, and extending provision and links with partner institutions. However, parents do not yet have

a strong enough role in supporting their child's education, and effective ways of securing this have yet to be devised. The school has a good capacity to improve further.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Arrow Vale's is a satisfactory sixth form. Students enter the sixth form with lower than average attainment for sixth forms. They make satisfactory progress to reach standards which are average in vocational courses, yet still are below average in GCE courses. Most students see their courses through, but more students than usual do not stay to continue studies from Year 12 in Year 13. The curriculum, which is satisfactory, has been broadened so that courses are appropriate to the needs of the full ability range. A few courses, for example chemistry, are taught off-site. However, some students are accepted onto courses for which they do not have the appropriate aptitude. Students receive good care, guidance and support from staff keen to make a difference for students academically and socially. Progress is monitored well and prompt action to address underachievement is having a positive impact on students' progress. Sixth form leadership is satisfactory. Refurbishment has made the sixth form area an attractive and efficient area for work and social events. In the sixth form, the sports specialism has less impact, and initiatives to improve the satisfactory teaching by encouraging independent learning skills are still inconsistent. Statutory requirements for providing religious education in the sixth form are not met. Students enjoy the additional opportunities to contribute to the school and the wider community, such as mentoring younger students or organising a major charitable event.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English, mathematics and science in the drive to improve achievement across the school.
- Eliminate low level disruption in lessons and ensure that tasks always meet the learning needs of all students to bring all teaching up to the quality of the best.
- Develop closer and more effective links with parents/carers to engage them more in the life, learning and development of the school.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' attainment on entry is below average. In tests in English, mathematics and science in 2007, standards by the end of Year 9 were still below average, with English performing better than mathematics and science. Teachers' assessments for 2008 indicate good improvement in science and mathematics this year, but standards have yet to reach national averages. Although the school sets challenging targets, students are broadly meeting predicted standards and making satisfactory progress. Standards in Year 11 are also broadly average. Data from tracking and examinations taken or partly taken this summer indicate some further improvement in the current Year 11. In physical education (PE), improved provision has led to a marked improvement in standards and achievement this year, although dance is still underperforming. Collaborative

initiatives from the sports college, such as between PE and English, have led to greater motivation in English and higher standards for boys. Girls' better achievement than boys broadly reflects the national picture. Students with specific learning needs and/or disabilities also make satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Their perceptions of school have improved well in the last few years and most students are increasingly aware of their responsibilities towards one another and their environment. Their moral and social values are sound. These are reflected in good contributions to assemblies and form time. Through the growing engagement of the school council with the wider community and through pro-active initiatives with the police, students are developing a more positive approach to community cohesion. For example, students have worked with a local artist to decorate a bus shelter and this has reduced incidents of vandalism. Students' behaviour is satisfactory. Around the school, it has improved, but a minority of younger students still cause disruption to learning in some lessons through immature chatter and disrespect for classroom routines. This is often linked to lessons which lack adequate challenge to maintain students' interest. Students have a good understanding of the importance of healthy eating but still many do not choose healthy options. They are keen to use the good computer facilities well and their preparations for the next stages in their education and for the world of work are satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Due to the strong impact of internal professional development, the school is successfully building a team of teachers which believes in its ability to better educate the students. Learning has become much more enjoyable due to the more creative teaching. The best lessons engage students very well, using good and often imaginative resources. Students' progress is not yet better than satisfactory as inconsistencies still exist in how teachers tailor work in class to meet the students' differing abilities and aptitudes. Most teachers use a good range of techniques to understand quickly what students understand and to act to counter misconceptions. Lesson objectives are usually clear, but insufficient information is provided to help students gauge for themselves if they are being successful. Despite variability, marking is often good and shows students how to improve, but too many students do not take responsible ownership of exercise books. This limits their ability to build on earlier work and adversely affects the quality and consistency of homework or other initiatives to develop learning independently. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is too teacher-directed, leading to weaknesses in the management of students' behaviour which detract from learning in these classes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The choice and flexibility to mix academic and a good range of new vocational courses, suited well to their aspirations and aptitude, are much appreciated by students. The range of specialist sport options is growing and the influence of the specialism is beginning to be felt better across the curriculum. A greater focus on literacy in Year 9 is helping to raise standards. Schemes of work modelled on those of the PE department are bringing consistency and challenge to the planning and sequencing of lessons. The recent introduction of a new focus on personal and social development materials illustrates the determination of the school to use the curriculum to address students' attitudes to learning. Provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is satisfactory but teaching assistants are not always appropriately deployed to lessons where support is most needed. Similarly, provision for gifted and talented students is at an early stage of development. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is satisfactory, with sports options growing in popularity.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Effective, rigorous risk assessments and child protection procedures ensure a safe environment for the students. Effective liaison with a wide range of external agencies has helped to significantly reduce absenteeism and students' exclusions. Clear procedures are in place to support vulnerable students and those with emotional or behavioural difficulties in lessons, although the implementation of procedures is not always followed consistently. Staff take a keen interest in the lives and learning of the students in form time and assemblies. Students are well informed about their progress. Through good feedback from regular assessments, students receive timely guidance and support if they are falling behind expectations. The growing influence of the sports college and new initiatives in personal and social education are improving students' awareness of healthy and safe practice. The school council, with its links to the local council and the police, encourages students to understand their rights and responsibilities outside of school. The quality of information and advice about courses and career progression is satisfactory, as is the support for those with learning difficulties.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The drive for school improvement in testing circumstances has been ceaseless and is now securing better outcomes for the students. The school's monitoring of its performance is rigorous and accurate and underpins a well-focused agenda for improvement. The sports specialism has made significant impact in raising standards and forging links with the community. The senior leadership team is influential and effective, providing regular support and challenge for departmental managers in helping to raise expectations and consistency. They are becoming increasingly accountable for the quality of teaching in their departments and realistic target setting. Coaching by expert practitioners is leading to raised expectations in teaching and

learning. Staff turnover and recruitment issues have been managed thoughtfully, although not without some adverse impact on the quality of teaching provision. The local authority provides good support for the school's agenda for improvement. Links to engage parents more in supporting students' learning are underdeveloped. The governing body is active, supportive and challenges the school well. It is alert to the implications of falling rolls and has secure plans to ensure that the school's forward momentum is sustained.

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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?	3	3
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?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
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

6 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Arrow Vale Community High School & Specialist Sports College, Redditch B98 0EN

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when they visited this week. We enjoyed talking to you about the improvements which you feel the school has made in the past year or two. Your contribution to the inspection was very helpful.

We have agreed that the school provides a satisfactory education and that it no longer needs to be categorised as having a 'notice to improve'. This is because staff and students have pulled together well since the inspection last year and are much better focused on learning and achieving well. You tell us that you enjoy school much more, that you feel safer and that you are more responsive to one another. Significantly, attendance at school has improved considerably and teaching has improved, becoming more consistent and more engaging. There is also a much wider range of courses to take when you get to Year 10 and the sixth form. The sports college is also providing better opportunities for you. This means that you all have a much better chance of meeting challenging targets in the subjects you are studying. This is reflected in your GCSE A*-C grades, which in 2007 were much improved compared to 2006. The improving trend looks to be continuing and we believe that the 2008 GCSE students will produce results closer still to those of the rest of the country. Importantly, your standards in English, mathematics and science need to be improved further so that you can do well in all the subjects you study.

We judged teaching and learning to be satisfactory because most of you are now making satisfactory progress. Your progress can be better, and leaders and teachers are working well to make it so. We would like to see more really good lessons and we have asked your teachers to focus better on setting tasks which meet all of your needs in lessons. You can help here by cutting out the disruptive chatter which undermines learning in some Year 9 and 10 classes in particular.

School leaders are working well to sustain these improvements, bringing about more continuity in staffing when numbers of students are falling. We have also asked them to engage more with your parents and carers, so that you benefit from greater involvement in learning at home as well as at school. The team all wish you well in examinations and the coming school year.

Yours sincerely

John Mason Lead inspector

Annex B

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John Mason
Lead inspector