

Alder Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	134283
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	360613
Inspection dates	08–09 December 2010
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall 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	788
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adrian Brooks
Acting Headteacher	Richard O'Regan
Date of previous school inspection	17 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 35 lessons taught by 35 teachers. They held meetings with students, leaders and managers, staff, the Chair of Governors and a representative of the local authority. They looked at a range of documents including the school's planning, policies, monitoring records and self-evaluation. Inspectors reviewed 284 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 108 from students, and 49 from staff.

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

- The rate of students' progress and whether it is improving in all subjects.
- The quality of teaching and whether it is strong enough to sustain the improving picture of attainment.
- The effectiveness of the newly formed extended leadership team.
- The quality and accuracy of the school's self-evaluation.

Information about the school

Alder Community High School is a smaller than average sized secondary school. A higher than average proportion of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds has increased over recent years and are now similar to the national average. The school is a specialist mathematics and computing college and has gained numerous awards including Information Advice and Guidance Gold award, Healthy School status, Every Child Matters standard and the Financial Management Standard in Schools.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Alder Community High School is a caring, inclusive and increasingly successful school which provides a satisfactory standard of education. The new senior leadership team has the capacity to deliver sustainable improvement. Attainment has been low but has risen and students' progress in learning is accelerating, although this is not even across subjects. Students' achievements are satisfactory overall, with particular strength in mathematics. Achievement in English continues to be weaker but is improving. Students respond well to what their school offers and speak enthusiastically of their experiences there. The very large majority of parents and carers are happy with their children's education. Attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now above the national average. Behaviour is generally good and the rate of exclusions for inappropriate behaviour has fallen.

Teaching is satisfactory, with an increasing amount that is good. Over the last three years, students' progress has been inconsistent, but is now satisfactory, as is the quality of students' learning in lessons. Students are attentive and generally do what is asked of them. However, some tend to be rather passive, particularly when they are not engaged directly by questioning or required to actively participate. Students do not always know their targets or what they have to do to improve their work. The school is working hard to improve this situation. Some students have weak literacy skills and teachers are not always consistent in how they address these. The school's curriculum is supported by well-established partnerships and enables students to make appropriate choices tailored to meet their needs. The rate of progression into further education and training has risen sharply. An exciting extra-curricular programme is well attended and the school uses its specialist status to create additional opportunities for students. There is a strong programme of support for transition in mathematics which is having a powerful impact on students' skills acquisition. Relationships between members of the school community are harmonious, characterised by mutual respect. The school works effectively with a range of agencies to provide support packages for students whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable. Students appreciate the good quality of care and guidance they receive, which impacts on their achievements.

Safeguarding is given a high priority; the safeguarding policy is clearly stated and rigorously followed. The school's financial management practices are robust and its

resources are well maintained; the campus presents a vibrant and welcoming learning environment.

Improved outcomes for students represent satisfactory value for money. Self-evaluation throughout the organisation is satisfactory and the new distributed leadership arrangements are being used to develop monitoring systems further and ensure linkage with improvement planning. The school's strong ethos and shared values, together with the support now available through its new partnership with a school in the neighbouring borough of Stockport, mean that it is well placed to make further gains.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching which is good or better so that the pace of learning accelerates, by:
 - making sure there is appropriate pace and challenge for all students
 - ensuring active student participation in lessons, including through varied questioning styles
 - improving the quality of assessment, including through effective marking
 - tackling weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and sentence structure systematically across the curriculum.

- Improve the rigour and coherence of school self-evaluation, by:
 - ensuring that the school's range of self-evaluation activities are specific, manageable and timely
 - ensuring that improvement planning at all levels is driven by self-evaluation.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The achievement of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, is satisfactory and improving. Students enter school with attainment which is broadly average. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, has improved steadily since the previous inspection and is now similar to the national average. Students make outstanding progress in mathematics; however, their progress in English is considerably weaker. The school has recognised this discrepancy and is taking appropriate action to secure improvement so that students are better placed to achieve their targets in the future. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G has risen rapidly and is testimony to the inclusive ethos evident in the school and the good quality of support provided to individuals to remove barriers to learning. Students made satisfactory progress in around half of the lessons observed during the inspection and good or occasionally outstanding progress in the others. There were no differences observed in the rates of progress for students of different minority ethnic groups or between boys and girls.

Students' behaviour is good, characterised by positive relationships, a welcoming approach and clear respect for the values promoted by the school. The level of exclusions for inappropriate behaviour has reduced because the school has effective strategies for promoting good behaviour and intervening on the rare occasions when it is unacceptable. Students value the school's rewards system and consider sanctions to be fair. They consider the school to be a safe and caring place. The view expressed by one student was: 'Alder is like a family. Everyone looks out for each other and makes you feel at home,' and typified the feelings of many. Students appreciate the school's efforts to keep them healthy and value the exciting range of physical education opportunities on offer. They make an effective contribution to their own community by fulfilling a variety of roles and they show genuine concern for wider communities through extensive charity work which they undertake zealously. Students' social and moral development are strongly promoted by all staff through positive relationships with students and through curricular opportunities, such as in religious education, citizenship and psychology where there is impressive discussion of ethical issues. Assemblies provide strong opportunities for spiritual reflection.

Attendance has improved and is above average. The rate of persistent absence has reduced considerably due to the hard work of staff in partnership with families and external agencies. Students cooperate well with each other and display a good range of skills including their use of information and communication technology (ICT), understanding of financial management and personal organisation. These skills will help prepare them to become effective employees and citizens.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
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
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	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is satisfactory overall, with an increasing proportion that is good. The most effective lessons observed during the inspection were characterised by engaging activities which prompted students' independent thinking, such as in a citizenship

¹The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

lesson in which students were challenged to explore the consequences of a culture which was non-democratic through a range of questions and resources. In a very successful psychology lesson, students posed questions to each other to enhance their understanding of the ethics of social research. However, in other lessons, there is an over-reliance on the teacher providing information and on these occasions students become passive and the pace of their learning slows. Some teachers are effective in structuring collaborative work, such as in an English lesson where students worked productively in groups to deepen their understanding of characters' behaviour in *An Inspector Calls*. On other occasions, there are insufficient opportunities for students to learn through varied approaches. Questioning is sometimes limited to exchanges between the teacher and volunteer students which reduces the participation of less confident class members. Teachers provide many opportunities for students to improve their work, for example, through the very well supported extra-curricular sessions provided by the mathematics department. Students are highly appreciative of teachers, 'going the extra mile for us'. The quality of marking of students' work is variable. In the best examples, marking is detailed, regular and provides a balance of praise and advice on improvement but this is not consistent across all subjects. Some teachers draw students' attention to spelling errors, particularly with regard to subject specific vocabulary, but the identification of errors in spelling, punctuation and sentence structure is inconsistent across the school leading to students' written work being underdeveloped. Students at Key Stage 4 generally know their target grades and have a reasonable understanding of how they should go about securing these. At Key Stage 3, students' awareness of targets and strategies for improvement is less well developed.

Curriculum developments since the last inspection have contributed to improving students' achievement. At Key Stage 3, the school has enriched its curriculum through the provision of an imaginative and manageable themed programme. There is a good range of courses at Key Stage 4, including those delivered in partnership with local colleges, to suit the needs and aspirations of students across the ability range. Effective transition arrangements ensure that younger students settle very quickly. Transition in mathematics is strengthened through some particularly effective liaison with local primary schools focused on the progressive acquisition of skills. Transition arrangements at the end of Key Stage 4 are also well developed and very few students now leave at 16 without a clear progression route. Extra-curricular provision is strong; students participate enthusiastically in a broad range of sporting, artistic, cultural, social and academic activities. The school readily identifies and supports students, and their families, who are potentially vulnerable and meets their needs with sensitivity and care, effectively involving a variety of external agencies. The high quality of the school's pastoral support is greatly valued by students who consider their school to be a caring and inclusive community.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior leadership team has recently been reorganised following the secondment of the substantive headteacher to a role within the local authority. The acting headteacher exudes enthusiasm, ambition and commitment to the school. He is ably supported by a hardworking team, some of whom are very new to their posts. They have a shared vision for improvement and are held in high esteem by staff, students, parents and carers. Since the previous inspection, the school has set itself ambitious targets and secured improvement in a number of areas, including students' attendance and their overall attainment at GCSE level.

The school's self-evaluation systems are under review. Various monitoring activities undertaken by a range of staff are not always sharply focused or clearly linked to improvement planning. By distributing leadership more widely, the acting headteacher has enhanced the school's capacity to know and act upon its strengths and areas for improvement. A teaching and learning group has been established to share good practice and further promote effective learning; this is strengthened by a collaborative relationship with a partner school. The school's specialist status has been used effectively to raise attainment in mathematics and ICT, enhance technological provision across the curriculum and promote effective transition.

The well-informed governing body holds the school to account effectively and is proactive in its support for improvement. Safeguarding is given a high priority and the school's procedures are robust and tenaciously followed. Financial management systems are rigorous and brave decisions have been taken to ensure that the school's resources meet students' needs. The school engages actively with parents and carers; the newly developed parents' forum exemplifies the school's drive to deepen communication and involve parents and carers in decision making. The school understands its own community well and has developed effective international links. A strong citizenship programme contributes powerfully to the development of students' sense of themselves within local, national and global communities. School leaders have created an inclusive, harmonious ethos where the needs of all students are given equal priority.

These are the grades for the leadership and management

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

Views of parents and carers

There was a much higher response rate to the questionnaire than that which is typically found. Most parents and carers expressed their satisfaction with all aspects of the school's work on which their opinions were sought. Several parents and carers provided additional comments thanking the school for the exceptional care it had provided for individual students when they experienced difficulties.

The areas of greatest concern expressed by a very small minority of parents and carers through questionnaire feedback were around behaviour management and homework. They were concerned that the behaviour of some students disrupted the learning of others and that insufficient homework was set. Inspectors found behaviour to be good but acknowledged that a very small number of students display negative attitudes to learning. The management of behaviour by the large majority of teachers was observed to be effective. Inspectors found that the school's homework policy was appropriate but on occasions was not consistently followed.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alder Community High 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 284 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 788 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	102	36	162	57	15	5	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	125	44	147	52	8	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	125	44	141	50	16	6	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	103	36	165	58	12	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	96	34	173	61	6	2	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	81	29	173	61	22	8	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	85	30	169	60	22	8	3	1
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)	96	34	161	57	6	2	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	99	35	166	58	6	2	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	93	33	148	52	27	10	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	74	26	174	61	18	6	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	109	38	156	55	8	3	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	133	47	135	48	14	5	1	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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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.



10 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Alder Community High School, Hyde, SK14 5NJ

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school. We enjoyed observing your lessons, looking at your work and talking to you. I would also like to thank those of you who returned questionnaires to us. We were pleased that the vast majority of you enjoy school, feel safe, think that adults are there help you and that the school is well led. We agree with you; we think that Alder is a very safe, caring, friendly and inclusive place. We were impressed with your hard work and polite behaviour and are pleased that your attendance levels are so good, even when the weather is very cold!

We judged that your school provides you with a satisfactory quality of education, with many good aspects. Staff in school work hard and provide an atmosphere in which you feel respected, supported and encouraged to do your best. An increasing number of you are now attaining good examination results, especially in your school's specialist subjects; Alder's performance in mathematics is exceptionally strong. You have a good curriculum, with a wide range of exciting extra-curricular opportunities. Your success in local sporting competitions is renowned. Many of you take on extra responsibilities as school councillors, mentors, team captains and sports leaders. In addition, you show great care and compassion; we were particularly impressed with the scale of your charity work.

Alder is a very proud and caring school. It has everything in place to move from strength to strength.

We have asked your teachers to do several things to improve further:

- Make sure that you are all challenged to think and work hard in all lessons.
- Ensure that you all contribute in lessons, for instance by more of you answering questions.
- Improve assessment so that feedback, including marking, lets you know what you need to do to improve further.
- Help you to develop better skills in your writing, spelling and punctuation in a range of subjects.

We have also asked the senior leadership team to further develop the way it monitors what is happening to improve learning in school.

We know that you will play your part by continuing to work hard and rising to the new challenges you are set. Once again, thank you for welcoming us. I wish you all the best as you move through school and every success in your future lives.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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