

# Almondbury High School and Language College

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	107758
<b>Local authority</b>	Kirklees
<b>Inspection number</b>	377643
<b>Inspection dates</b>	1–2 February
<b>Lead inspector</b>	John Young HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	493
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Allen Turner
<b>Headteacher</b>	Janet Tolley
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	21–22 January 2009
<b>School address</b>	Fernside Avenue Almondbury Huddersfield HD5 8PQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01484 223910
<b>Fax number</b>	01484 223912
<b>Email address</b>	office.ahslc@educirklees.net

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## Introduction

Inspection team

John Young

Her Majesty's Inspector

Denah Jones

Additional inspector

Helen Gaunt

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 34 lessons and observed 33 of the 41 teachers at the school. This resulted in inspectors sampling learning in every subject taught. Inspectors observed pupils' reading, visited a number of tutorial lessons and examined the specialist 'Nurture' provision for pupils deemed more vulnerable than others. Inspectors also saw the school's specialist provision for pupils at the early stages of acquiring the English language, and the provision for accelerating pupils' literacy development. The headteacher and the lead inspector carried out 10 joint lesson observations. Inspectors held meetings and discussions with a range of staff, groups of pupils, the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and a local authority representative. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a range of other evidence, such as development plans, safeguarding arrangements and self-evaluation documents. They evaluated questionnaire responses from 184 parents and carers, 100 students and 68 staff. There were insufficient responses for inspectors to take account of the views expressed in the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).

## Information about the school

At this smaller than average-sized secondary school, the large majority of pupils are White British and live locally. The remaining numbers of pupils originate from a range of minority ethnic heritages of which Pakistani and mixed Black Caribbean and White heritage pupils are the largest groups. Few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is similar to the national average. These needs range from autistic spectrum disorder, and specific and moderate learning difficulties, to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and hearing impairment.

The school has Specialist Language College status and holds the International School Award. The school provides a range of extended services such as family learning programmes, community access to school facilities and study support. The school is part of a consortium of local high schools, a college, and work-based learning providers which enables a minority of Key Stage 4 pupils to access a range of mostly vocational courses off-site. These include motor vehicle studies, photography, construction and engineering. The school meets the government's current floor targets; these are the minimum standards expected for secondary schools. The number of pupils on roll has fallen sharply over the past three years. This has been against the backdrop of a significant demographic decline in the number of school-age children in Huddersfield which has had implications for all schools.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. Inspectors concur with the school's self-evaluation that the overall educational experience provided to pupils is good and improving. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment.
- Leadership is good and has enabled the school to evolve and improve over time. Senior leaders are well supported by capable staff at all levels, effective governance and the alliances forged with key partners. Collectively, they have strategically enhanced the quality of provision, raised academic standards, and are ensuring that pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective.
- Since the last inspection, attainment has risen from well below to being in line with national averages. Pupils' achievement is good when set against their generally below average starting points. There is room for improvement because a minority of pupils' achievement is not good in certain subjects. The curriculum effectively supports pupils' learning and is well matched to their needs. The contribution of the specialist subjects is strong. Their sphere of influence has a positive impact on raising standards, improving teaching and learning, enhancing curriculum breadth, leadership, strengthening transition arrangements, and developing local and international community links.
- Teaching has a good impact on most pupils' learning overall. There are pockets of outstanding practice which inspire pupils to progress exceptionally well. There are also weaker elements of teaching and inconsistency in the use of agreed behaviour management strategies, assessment practice, marking and feedback.
- Behaviour and safety are good overall. The very large majority of pupils feel safe and well supported as a result of the arrangements in place. A few parents and carers, staff and pupils believe that poor behaviour and bullying are issues. Inspectors do not but agree there is room for further improvement.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to raise pupils' attainment and further improve the amount of progress they make during their time in the school so that their achievement improves relative to their starting points by:
  - further improving the effectiveness of early identification and intervention strategies for pupils at risk or already falling behind
  - ensuring all pupils make or exceed three levels of progress in all subjects undertaken during Key Stages 3 and 4
  - improving the achievement of groups of pupils, and raising attainment in subjects that have previously underperformed.
  
- Continue to improve the impact of teaching on pupils' learning so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school by:
  - sharing and embedding best practice
  - eradicating the remaining weaker aspects of teaching
  - ensuring all staff adhere to agreed whole-school school policy for behaviour management, assessment and guidance to pupils.
  
- Address the negative perceptions about the way the school deals with bullying and poor pupil behaviour, held by a small minority of parents, pupils and staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaires, by:
  - communicating more effectively the success the school has in improving pupils' behaviour, and increasing confidence in the school's behaviour management and anti-bullying strategies
  - further improving the quality of the learning climate in the very small minority of classrooms where there are occasional lapses.

## Main report

### Achievement of pupils

The very large majority of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire feel that their children are making good progress. Inspectors agree and found from the evidence that all pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, those known to be eligible for free school meals, and groups of minority ethnic pupils, make better than expected progress given their starting points. Inspectors observed pupils on the whole acquiring knowledge quickly and securely in a wide range of different subjects. Pupils confidently demonstrated their ability to apply a range of key skills well, underlining how well they are being prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment. The impact of this over time is reflected in less than 5% of pupils being unemployed when they leave the school. Inspectors observed how pupils' competence in reading and writing is being accelerated by a sharper focus on extending their vocabulary and knowledge of subject specific terminology, oracy development, guided reading and creative writing. Specific support for those at the early stages of learning English and for those pupils with low levels of literacy was also effective along with similar arrangements to boost pupils' numeracy skills. However, there is scope to improve

further learning and progress in several subjects and for a number of groups of pupils, such as lower-attaining pupils in mathematics, girls and middle-attaining pupils in English, some mixed heritage pupils, and some Pakistani pupils. Pupils' attainment has risen considerably over time; deficits between different groups of pupils, and gaps when compared with national averages have narrowed. Attainment in languages is high and in several subjects exceeds the national average, including for the English Baccalaureate measure. However, in 2011, subjects such as core science, Business Studies and English Literature did less well. Encouragingly for the school, the latest tracking information and inspectors' observations indicate that the large majority of pupils are currently on track to meet their respective targets. The school recognises, and inspectors agree, that there is room for even greater impact from the ongoing intervention packages offered to pupils, for attainment to rise in those subjects, and for those groups that have performed less well previously to do better.

### **Quality of teaching**

From the responses to the questionnaire, more than 90% of parents and carers believe their children are well taught and make good progress. More than 94% of pupils share this view. Inspectors concur with this overview and judge that the impact of teaching on pupils' learning is good, which is reflected in pupils' predominantly good progress. There is a core of outstanding practice but this is not the norm. There is also some weaker practice.

The large majority of staff display strong subject knowledge and good relationships with pupils. They plan meticulously taking account of the wealth of data on pupils' progress which enables them to set appropriately challenging tasks and activities for the range of pupils the school serves. Teachers hold high expectations of pupils, who repay the faith shown in them with high aspirations of their own, underpinned by effective personal development. Pupils respond well to demanding, engaging and often practical challenges which give them the opportunity to both develop and demonstrate their creativity, resilience and problem-solving abilities. Clear success criteria, focused delivery and targeted questioning to challenge pupils' thinking, punctuated with expert guidance and intervention to correct misconceptions, to gauge pupils' understanding of key concepts and skills, or to accelerate the pace of learning, also bear fruit. Pupils thrived when they were given responsibility for leading their own learning, showing they can work confidently independently and in groups. Less effective practice in teaching included an absence of some or many of these features. Critically, the pace, quality and climate for learning was adversely affected when staff did not adhere to agreed principles for behaviour management nor maximised pupil engagement, or used assessment to match work precisely to pupils' capabilities.

The use of assessment to support learning is sound overall and is used well to inform the next step in pupils' development, triggering any necessary intervention, sign-posting pupils' current levels of attainment and their progress towards their targets.

Good links with partner providers enrich the learning opportunities available to pupils and, together with a range of visits and visitors, allow pupils to gain insights and experiences from beyond Almondbury.

## **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Parents and carers, pupils, and a very small minority of staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire hold mixed views about the quality of behaviour, how often lessons are disrupted by bad behaviour and how well the school deals with bullying. Inspectors found that few of these concerns are well founded and that pupils' behaviour and safety are good overall. Most pupils have good attitudes to learning and school. Rates of exclusion, major incidents and reports of bullying, including prejudiced-based and cyber-bullying, are low, and the incidence of referrals of pupils for poor behaviour has fallen over time. Most pupils adhere to the behaviour and safety protocols and the improvement strategies in place. Re-offending is confined to the minority. Pupils have a good understanding of safe working practices and apply them. However, on occasion, pupils' behaviour affects the learning climate and pupils let themselves down. Similarly, some staff have different thresholds of what constitutes acceptable behaviour which leads to some inconsistency of approach. Nevertheless, 98% of pupils and 90% of parents and carers say pupils feel safe at school. Some high-quality support, advice and guidance help pupils to feel secure, particularly those deemed more vulnerable. The school accepts that it must challenge and change the negative perceptions that exist about poor behaviour and bullying at the school. Attendance is above average. Rates of persistent absence are low because of the proactive steps the school has taken to ensure parents, carers and pupils realise the negative impact that regular absence can have on pupils' educational success.

## **Leadership and management**

Senior leaders' good strategic thinking and the systematic implementation of effective strategies have resulted in a better curriculum, improvements in pupils' attendance and behaviour and the tackling of some previously identified weaknesses. These successes indicate the school's capacity to improve further. Moreover, leaders model best practice; their robust monitoring and evaluation of all areas of their work and their effective mentoring, training and professional challenge have been instrumental in raising standards and improving the impact of teaching. They are well supported by capable staff at all levels in the school who embrace their vision and ambition for the school's future.

The curriculum supports pupils' learning effectively. Pupils can pursue traditionally academic, vocational and work-based pathways. This is supplemented by specialist work with targeted groups of pupils who receive expert support and guidance to raise their aspirations, improve their confidence and accelerate their learning. Pupils take full advantage of and appreciate various enrichment, extra-curricular and study support options. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is actively promoted through daily tutorials, lessons in personal, social, health, citizenship and relationships education, and whole-school events. Pupils' high-quality works of art, their mutual respect, resilience, respect for diversity and creativity reflect this as does their charity work, leadership roles and quiet reflection in assemblies.

The school's specialism makes important contributions to whole-school improvement. Staff share good practice and coach other staff. Curriculum opportunities have been

enhanced with new qualification routes and the early entry of more-able pupils. The community benefits from language clubs in local primary schools and adult and family learning classes in Mandarin, Arabic and Urdu. Cultural, spiritual and social awareness is raised via international food days, exchange visits and associations with schools in several countries and a Sikh temple.

The governing body's collective expertise, experience and evident ambitions for the school's future ensure that it discharges whole-heartedly its responsibility to rigorously monitor, challenge and strategically influence the school's development. A committee structure linked to key aspects of the school's work and ongoing training equips members with the insight to evaluate the school's performance more discerningly.

The school is effectively promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination which is reflected in the improving performance of different groups of pupils, a strong stance on prejudice and the very positive relationships that exist between pupils from a diverse range of ethnic, social and religious backgrounds. Safeguarding arrangements meet requirements with suitable procedures for staff training, child protection, risk assessment, the safer recruitment of staff and site security. Most parents and carers are very positive about the work of the school and most would recommend the school to others. Inspectors investigated the concerns of a small minority but found little corroborating evidence. Nevertheless, they have identified as an area for improvement, the need to prove to the parents and carers, staff and pupils who doubt it, that the prevalence of poor behaviour and bullying is overstated. Also, to show parents and carers that the school's systems for dealing with inappropriate behaviour are effective when it does occur.



## 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

**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.**



03 February 2012

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Almondbury High School and Language College,  
Huddersfield, HD5 8PQ**

Thank you for being polite and helpful to the inspectors when we visited recently. We learned a lot from observing your lessons and talking with you. We read with interest the views you, and your parents and carers expressed in the questionnaires.

We found that your school provides you with a good education. We know you will be pleased by this news because you told us how well you think you are doing and how much you enjoy coming to school. Standards are rising and your achievement is generally good as a result of the good teaching you receive, the broad and balanced curriculum on offer, and the good care, guidance and support you receive, particularly those of you who are at risk of underperforming or need specialist help in getting back on track. However, not all of you do as well as you could in all subjects, nor is all teaching good or better. Behaviour and safety are good overall, but occasionally you let yourselves down. Your attendance has improved and is now higher than average. We found that you are developing a range of personal and social skills which will help you in the future and that your horizons are being broadened by the enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities open to you. We also found that your specialism in languages has a positive impact on your achievement, cultural awareness, and in developing community links.

The school's leaders are effective in their role and have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for further development. We have asked them to focus on making the school even better. In order to do this we want them to: further raise your attainment and improve your achievement; further improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better throughout the school; further improve standards of behaviour and challenge the negative views some of you, staff and your parents and carers have about the amount of poor behaviour and bullying that exists and how well staff deal with it.

You can all play your part by continuing to work hard and attending school regularly.

Yours sincerely

John Young  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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