

Astley Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122374
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	380458
Inspection dates	1–2 February 2012
Lead inspector	Lee Northern 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	653
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Hillman
Headteacher	John Barnes
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2008
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Introduction

Inspection team

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Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted secondee
Additional inspector
Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The lead inspector looked at the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 27 lessons, each taught by a different member of staff. Of these lessons, five were observed jointly with managers from the school. In addition, a number of short visits to lessons and registration sessions were conducted, including a series of visits to lessons to sample students' behaviour and attitudes to learning. In total, over 14 hours of teaching was observed. Inspectors held meetings with groups of students, members of the governing body and school staff. They observed the school's work, scrutinised a range of documentation and examined evaluations undertaken by the school to ensure that it meets statutory requirements in relation to safeguarding. In addition, 224 questionnaires from parents and carers were scrutinised and inspectors also examined questionnaires returned by staff and those from a representative sample of students.

Information about the school

Astley Community High School is a small than average-sized secondary school, situated in south-east Northumberland, and has specialist status for mathematics and computing. The current headteacher joined the school in January 2012. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is smaller than the national average, although it has risen since the previous inspection. Almost all students are of White British heritage and very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs is lower than that seen nationally. The proportion of students entering or leaving the school other than at the usual times is lower than the national average for secondary schools. The school is in a 'hard' federation with Whytrig and Seaton Sluice Middle Schools and the three schools share the same governing body.

The school meets the current floor standard. It has gained a number of awards, including Investors in People and Healthy School status.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	3
Leadership and management	3

Key Findings

- Astley Community High School is a satisfactory school. Although achievement is satisfactory overall, there is a notable difference in students' levels of achievement on vocational and academic courses throughout the school. This is seen most clearly in the sixth form. Students on BTEC programmes make better progress than those who follow GCE AS and A2 courses. However, as a result of recent actions to improve outcomes for students following academic routes, the sixth form is satisfactory overall.
- The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although existing good and outstanding practice is not shared systematically enough across the school. Not all teaching, particularly on academic courses, is effective in meeting the needs of different groups of students. Opportunities to provide greater challenge for more-able students are sometimes missed and, as a result, they are held back from making faster progress. Consequently, too few students achieve the highest grades in a range of subjects, including in English. Teachers' questioning does not consistently demand that students' develop their thinking and provide more extended responses, and too little teaching involves students in assessing their own progress or helping them to understand more clearly how to reach higher grades. Although the use of assessment information is improving in mathematics, English and in science, there are inconsistencies in the ways in which this information is used to accelerate progress in other subjects.
- Most students behave well and enjoy coming to school. Students' mature and considerate approach ensures that the school is a safe and orderly environment. However, some students and their parents and carers say that learning in a few lessons is disturbed by instances of off-task behaviour. Inspection evidence confirms that although learning proceeds smoothly and positively in the great majority of lessons, inappropriate behaviour does slow progress for some students in a small number of lessons.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, the impact of leaders and managers is not consistently effective in reducing variation across the school. For example, monitoring activities do not focus sufficiently on the impact of teaching on learning, and middle leaders' contribution to leading improvements in their subject

areas is underdeveloped. Management structures to ensure accountability for students' progress are unclear and improvement planning lacks a sharp focus on outcomes, measurable success criteria or more appropriate timelines.

Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure good achievement for students on academic courses or pathways, particularly in the sixth form, by:
 - increasing the proportion of students attaining the highest grades at GCSE and in the sixth form, including in English
 - ensuring teaching consistently provides an appropriate level of challenge for all students, particularly for more-able students
 - improve the quality of teachers' questioning so that more students are challenged to develop their thinking and provide more extended responses
 - involve students more in understanding how well they are learning and to recognise more clearly the next steps they need to take in order to improve
 - sharing good and outstanding practice more systematically across the school and thereby reduce variation in the quality of teaching and use of assessment.
- Eradicate any instances of low-level disruption to learning that slow progress and reduce students' enjoyment and achievement in lessons.
- Strengthen the work of leaders and managers at all levels by:
 - ensuring improvement planning focuses more sharply on outcomes for students, identifies an appropriate range of success criteria and monitors the impact of actions taken against specific timelines and milestones
 - improving the skills of middle leaders to lead more effectively the development of teaching and learning in their subject areas
 - focusing more clearly on the impact of teaching on learning in all monitoring activities
 - clarifying lines of accountability to ensure a greater emphasis on the progress of students.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the school in Year 9 with broadly average standards of attainment. They make satisfactory progress overall and, by the end of Key Stages 4 and 5 reach broadly average levels of attainment. For example, the proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE, including in English and mathematics, is in line with the average seen nationally and has risen in each of the last three years. The strength of the school's vocational provision can be seen in average point scores by the end of Key Stage 4 that are significantly and consistently above average. However, students achieve less well in many of their GCSE subjects. For example, although achievement in English and mathematics is satisfactory overall, not enough more-able students secure the highest grades in English. In

mathematics, targeted approaches tailored at different groups of students are helping to further raise achievement. For example, prompted by the specialism, a small group of more-able students in Year 11 are studying units from part of the AS level mathematics programme. This is helping to raise aspirations and encourage more students to continue mathematics into the sixth form.

Some parents and carers stated their concerns in their questionnaire responses regarding the differences in achievement between subjects. Inspectors confirmed that achievement on vocational programmes was higher than on academic courses. This was particularly the case in the sixth form. Students make good and sometimes outstanding progress on BTEC courses, although achievement was more broadly satisfactory across a range of AS and A2 subjects. However, students achieve well in psychology because they are challenged to reach high standards, are more actively involved in their learning, and assessment information is used to identify and address any underachievement promptly and effectively.

Disabled students and those who have special educational needs progress at rates similar to their peers. The curriculum in particular makes a strong contribution to this by providing a range of opportunities well matched to students' needs and aspirations. In addition, the school works hard to ensure that a small number of students whose circumstances make them vulnerable are well supported. Detailed tracking of the progress made by a few students requiring extra support with reading is helping them to gain confidence and access learning more effectively. However, progress in some mainstream lessons is slower because not all lessons are adjusted effectively for students with special educational needs. The achievement of students known to be eligible for free school meals is sometimes adversely affected by their lower levels of overall attendance and more could be done to address this aspect more effectively.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although there were examples of outstanding and inadequate teaching seen. Some parents and carers also expressed the view that there is considerable variation in the quality of teaching. In vocational lessons, good learning was often assured as a result of the quality of preparation and the effective use of assessment information by the teacher. In these lessons, the use of criteria to make clear to students how they could improve their work was a common feature of successful learning. As a result, students were self-motivated because they could see a clear purpose to their work, they worked with interest and enthusiasm and developed good independent learning skills. These features were less common in some lessons on academic courses. For example, in less effective teaching, the same task was frequently given to all students in the class. As a result, more-able students in particular were not challenged to move more quickly or enabled to access work more appropriate to their target grades. Similarly, not all teachers' questioning expects greater involvement or more thoughtful responses from most students. Opportunities for students to develop better literacy, communication and social skills through guided group learning were not always well exploited.

The most effective lessons ensure all students are challenged to produce their best work. Students made better progress in those lessons where they could understand clearly how well they were learning and were guided in how to improve their work and reach higher grades. For example, in two outstanding lessons for sixth form students, a common feature was the way in which students were encouraged to reflect on what they had learnt against clear criteria displayed as part of the introduction to the lesson. Through discussion, the

students were able to clarify for themselves what they needed to do to improve their understanding and secure their learning. Teachers' strong subject knowledge and infectious enthusiasm contributed strongly to the students' outstanding progress in both lessons.

The quality of written feedback to students varies greatly. In the best examples, students are provided with detailed guidance from the teacher that helps them to improve their work. For example, in science, some marking provides additional questions for students to answer that builds on the understanding they have shown in their written work. This is doubly effective because the teacher follows up the students' responses to the questions he has set. However, in other examples, books are rarely marked or the comments provided are not useful in supporting students to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The students say they feel very safe in school and parents and carers express few concerns. Students are unanimous in their confidence in the school's ability to deal effectively with bullying where it occurs. They say that the school promotes well their awareness of different forms of bullying and, as a result, the school is a harmonious community where students get on well with each other. Through a combination of assemblies, tutorial time, enrichment activities and through the wider curriculum, students are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of religious, moral and ethical issues in modern society. As a result, their thoughtful and considerate approach makes a positive contribution to school life. Students display a good awareness of safety issues, including in relation to e-safety. Their behaviour in workshops and science laboratories shows a good understanding of risks and hazards.

The great majority of lessons proceed with very little interruption and many are characterised by the warmth of relationships that support learning. However, in a small number of instances, lessons are disturbed by the off-task behaviour of a few students. Inspection evidence confirms that this is frequently linked to instances where the school's systems for managing behaviour are inconsistently applied by some staff. Nevertheless, a few students say they are frustrated by on-going behaviour that does not appear to be dealt with promptly enough.

Students' attendance is broadly average overall and the school has worked hard to reduce the impact on learning of the absence of a small number of students who are persistently away from school. However, there remains considerable variation across different groups of students and more needs to be done to increase rates of attendance for all students. Overall, levels of exclusion are broadly average and the number of referrals to the inclusion facility in school is reducing.

Leadership and management

The new headteacher has a clear understanding of those aspects of the school's work in need of further improvement. The school's evaluation of the impact of its work is broadly accurate and recent actions to improve the achievement of more-able students on GCSE courses and for sixth form students on academic programmes have begun to bear fruit. Variations in outcomes between different groups of students and across different courses are reducing. As a result, the school is demonstrating a satisfactory capacity to improve further. However, the headteacher has rightly identified that further work is needed to improve the impact of leadership structures on outcomes. For example, lines of accountability between senior managers and middle leaders are not clear enough to ensure

that middle leaders are held closely to account for the progress of students in their subject areas. Similarly, the skills of middle leaders in leading improvements to teaching and learning are in need of further development. This is because not all middle leaders have a sufficiently clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in order to bring about more rapid improvement.

Improvement planning identifies an appropriate range of development priorities. However, planning has a greater focus on processes and provision than it does on improving outcomes for students. Consequently, success criteria are frequently too vague for the impact of actions taken to be easily evaluated and associated timelines are often too open-ended to be effective. As a result, it is difficult for senior leaders and the governing body to hold leaders and managers to account for progress within their areas of responsibility. The impact of work to improve the quality of teaching and learning across the school has been more successful in some areas than in others and, as a result, the quality of teaching is uneven across the school. Existing approaches to monitoring the effectiveness of teaching place too great a focus on features of teaching as observed in classrooms, and too little emphasis on the impact of teaching on learning over a longer period.

The governing body is very supportive of the work of the school and provides adequate levels of challenge. It meets its statutory duties and supports the school well in ensuring that staff and students are safe. Although the governing body works across all the schools in the federation, there is little evidence that the work of the federation is adding significant value to provision in the high school. For example, although some students and their parents and carers expressed disappointment in the limited provision for modern foreign languages in the high school, a coordinated approach to developing languages provision across the federation is yet to gather momentum.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Guidance for students entering the sixth form ensures that they follow courses appropriate to their needs and aspirations. As a result, the proportion of students successfully continuing their courses into the second year of the sixth form is rising. The impact of the specialism can be seen in the very high proportion of students that secure valuable accreditation in information and communication technology (ICT) courses. The curriculum makes a satisfactory contribution to equality of opportunity and the school community is one where discrimination in any form is not tolerated.

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).

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.
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.



3 February 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Astley Community High School, Whitley Bay, NE25 0BP

You will remember that a team of inspectors visited your school recently. We took careful note of the views that you expressed in our meetings with you and in the questionnaires that you completed for us.

We judged that your school is providing you with a satisfactory standard of education, although we found that your levels of achievement should be higher, particularly for those of you studying academic courses in the main school and in the sixth form. We have therefore asked school leaders and managers, and the governing body, to ensure that your achievement at least matches those seen on vocational programmes.

We also found that your school works effectively to ensure you have a safe learning environment where bullying is not tolerated. You told us that in a few of your lessons your learning is sometimes disturbed by other students. Some of your parents and carers commented on the same issue. While we confirmed that disruption to learning does take place, it is uncommon; nevertheless, we have asked the school to address the issue.

We have also asked that teachers ensure that all of you are regularly challenged to produce your best work in every lesson. We have also said that you should be encouraged to express your ideas in more detail when discussing your work with teachers and other students. You can help in this by responding enthusiastically and positively to opportunities to discuss your work with other students in lessons.

You can also play your part in improving Astley Community High School by continuing to attend regularly, behaving well and working hard. I wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Lee Northern
Her Majesty's Inspector

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