

Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104498
Local Authority	Knowsley
Inspection number	355590
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Hilary Ward

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Gannon
Headteacher	Mr B Kerwin
Date of previous school inspection	3 October 2007
School address	Wellcroft Road Huyton, Liverpool Merseyside L36 7TA
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited all class groups, observing 18 lessons taught by a total of 17 teachers. They met with a group of students, members of the governing body, senior managers and held discussions with other staff. They observed the school's work, looked at students' books and at a range of documentation including school policies, assessment data and records, -students' welfare and safeguarding information, curriculum planning and records celebrating recent work of the school. The inspectors analysed the 25 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas:

- How well assessment information is used to plan lessons that meet all students' needs.
- The impact of the curriculum on students' future economic well-being.
- How well students are cared for and supported.
- The contribution of partnerships to students' outcomes.

Information about the school

Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre is larger than average for a community special school. It provides for students with an increasingly complex range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including moderate and specific learning difficulties and speech, language and communication difficulties. Recently, more students have been admitted with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Since the last inspection, the school has established a base to meet the specific needs of higher-achieving students with autistic spectrum conditions.

The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. The school population is almost exclusively of White British backgrounds and boys outnumber girls by almost 4:1. All students have a statement of special educational needs and 10 students are in the care of the local authority.

At the time of the last inspection, the school was unsure of its future during a period when special educational needs and/or disabilities provision was being reviewed in the local authority. This was temporarily resolved in the summer term of 2009.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This outstanding school is a very happy learning community. Since its last inspection, it has built on its strengths and further improved the quality of education and care for its students. Self-evaluation is highly effective, giving leaders an extremely good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Senior leaders have very high expectations for the students and this ambition is conveyed to and shared by all staff and the governing body. As a result of these shared aspirations, an exceptionally clear vision for the school's future and leaders' record of sustaining improvement, the school has an outstanding capacity to improve further.

Students enjoy coming to school and make good progress in their learning and outstanding progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is as a result of the effective teaching and of the excellent care, guidance and support students receive. Students make outstanding progress in communication and literacy and very good progress in science, and information and communication technology. Their development of numeracy skills, while good overall, is less well developed. Arrangements for safeguarding students are exemplary and students feel safe at all times. They are known very well as individuals and their differing needs are respected and supported. The school works very closely with students' families and this success was reflected in parents' and carers' responses to the inspection questionnaire.

The excellent curriculum provides a wealth of opportunities which engage and motivate students, including a very successful programme in partnership with the local college of further education. It is fundamental to the school that all students should have equal opportunities to experience the joy of success and hence, a wide and ever-increasing range of accreditation opportunities is offered to each of them. The school works extremely positively with other organisations in the wider community and has established productive partnerships with, for example, schools, colleges, employers, voluntary and faith groups, all of which enhance students' experiences and help to prepare them for their future.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that students' progress in mathematics is as good as that in literacy, by providing more opportunities in lessons for students to apply their existing mathematical skills and for them to develop new mathematical skills more rapidly.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

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All groups of students, including the relatively small number of girls, make good progress as they move through the school. Due to their complex special educational needs, students are unlikely to attain levels reached by students of a similar age nationally. Discussions with students, analysis of their books, and work in lessons, show that they have a clear understanding of their own progress. They behave very well in lessons and cooperate with each other and with staff to willingly complete tasks. Most achieve outstandingly well in literacy and very well in science and information and communication technology, but their understanding of the use and application of mathematics is not at the same high level. Overall, attainment is rising year-on-year. Leavers enjoy achieving an increasing range of external awards and last year, all but one student went on to continue their education at the local further education college. All Year 10 and 11 students enjoy a vocational studies programme and inclusion in accredited courses at college and gain, for example, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) certificates. They acquire business skills by taking part in enterprise activities, such as setting up a company, in which staff and parents and carers can invest and receive dividends, to produce and market greetings cards. The gardening club has raffled an organic vegetable box to raise funds to re-invest in their enterprise.

Students with autistic spectrum conditions develop good social and communication skills through the well-planned programmes offered to them in the new base. These reduce students' anxiety, contributing effectively to their emotional well-being and enabling them to participate more effectively in their learning.

Students gain the confidence to give presentations and win awards. For example, they used multi-media effectively to produce a DVD on 'the politics of the playground,' which won the Tate Liverpool School's Turner Prize, in competition with mainstream schools from across the North West. They make very useful contributions to the community, for example, making a DVD for future students, which tell them about life in the school and by raising funds for national and global charities. In particular, students collect money weekly to sponsor a child in an underdeveloped country and learn about the life there. The school council has made successful proposals for improving provision, has raised funds for providing benches and bike racks and contributed to a travel plan to improve safety. Students apply their excellent understanding of moral, social and cultural issues to their learning and daily life. In a history lesson about life during the Second World War, a student observed that 'people had to make difficult choices'. Students demonstrate their readiness to adopt healthy lifestyles, for example, by willingly participating in a range of sporting and physical activity, sometimes with other schools and clubs.

Attendance of the very large majority of students is good and the school has successfully taken measures to motivate some students who have not attended in previous settings.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	*
Pupils' attainment ¹	
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

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

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

How effective is the provision?

Teachers and support assistants know the students very well and have high expectations for what they can achieve. Teaching in mathematics is not consistently as effective as in other subjects because students do not always move on to new work quickly enough or have sufficient opportunities to practise their skills. Teachers use lessons and pastoral sessions very successfully to remind students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Students contribute to the evaluation of their own work. The school has recently introduced a different assessment framework and teachers are already using the information gathered from this in their planning, matching tasks and activities well to students' abilities. There is a 'can-do' ethos in the school with constant encouragement of students to raise their self-esteem and to enable them to enjoy success.

The rich curriculum provides excellent opportunities for students' learning and personal development and for them to enjoy a variety of exciting experiences. Information and communication technology and other stimulating resources enhance learning consistently well. Varied programmes engage students' interest and support their different learning needs highly effectively. This is evident, for example, in the social and communication programmes, which have been recently developed for students with autistic spectrum

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conditions and which have been found to benefit other students too. An extensive range of enrichment activities include highly motivating visits into the community and visitors into the school, linked closely to the topics students are studying. Where it is appropriate, the school encourages the inclusion of parents and carers in these sessions. Students in Years 10 and 11, who access the collegiate programme, begin with a carousel of taster sessions so that they can select an accredited course of their choice, for example, building construction, food technology or car maintenance, leading to an NVQ or Entry Level qualification.

Care procedures are outstanding and show that all students matter greatly as individuals. The excellent relationships between staff, students and their families are highly effective in ensuring students' welfare, for example, as they join or leave the school. Relationships are built on trust and mutual respect and on an individual approach to meeting students' emotional and physical needs. Parents and carers appreciate the contact that they have with the school and the support it provides when they need it. Attendance is monitored rigorously with firm, sensitive and effective action taken when necessary.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders' aspirations and ambition to provide the very best for students is central to this school and has motivated staff during a long period of uncertainty about the school's future. Leaders have continued, not only to maintain, but to raise achievement and the quality of care, for example, by the introduction of refined assessment procedures and by extending accreditation opportunities. All staff feel very involved in decisions about the school's improvement and as a consequence, they all share the same vision and high expectations. Middle managers conscientiously fulfil their responsibilities and are very effective in planning improvements to meet students' changing needs. The headteacher has a very accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning and the members of the senior leadership team have taken effective steps to improve the quality of teaching overall. They are aware of the strengths of teaching and where more improvement is needed and share these with all staff and the governing body.

Good governance based on training, skills and knowledge, gained from well-organised systems and reports, ensure that the governing body is well informed. Individual members of the governing body are highly effective in supporting and challenging school leaders, but a few are still developing the knowledge and skills needed to be able to hold leaders fully to account.

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Equality of opportunity for all students underpins all the school's work. For example, conscious that girls form a minority group, the school has developed a health programme and clubs to meet their particular needs. Safeguarding arrangements are also outstanding. All staff receive high-level training and understand and fulfil their responsibilities to protect vulnerable young people exceptionally well.

The school has taken steps to audit its involvement in the wider community and in the impact of its work to promote community cohesion. It has developed excellent partnerships with a range of statutory and voluntary agencies and other community groups which have greatly enhanced curricular opportunities and welfare support for students. Relationships with parents and carers are outstanding and it is clear that they feel very well informed and well supported by the school. The school goes the extra mile to encourage parents' and carers' involvement in school activities. It provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
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	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. They are very pleased with the progress their children are making and with the high quality care and support they receive. The inspection findings fully support this view. There were one or two concerns expressed about homework and about the provision of disabled toilets, but the inspectors found no evidence to endorse these views. Several parents and carers expressed appreciation for the support the school had given to the families.

Typical comments were, 'Alt Bridge is a brilliant school; my son started in September and within a month has made great progress', and another, 'The pastoral support from the school is excellent and it's a very welcoming environment for parents'.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre 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 25 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 104 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	16	64	7	28	2	8	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	17	68	6	24	2	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	76	5	20	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	19	76	6	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	68	7	28	0	0	0	0
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)	17	68	8	32	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	18	72	5	20	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	72	7	28	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	68	7	28	1	4	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	80	5	20	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	19	76	6	24	0	0	0	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.



15 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Alt Bridge Secondary Support Centre, Liverpool, L36 7TA

I want to thank you for welcoming my colleague and me into your school this week and for being so polite and courteous during the inspection. Thank you particularly to those of you who spoke with us and answered our questions about what you were learning in lessons or how much you enjoyed school. Alt Bridge is an outstanding school. These are some of the things we found out.

- You enjoy school and are happy there. Teachers and support assistants take excellent care of you and help you to feel safe.
- The school offers you a lot of opportunities to find out what you are good at and to try new things. They help you to be successful and gain awards. We were especially impressed that you won the Tate Liverpool Schools' Award and hope you will carry on looking for new and exciting things to do.
- You make good progress with your literacy, ICT and science skills and we have asked the school to help you to do just as well in mathematics.
- The school is extremely well led and we are very confident that your headteacher will continue to look for ways to make things even better for you.

Thank you again for all your help when we visited. We are very glad that most of you think it is important to continue your education by going on to college when you leave school and we wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Hilary Ward

Lead inspector

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