

Altrincham College of Arts

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106367
Local Authority	Trafford
Inspection number	367376
Inspection dates	24-25 May 2011
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	815
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Robert Aubrey
Headteacher	Mr Peter Brooks
Date of previous school inspection	12 February 2008
School address	Green Lane Timperley Altrincham Cheshire WA15 8QW
Telephone number	0161 980 7173
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Email address	headteacher@mail.altrinchamcollege.com

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Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 43 lessons taught by 43 teachers. They held meetings with staff, governors, students and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documents including planning, assessment records, monitoring reports and the school's self-evaluation. They analysed 391 questionnaires received from parents and carers, 60 from staff and 237 from students.

Information about the school

Altrincham College of Arts is smaller than the average-sized secondary modern school. The number of students on roll has increased steadily since the previous inspection and includes a higher proportion known to be eligible for free school meals than is found nationally. The proportion of students identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities is much higher than average but is reducing, as is the proportion who have statements of special educational needs. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups, and the proportion whose first language is not English, are average though gradually rising. It has been a specialist college for visual arts since 2002, for mathematics and computing since 2007 and for applied learning since 2009. The school holds numerous awards, including Artsmark Gold, Investor in People, Information Advice and Guidance Gold Award and National Healthy Schools Award. The school has met the government's floor targets for academic performance in each of the last three years.

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	1
Achievement	1
Teaching	1
Leadership and management	1
Behaviour and safety	2
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

Key findings

- This is an outstanding school that values all individuals and nurtures their unique talents.
- Students achieve outstandingly well and make rapid progress from below average starting points. GCSE results are around the national average. Performance in specialist subjects including mathematics, science, drama, art and information and communication technology (ICT) is above average and demonstrates the impact of the school's specialism.
- Teaching is outstanding. Teachers consistently expect all students to 'be the best you can' and, because of prevailing excellent relationships, students show confidence in responding to this challenge. Lessons are well paced, relevant and enjoyable, providing many opportunities for achievements to be shared, celebrated and built upon.
- Leadership and management are outstanding, driven by a principled, enthusiastic and approachable headteacher who inspires the trust of students, staff, parents and carers. The highly skilled and cohesive senior leadership team has a clear awareness of the school's performance and priorities, and plans creatively for improvement.
- The school is a very safe, harmonious and friendly place. The vast majority of students behave well and adhere to the school's 'behaviour charter.' However, some students do not readily take responsibility for their own actions and rely on staff to enforce rules.
- The number of students who are persistently absent from school has reduced markedly since the previous inspection.
- The school makes a valuable contribution to the local community, through a range of responsibilities which many students willingly take on. International links enhance students' moral and cultural awareness and enable them to make a difference more widely.

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- Intelligent management systems, a track record of improvement and relentless belief in the potential of every individual mean that the school has outstanding capacity to improve. The opening of a sixth form in 2011 is testimony to the ambition and foresight of leaders and governors.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen students' awareness of the need to take personal responsibility for their actions so that they are less dependent on adults.

Main report

Altrincham College of Arts is an outstanding school in which inspirational leadership, exceptional care and consistently high-quality teaching enable all groups of students to flourish. Achievement is outstanding; students make excellent progress from starting points which are generally below those found nationally. Their attainment is in line with the national average at GCSE in terms of the proportion who gain five good grades including English and mathematics. Standards are above average in mathematics, science, ICT, drama and art, demonstrating the powerful impact of the school's specialist status. Inspectors observed good or outstanding progress in almost all the lessons they observed. In discussions, students spoke knowledgeably about their work and described their next steps to improve it.

Teachers' detailed knowledge of the particular skills and achievements of all students within their classes enables them to design lessons to meet differing needs. The school keeps all aspects of its performance under constant review and takes rigorous but supportive action if any student is deemed to be underachieving in relation to their challenging individual targets. Girls and boys perform very well; girls' progress is particularly strong. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make excellent progress in response to highly effective support; the reading skills of those students who receive literacy intervention improve at an impressively rapid rate. The progress of students identified as vulnerable, including those who are looked after, is similar to that of their peers. Leaders and teachers know all students as individuals and take time to discover, and foster, their unique talents. Students' personal development is very strong. A wide range of extra-curricular activities supplements a highly relevant curriculum that enables students to pursue their own areas of interest. Specialist provision in the arts and applied learning has stimulated students' creativity and broadened their awareness of vocational opportunities. Students' self-esteem is high in a climate where achievement is fun. As one stated, 'this is a brilliant school where everyone really cares about us and expects us to be the best we can.' The overwhelming majority of students leave the school having secured a place in education, employment or training.

Ambitious and principled leadership by the headteacher ensures that the school is continually looking to raise its own performance. A member of staff used a sporting image to describe the school's ethos: 'it's like a great football team with a talented manager, strong spine and excellent players'. Senior leaders and heads of

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department are insightful, highly effective and deeply committed to the development of all staff. Self-evaluation is accurate and comprehensive, drawing on the views of parents, carers, students, staff and external partners. The school's lesson observations have been systematically moderated by a local authority adviser and are thorough, objective and enable the sharing of good practice. An innovative job-shadowing programme enables staff at all levels to learn new skills and lead initiatives within a supportive environment. Leaders at all levels continually take feedback from students in determining improvement plans, including the establishment of a sixth form which admits its first students in September 2011 and is the source of great excitement and pride. Governors are extremely well-informed and proactive. They have a clear understanding of the school's context and passionately promote its development. Through their well-ordered committees they ensure that the school's policies support its effective functioning. Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements.

Leaders have focused on raising the quality of teaching with conspicuous success. Thoughtful research has underpinned decisions with regard to teaching styles. Focused professional development, coupled with rigorous quality assurance, has led to the high level of consistency observed by inspectors. Teachers establish respectful relationships with students and consistently ensure a climate which values creative thinking and builds self-esteem. They have excellent subject knowledge and willingly discuss their practice with each other. Their own enthusiasm for lifelong learning engenders a 'can do' culture among students. Support staff make a valuable contribution to learning by responding to students' specific needs and fostering their independence. In many lessons highly effective questioning challenges students to give detailed and thoughtful responses, such as in an outstanding Spanish lesson where students probed each other's responses to ensure that their grammatical structures were perfect. Assessment is continuous and effective in most lessons, including helpful written advice to students on how to improve their work. A significant number of students enter school with comparatively low standards in reading and writing. The school takes particular account of their needs in promoting a reading culture and ensuring that opportunities for extended writing are carefully structured in order that students can gain skills and confidence. Excellent literacy practice was evident in an outstanding English lesson in which the teacher actively developed students' skills as inferential readers as a precursor to studying *Romeo and Juliet*. Higher-attaining students report that the school 'stretches' them to attain the best possible grades.

Students collaborate willingly during lessons, readily taking on roles within teams and supporting each other's learning through sensitive feedback. Their leadership skills are further developed through opportunities to be school councillors, sports leaders and student leaders. Arts leaders learn skills from the school's artists in residence and then teach them to pupils in local primary schools. Students' spiritual and moral development is promoted strongly throughout the curriculum. For instance, in a particularly moving history lesson, students created media reports to illustrate wartime propaganda. In religious studies their curiosity was apparent as they debated the concepts of forgiveness and punishment. Assemblies and form time

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enable reflection on topical news items and ethical dilemmas. Through its AfriTwin project, the school has established strong links with a school in South Africa and this has a significant impact on students' respect for diverse cultures.

The school is a very safe and secure place. Relationships are harmonious and students report that incidents of bullying are extremely rare and rapidly dealt with. Equality of opportunity is strenuously promoted and widely respected. Inspectors observed very good behaviour in lessons and around the site. Conduct during an unplanned fire evacuation was exemplary. A few parents, carers, staff and students commented that the immature behaviour of a small minority of students occasionally disrupts lessons and that a few students rely too heavily on adults to enforce rules. The school has a very effective behaviour management system and teachers consistently demand high standards of conduct.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Altrincham College of Arts 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 391 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 815 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	175	45	202	52	11	3	2	1
Q2 My child feels safe at school	189	48	181	46	17	4	1	0
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	189	48	175	45	20	5	2	1
Q4 The school meets my child’s particular needs	170	43	195	50	11	3	4	1
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	194	50	177	45	12	3	2	1
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	187	48	185	47	16	4	1	0
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	104	27	227	58	46	12	5	1
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	86	22	206	53	78	20	6	2
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	143	37	188	48	32	8	7	2
Q10 The school helps me to support my child’s learning	160	41	207	53	13	3	3	1
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	188	48	166	42	27	7	6	2
Q12 The school is well led and managed	222	57	155	40	9	2	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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and 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.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 achievement of all pupils. ■ Behaviour and safety. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The effectiveness of leadership and management. <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
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.



26 May 2011

Dear Students,

Inspection of Altrincham College of Arts, Altrincham, WA15 8QW

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks to those of you who gave up your time to speak with us and those of you who completed the questionnaire. I am delighted to inform you that we judged your school to be outstanding, for many of the reasons that you told us about:

- The school values you all as individuals and helps you develop your talents. You are exceptionally well cared for and supported by the staff.
- You achieve outstandingly well and make rapid progress from your starting points. Your results in mathematics, science, art and drama and ICT are particularly impressive.
- Teaching is outstanding. Your lessons are interesting and you told us how much you enjoy them.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Mr Brooks sets high standards in all aspects of the school's work and he is very well supported by the other staff and governors.
- Many of you take on extra responsibilities which help the school community. You also make a difference to the wider community through your work in arts subjects and your international links, including the AfriTwin project.
- The school has great capacity to go from strength to strength. The sixth form centre will provide exciting new opportunities.

The school is a very safe and friendly place. Most of you behave very well although we know, because staff, parents and students told us, that a small minority sometimes act in an immature way. In order to ensure that everyone continues to achieve as well as they can in all aspects of school life, we would like those of you who sometimes act in an immature way to take more responsibility for your own actions by thinking about your own behaviour and not relying on adults to tell you

the right things to do. It's a tall order but we have every confidence that you can rise to this challenge because you have proved how capable and talented you are in other ways.

You are rightly proud to belong to this exceptional school; thank you for playing your part in making it such an exciting and caring place. On behalf of the inspectors I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Shirley Gornall
Her Majesty's Inspector

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