

Alder Grange Community and Technology School

Calder Road, Rawtenstall, Rossendale, Lancashire, BB4 8HW

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Leadership and management are outstanding. The school's clear vision for excellence is exceptionally well informed by a keen awareness of the community the school serves and an ambition to meet the needs of individual students.
- Students make good progress and achieve well in most subjects. Standards attained are mostly above average and have risen at a faster rate than nationally in recent years.
- Teaching is mostly good and often outstanding. Teachers plan their lessons particularly well to effectively develop students' skills and understanding.
- Teachers know their students well: they provide excellent individual support and have high aspirations for them.
- Alder Grange is a very inclusive school which aims to meet the needs of all students. The work of the school's recently developed inclusion centre provides excellent support for vulnerable students.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding. They are welcoming, courteous and polite. Their conduct is excellent and they are proud to belong to the school.
- Attendance has improved in the last three years such that it is now above average.
- Excellent data analysis means the school is well aware of its strengths and priorities for improvement.
- Leaders ensure the professional development of teachers within the school, new entrants to the profession and those in partner schools is highly effective in improving teaching.
- There is effective leadership development through a formal alliance of schools which has resulted in producing new leaders for Alder Grange.
- The development of the sixth-form provision has been carefully managed and thought through to meet the needs of the students in the community it serves; it provides a good balance of vocational and academic courses.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not outstanding overall; marking is not consistently of high quality and occasionally there is not always enough challenge for students of all abilities.
- Higher proportions of students need to make better than expected progress in order for achievement to be outstanding.
- Although the recently opened sixth form is developing well, it requires improvement as it is not yet securely established to ensure students' progress is consistently good, particularly in academic courses.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 36 lessons taught by different teachers. Four observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, executive headteacher, head of school and other senior and middle leaders, four groups of students including representatives from the school council, members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and scrutinised the work in students’ books and a wide range of documentation, including: information on students’ achievement; school records relating to the monitoring of teaching, behaviour, attendance and safety; school policies; minutes of meetings of the governing body; the school’s development plan and a summary of its effectiveness.
- The 30 responses to the staff questionnaire and the 46 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) were taken account of.

Inspection team

Mick Blaylock, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lyn Field	Additional Inspector
Jan Peckett	Additional Inspector
David Woodhouse	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Alder Grange is a smaller-than-average-sized secondary school. It is non-selective within a locality that operates a selective system.
- The school opened a sixth form in September 2010 which moved into the attractive purpose-built accommodation in February 2011.
- From September 2012 the former headteacher became the executive headteacher of the Pennine Lancashire SCITT partnership and now leads the Pennine Lancashire Alliance of 40 schools and the Pennine Lancashire Leadership Academy.
- The school's headteacher is supported by a head of school, who has responsibility for the day-to-day running of the school.
- The proportion of students who are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, those looked after by the local authority and those from service families, is in line with the national average.
- Approximately 85% of the students are of White British heritage. Just under one tenth are Bangladeshi. For approximately 10% of students their first language is not English.
- The proportion of students supported at school action is lower than that found nationally. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is average.
- Ten students attend off-site provision; four attend medical provision and six students attend the local pupil referral unit.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding and hence raise students' achievement further, including increasing proportions of students making more than expected progress in English and mathematics, by ensuring that:
 - work is always challenging enough to meet the needs of students of all abilities
 - marking is of a consistently high quality across all subjects and provides clear identification of how students can improve further.
- Increase the overall effectiveness of the sixth form to securely establish its provision by:
 - strengthening the teaching of A-level subjects to ensure that students make at least good progress on academic courses
 - achieving greater consistency of numbers on roll through increased integration with the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- The overall attainment of students on joining the school in Year 7 varies between year groups but is mostly below average, with smaller proportions than seen nationally having higher attainment.
- In recent years the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSEs at Grade C or above, including English and mathematics, has risen from below average in 2010 to above average in 2012.
- The current Year 11 students are unlikely to exceed the 2012 proportion achieving five or more GCSEs at Grade C or above including English and mathematics. However, their projected attainment would still represent good progress, indeed better than that of the 2012 cohort, because of their lower starting points.
- Students make good progress from their different starting points, although the proportions making more than expected progress in English and mathematics were below average in 2012.
- In English the proportions making expected progress by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2012 were above average. However, in mathematics a change of examination resulted in below-average proportions making expected progress for that year group.
- The detailed analysis of the performance of students currently in Years 10 and 11 indicates that their progress in both English and mathematics is good. The school's data and work in students' books confirms that achievement is good.
- Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average overall. Students achieve as expected on vocational courses but their progress on A-level academic courses is well below national averages and requires improvement to become good.
- There are no discernible differences in the performance of different groups of students such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds or those who speak English as an additional language.
- Students who are disabled or those with special educational needs receive excellent support that enables them to make good progress and achieve real success both academically and socially.
- The leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to equality of opportunity. The achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium funding is good. They achieve better than similar students nationally and the in-school gaps in attainment have reduced such that their performance is comparable to that of other students.
- The small number of students whose special circumstances require alternative provision are suitably provided for to ensure their good progress is sustained.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used effectively to provide one-to-one support for weaker readers.
- An early entry policy in English has been discontinued as the school has moved away from starting GCSE courses in Year 9 to a more conventional two-year Key Stage 4.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching is good due to the school's recognition of the importance of teaching and learning which engage and motivate students and enables them to become independent learners. There was strong agreement on staff questionnaires that 'leaders do all they can to improve teaching'.
- The quality of teaching observed in the course of the inspection was mostly good with some that was outstanding, although a small amount seen required improvement.
- Teachers are highly innovative and structure their lessons particularly well with a range of activities to develop students' understanding and support their progress. These well-planned activities are effective in engaging students' interest as, for example, in a Year 8 group task of reordering the lines of command for a shredded computer program.
- In the stronger teaching there is effective use of questioning to challenge students and cause

them to reflect on their understanding. Good use was seen of students being encouraged to question each other, for example in posing questions for the class as 'quiz-masters' in a Year 11 science lesson and in critical peer evaluation against examination criteria in Year 13.

- Teachers showed very good subject knowledge which is used to good effect in their teaching and in responding to students' questions.
- In some lessons the challenge for students of all abilities was not always appropriate. In some lessons work was not always sufficiently challenging for some while in some cases being too challenging for others.
- The school has a very positive climate for learning, evident in a Year 10 religious education lesson considering issues of social injustice in El Salvador where students made excellent progress in their understanding due to their positive attitudes, a high level of challenge and their collaborative working.
- Sixth-form students appreciate the individual support they receive from their teachers in what are often very small teaching groups. There is good awareness of the need to further develop the skills of those new to teaching A-level courses in order to raise achievement. Effective training and support for this are in place.
- There is very effective support for vulnerable students, including those who are disabled or those with special educational needs, through in-class support from teaching assistants and the school's inclusion unit – enterprisingly called 'ag+'. The needs of these students are carefully and sensitively analysed, leading to some imaginative responses.
- The excellent checking of students' work in English identifies what is good and where improvement is needed to reach the next level. Additionally, detailed feedback is provided to students every half term. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent across subjects and within subjects and does not always provide clear guidance on how students can improve further.
- There is good teaching of literacy skills with reinforcement across subjects of subject-specific vocabulary and effective guided reading. A reading ambassador scheme promotes reading for enjoyment through well conceived strategies and provides incentives to encourage students to read. The school's own recent survey showed that, currently, 65% of students read for enjoyment either in or out of school. Numeracy skills are addressed well in mathematics and reinforced across the curriculum.
- The majority of parents agree or strongly agree that their children are taught well in the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of students at Alder Grange is outstanding. Their conduct is excellent: they are welcoming, courteous and polite. Students' pride in their school is seen in their smart appearance, wearing a school uniform that was agreed with the school council. Older students respond well to responsibilities allocated as prefects, contributing to the calm and orderly way in which students move around the school and conduct themselves during break times.
- Students of all abilities and ages show very positive attitudes to learning and are able to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. They are attentive, eager to please and know their teachers want to help them do the best they can. They relate well with their teachers and other adults, showing maturity, confidence and respect.
- Students reported that incidents of bullying of any kind are rare. Students know they can approach staff with concerns and that the school has effective systems in place to deal with bullying. The exemplary logging of any bullying or racist incidents is both meticulous and comprehensive and includes a record of actions taken.
- Attendance has improved year on year from 2010 such that it is now above average.
- The school takes care to identify underlying reasons for any poor behaviour. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and work with the school, and other agencies as appropriate, in finding the best way to support them and achieve positive outcomes. The school's internal exclusion unit is very well managed. Skilful work with students helps them

appreciate the consequences of their actions. Exclusion measures have been used to address behaviour concerns for a small number of students. The effectiveness of this is seen in the outstanding behaviour of students.

- Students say they feel very safe in school, a view that parents and staff strongly agreed with.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Senior leaders and governors share a strong commitment and deep-seated desire to meet the needs of their community and the young people they serve, resulting in a very clear vision for the school. This drives the work of the school and informs its strategic planning and is shared by middle leaders and the overwhelming majority of staff, who consider it a privilege to work at the school. Inspectors agreed with the sentiment of one that the 'school always strives to keep the interests of its students paramount in its strategies'.
- Since the last inspection the school has implemented two major initiatives in developing a new sixth-form centre (ag6) and establishing strategies to better support students' behaviour, learning, and attendance, including the 'ag+' specialist provision. These developments have been managed exceptionally well by the governing body, the school's headteachers (past and present) and other senior leaders. A restructuring of roles and responsibilities for governors and senior leaders has taken place to ensure the capacity for the school's future remains strong.
- The school's leadership of teaching is outstanding and has proved effective, developing its own leaders. Senior and middle leaders are committed to teaching which engages and motivates students, enabling them to become independent learners. There is excellent involvement of all staff in reviewing and developing their teaching. Teachers at all levels are empowered to develop skills and contribute to whole-school developments. Consequently, the school's work in developing its teachers has the right priorities, such as focusing on additional training needed to teach A level effectively in the sixth form. The use of performance management is robust with well-informed decisions on the progress of teachers up the salary scales.
- The curriculum is good and meets the needs and interests of both students and the local community. In addition to the full range of expected subjects, enrichment courses are offered in Year 9 and across Key Stage 4. The curriculum includes opportunities to challenge students' spiritual and moral thinking, contributing well to their personal development, promoting equal opportunities and preparing them for life in contemporary society, nationally and internationally. Assemblies reinforce the ethos of the school, although form times could be used more productively.
- The curriculum in the sixth form provides a good balance of both vocational and academic courses to meet the needs of the students in the community.
- The sixth form has proved attractive to students from other schools, although numbers progressing from Alder Grange have fluctuated considerably in the three years since opening. The school's concern to increase progression to the sixth form is proving effective with current Year 11 students.
- The large majority of parents are very positive about the school and would recommend it to others. There are striking examples of success in the school's work with parents of students who struggle to make the best use of the opportunities the school offers.
- The website is detailed and informative. It includes a parent mail section which the school uses to highlight current events and day-to-day changes as well as signposting more generic information.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding students are fully in place.
- The local authority provides good support both through its data analysis and its link advisor who knows the school and its context well.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governors are highly skilled and knowledgeable about the school, including how well the school is doing and the quality of its teaching. They are passionately committed to the school's vision for its role in the community and provide robust challenge and effective support for

senior leaders. Together with the current executive headteacher they have driven strategic planning and improvements since the last inspection and have sustained the outstanding calibre of leadership. Planning for continued success lies at the core of the governors' work and is reflected in leadership at all levels. This has led to the current headteacher model where the three most senior staff have clearly defined areas of responsibility. The governors monitor the impact of the school's partnership work in order to ensure that energy given to this area does not distract attention from the school's focus on teaching and learning. Constant reflection on how well systems work led to a realignment of governor committees in the summer of 2012. The impact of this has been sharper monitoring against the school's key priorities in the school development plan. For example, the governors are aware of how the leadership of core subjects affects the improvement in students' progress and know that teachers' subject knowledge is a vital element in the delivery of the sixth-form curriculum. Governors are fully involved in planning for the use of pupil premium funds and know that students eligible for this funding do achieve well. Governors also display astute financial management both in their understanding of the links between performance management and salary progression for staff and in the development of the sixth-form centre.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119722
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	411819

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	809
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	113
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Lawrence Forshaw
Headteacher	David Hampson
Date of previous school inspection	11 October 2006
Telephone number	01706 223171
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