



Inspection report

The Armthorpe School

Unique Reference Number 106782
LEA Doncaster

Inspection number 275643
Inspection dates 4 and 5 July 2005
Reporting inspector Mr D C Simpson HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and was deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Type of School	Comprehensive	School address	Mere Lane
School category	Community		Armthorpe
			Doncaster
Age range of pupils	11 to 18 years		South Yorkshire
			DN3 2DA
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01302 831582
Number on roll	866	Fax number	01302 300757
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs S Shearman
Date of previous inspection	May 2004	Headteacher	Mr N Pattinson

Age group	Published	Reference no.
11 to 18 years	8 September 2005	275643

Introduction

When The Armthorpe School was inspected in May 2004, it was judged to require special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. Her Majesty's Inspectors of schools (HMI) subsequently visited the school on two occasions to monitor its progress, and reinspected the school in July 2005.

Description of the school

The Armthorpe School is situated in the village of Armthorpe on the eastern fringe of Doncaster. Its 866 pupils are in the main from white families living in a variety of socio-economic circumstances and include a significant proportion who are disadvantaged. At seven per cent, the proportion of the pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. Twenty five per cent of the pupils have special educational needs, which is above average, and 27 pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Need. In the main, the pupils who enter the school at Year 7 have achieved or exceeded the National Curriculum attainment level expected for their age.

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Overall effectiveness of the school

In accordance with section 14 of the School Inspections Act 1996, I am of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures, since it is now providing an acceptable standard of education for its pupils.

The Armthorpe School provides a very sound education for its pupils. The very good leadership of the school has enabled it to address quickly the weaknesses identified in the last inspection. Management has been strengthened by the introduction of rigorous procedures for monitoring and evaluation. Teaching is satisfactory, with much that is good or better. Consequently standards are rising and achievement is improving overall, but not all of the pupils achieve as well as they should. Much assessment practice is good but it is not sufficiently consistent across the school. Most pupils enjoy coming to the school because they are well cared for and have good relationships with their teachers. Some aspects of accommodation are unsatisfactory.

Effectiveness of the school's sixth form

The sixth form is small but provides a sound education for its students. The quality of teaching was satisfactory, and sometimes good or very good. The students' conscientious attitudes and industrious behaviour were striking and most contribute very well to the life of the rest of the school. Their attendance is satisfactory overall and is monitored closely. Pass rates are high in Year 13 and on vocational courses. Lower pass and completion rates at the end of Year 12 partly reflect a weakness in the quality of guidance for the pupils prior to entry into the sixth form. The wide range of courses offered on-site, or in conjunction with other institutions, provides well for the school's comprehensive intake, and 90 per cent of sixth-form students continue studying in further or higher education. Facilities for independent study are limited.

Improvement since the last inspection

The inspection report required the school to: improve the progress and raise the attainment of the pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3; improve the quality of teaching; strengthen the use of assessment; and set down a strategic plan to co-ordinate the school's widening range of initiatives. There has been reasonable progress in relation to raising attainment, though standards need to rise further, and good progress elsewhere.

Capacity to improve

The Armthorpe school is well placed to sustain its recent progress. A trend of declining results at the end of Key Stage 3 was halted in 2005, and improvements in the quality of teaching have the potential to raise attainment further throughout the school. Very effective monitoring procedures have resulted in high levels of accountability and a programme of school improvement based on an accurate analysis of the school's performance. The school's leadership has a good awareness of its future priorities. The greater stability of staffing for next year and the school's successful appointment of teachers from neighbouring schools testify to improved morale and the growing reputation of The Armthorpe School.

What the school should do to improve further

The key priorities are to:

- continue to improve the pupils' achievement;
- increase the proportion of teaching which is good or better;
- implement the existing good practice in assessment more consistently across the school;
- improve aspects of accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Standards are rising and achievement is improving overall. However, not all of the pupils achieve as well as they should, often because of a legacy of underachievement. There is some variation in the performance of the pupils across departments. There are no significant variations in the performance of different ethnic minority groups, but girls do better overall than boys.

The pupils' results in the 2004 end-of-Key Stage 3 tests were below average but they rose significantly in mathematics and science in 2005. The proportions of the pupils gaining a Level 5 or above increased from 63 per cent to 76 per cent in mathematics, and from 60 to 66 per cent in science, as did the proportion of the pupils gaining a Level 6 or above. In mathematics, many of the pupils achieved well, but in science around a third of the pupils remained at Level 4 throughout the key stage. The pupils' results in English for 2005 are not yet available.

At Key Stage 4, only 31 per cent of the pupils achieved five or more grades A* to C at GCSE in 2004 and this was ten percentage points less than the school's statutory target. Similarly, only 83 per cent achieved five or more grades A* to G, six percentage points lower than the target. The school's robust monitoring indicates that many more pupils should achieve their target grades in the 2005 GCSE examinations. Moreover, modular science test results indicate that fewer of the Year 10 pupils are underachieving than hitherto.

In the sixth form, the average points score achieved by the students in 2004 was well above the average for all maintained schools with sixth forms. In the AVCE and A level examinations, 95 per cent of the students entered achieved a pass, although the AS results were weaker. Pass rates were very high on the level 1 and level 2 courses.

The pupils made satisfactory or better progress in 30 of the 34 lessons observed, including nine where it was good and four where it was very good. The pupils' progress was unsatisfactory in four lessons. The work sampled during the inspection showed that most pupils made at least adequate progress over time.

Many of the pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Need, and those other pupils who have special educational needs who are taught in small groups, made good or better progress. For example, the Year 7 pupils achieved very high standards when their prior attainment is taken into account. In some of the other low-attaining classes, particularly in Years 9 and 10, weaknesses in literacy and gaps in their prior knowledge and understanding slowed the pupils' progress.

The higher-attaining pupils often worked at, or above, the level expected for their age. However, many of the higher and middle-attaining pupils struggled to use standard English accurately when speaking formally.

Personal development

The pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. The majority of the pupils responded positively to a demanding work rate and completed the tasks within the specified time. The learning ethos of the school has improved to such an extent that only dull teaching failed to elicit a positive response. In the best lessons, the pupils were enthusiastic and actively engaged in the topics being taught. They readily followed well-established routines, were aware of the teachers' expectations and were motivated to succeed.

The pupils' behaviour around the school is good and sometimes very good. Their movement between lessons is orderly and well supervised by staff. Relationships between the pupils and teachers, and among the pupils themselves, are generally

good. Teachers provide positive role models. The senior members of the behaviour educational support team are effective in improving behaviour. Exclusions, although rising slightly from the precipitous drop recorded two years ago, are used sensitively to set standards of behaviour which are conducive to learning and to establish positive personal development. The inclusion unit is effective in pre-empting the need for exclusion, and the re-integration of the pupils into mainstream lessons is managed well.

The rate of attendance has continued to rise and is currently 93 per cent, which is above the national figure. Systems are in place to encourage and reward good and improved attendance, and the link between attendance and achievement is firmly reinforced. Punctuality to the school and lessons continues to improve, but is not helped by a minority of teachers who respond inadequately to the pupils' lateness to lessons or registration sessions.

Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory with some good features. Year group assemblies with planned themes and the associated 'thought for the day' in registration sessions provided useful opportunities for reflection. The Year 7 assembly was a good example of the pupils' active involvement in the life of the local community. The school recognises that aspects of citizenship and personal development across the curriculum lack sufficient co-ordination to guarantee an entitlement. Plans are in place for next term to ensure a more comprehensive provision. The pupils participate in a wide range of extracurricular activities, including the arts, sports and residential visits. The school council provides good opportunities for the pupils to take responsibility, to contribute to decision making about a range of issues which directly affects the quality of their school life, and to improve their communication and negotiation skills.

The pupils report that they feel safe in the school. A named teacher has received child protection training. Members of the senior leadership team meet and greet the pupils in the morning and the pupils were well supervised during the day. The pupils spoke knowledgeably about bullying, racism and disabilities, and understood the skills they were developing for citizenship and employment. The school council's focus on healthy eating was instrumental in the setting up of new catering arrangements. The theme of healthy life styles was well developed in a Year 8 registration period and a Year 10 physical education lesson.

Quality of provision

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall; it was satisfactory or better in over nine out of ten lessons. It was good or very good in four fifths. This is a significant improvement since the school was made subject to special measures, when teaching

was unsatisfactory. Teachers have actively applied the training they have received and provide the pupils with a greater variety of learning activities.

The best lessons were well planned to meet the needs of the pupils and delivered with high expectations; the pupils enjoyed opportunities to speculate, predict and justify their problem-solving strategies. Teachers questioned the pupils effectively to assess their progress and challenge the more able. Teaching assistants were deployed appropriately to support the pupils' learning and discreetly manage inattentive behaviour. Where teaching was satisfactory or inadequate, common weaknesses were planning that did not adequately address the pupils' differing needs and the teacher talking for too long.

The use of assessment is a strength of some departments, but this best practice is not spread widely enough across the school. The end-of-key stage targets set for the pupils are generally challenging and the school has sound systems for checking the pupils' progress. At regular intervals, the school analyses performance and identifies underachievement. Many pupils knew the level at which they were working, particularly in modern languages, history and English, and understood what they needed to do to progress to the next level; in other subjects this was less secure and teachers did not routinely use assessment information to plan lessons. Much of the marking was sound, and often it was good, but not all departments ensured that the marking consistently gave the pupils helpful and concise guidance about how to improve their work.

The curriculum is broad and balanced, and based on national requirements. At Key Stage 3, provision for citizenship and physical education has improved. At Key Stage 4, a wide range of relevant and appropriate courses enables the pupils to pursue particular aptitudes and vocational pathways.

The school site is made up of a diverse mix of buildings including several that are temporary. It is generally well cared for and most classrooms provide a stimulating learning environment. However, many corridors are sparse. Some areas have been neglected and are in need of painting or repair. The school has appropriate plans to relocate senior managers, currently based in the administration block, around the site, close to the departments which they line manage. Library provision is inadequate.

The provision for the pupils who have special educational needs is satisfactory with more strengths than weaknesses, and is improving. The pupils with the lowest levels of literacy, including many of those who have a Statement of Special Educational Need, are given intensive support in developing reading skills and these pupils often make good progress. The quality of individual education plans and group education plans are good. The targets in the plans are usually measurable

and specific, and the plans give good guidance about how to adapt work and teaching methods to meet the pupils' needs.

Leadership and management

The school is very well led. The headteacher has improved the effectiveness of senior leaders by sharply defining their responsibilities. He has established a culture of high expectations underpinned by an effective balance of monitoring and consultation. The school's self-evaluation is rigorous, robust in tackling underperformance and identifies the next priorities for improvement. Regular meetings are held with middle managers who report positively upon the support and challenge they receive. Despite attempts to recruit to the posts of head of design and technology and history, they remain vacant.

The governing body has significantly improved the rigour with which it holds the school to account. The chair of the governing body is very knowledgeable about the school's strengths and weaknesses and has a clear awareness of the priorities for improvement. Governors are generous in the time they give to their duties, and are progressively deepening their knowledge of the school's work through presentations from senior and middle managers, as well as consulting with the school council.

Financial management and budgetary planning are good. A balanced budget for the current financial year has been set, and a three-year plan to eradicate the deficit has been agreed with the local education authority (LEA).

The LEA has provided valued support, and worked alongside the school to tailor training effectively to improve the quality of teaching and the capacity of senior and middle managers.

Appendix – Information about the inspection

The Armthorpe School was inspected by HMI in May 2004. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act. The inspection was critical of many aspects of the work of the school and, in accordance with that Act, the school was made subject to special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education.

The school was visited by HMI and an Additional Inspector in December 2004 and in March 2005 to assess the progress it was making to implement its action plan and address the key issues in the inspection report of May 2004.

In July 2005, two HMI and an Additional Inspector returned to inspect the school for two days. The inspection was carried out under section 3 of the School Inspections Act 1996, and was also deemed a section 10 inspection under the same Act.

Thirty four lessons or parts of lessons, two assemblies and one tutor period were inspected. The pupils' conduct was observed around the school and on the playground at break and lunchtimes, and samples of their work were inspected. Discussions were held with the headteacher, other key staff, the chair of governors, a representative from the LEA, a group of pupils and informally with other staff. A wide range of the school's documentation was scrutinised. Account was taken of the evidence from previous monitoring inspections.

The inspection assessed the quality of education provided and the progress the school has made, in particular in relation to the main findings and areas for improvement in the inspection report of May 2004 and the action plan prepared by the governing body to address those areas for improvement.

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