



Altrincham Grammar School for Girls

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 106362
LEA Trafford
Inspection number 277540
Inspection dates 9 November 2005 to 10 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr James Kidd CfBT Lead Inspector

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Cavendish Road
School category	Foundation		Bowdon
Age range of pupils	11 to 18		Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 2NL
Gender of pupils	Girls	Telephone number	0161 9280827
Number on roll	1164	Fax number	0161 9417400
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Cliff Wright
Date of previous inspection	10 October 2000	Headteacher	Mrs D Ross-Wawrzynski

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Altrincham Girls' Grammar School is the largest single-sex grammar school in England and is also a specialist language college. There are 1,164 pupils on roll, including a sixth form of 266 students. Entry to the school is by examination and pupils in the top 40% of the ability range are admitted. Many pupils come from the immediate, relatively advantaged, neighbourhood, where the school enjoys an excellent reputation. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low and none are at an early stage of learning English, but there is a diversity of cultures represented in the school. There are very few pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and very small numbers of pupils living in care at the school.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the leadership team that Altrincham Girls' Grammar is an outstanding school. Pupils make excellent progress. Pass rates in public examinations are very high and improve year on year. Teaching is very effective and the school quite rightly prides itself on its reputation as a learning community. Pupils' personal development and the care and support provided for them are outstanding. Similarly, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent and they feel safe and happy. The formal curriculum is augmented by a wide range of enrichment activities and an increasing variety of links with schools in the local area and abroad. Language college status supports the raising of standards in all subjects and both primary and secondary schools nearby benefit from the expertise of Altrincham staff. Pupils and staff are very proud of the school and it is held in the highest esteem by parents. The school correctly recognises that improvements need to be made in the accommodation for physical education and music, if these subjects are to continue to perform at the highest level.

The leadership of the school is outstanding. It is managed efficiently and provides excellent value for money. It is a thinking school, one in which performance is always under review, evaluation is accurate and in which the capacity for improvement is a hallmark. Areas for development noted in the previous report have been tackled successfully. Senior and middle leaders, governors, teachers and associate staff work together in harmony for the benefit of the pupils in their care. The school's systems for checking how well it is doing are outstanding and self-evaluation documents are accurate and detailed. Excellent use is made of statistical data to monitor and improve the performance of both pupils and teachers.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form is very effective and students speak highly of the teaching, support and guidance they receive. Sixth form students have a wealth of responsibilities outside their formal lessons and do much to support and mentor younger pupils. They run clubs - drama and chess, for example - and they play a major role in ensuring that pupils new to the school take full advantage of what it has to offer. Standards at general certificate of education advanced level (GCE A-level) are very high and in 2005, 85% of grades were A or B. Teaching is outstanding in many lessons and staff have very good knowledge of their subjects. Leadership and management are excellent and teachers are fully committed to developing sixth form provision further. Again, sixth form

students are very proud of their school and find it difficult to suggest any improvements which may be made.

What the school should do to improve further

The school has no significant areas for improvement, however in order to further improve its very effective performance, it should:

- develop the effective assessment practice even further to ensure that all departments are using assessment to enhance learning in a systematic and rigorous manner
- increase pupils' access to information and communications technology (ICT) in order that they are given more opportunities for personal research and independent learning across all subjects
- ensure there is an even sharper focus on learning objectives within the already outstanding teaching.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards and achievement are outstanding and both pupils and students make extremely good progress. Pass rates at general certificate of secondary education (GCSE) and A-level are very high, have been for many years and continue to rise. At Key Stage 3, results are very high in English, mathematics and science and this performance places the school in the top 5% of schools nationally. Standards in other subjects are also outstanding and pupils regularly exceed their targets. No group of pupils is underperforming and they make better progress than might be expected, even though they enter the school with well above average levels of attainment.

At GCSE, almost 100% of pupils achieved at least five passes at the higher grades in 2004 and in 2005. Every subject has pass rates which are much higher than average and the proportion of grades A and A* is more than four times that found nationally.

In the sixth form, achievement and standards are exceptionally high and are improving year on year. In 2005, for example, all students reached pass levels in all subjects and 85% gained A and B grades, a figure which is almost twice the national average. Large numbers continue their studies at university and, on average, 10 students enter Oxford or Cambridge each year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Girls work hard to become members of 'Alty Girls' and they are proud to belong to its community. They enjoy school life and make the best of the opportunities provided for them, demonstrating a mature understanding that they are the architects of their own current and future development. Their attendance is exceptionally high and their behaviour is excellent. Very good quality relationships with adults and amongst pupils ensure that learning takes place in a business-like and supportive atmosphere. The girls are very helpful to each other, and to adults, and are quick to show their appreciation of their classmates' work.

Pupils are sensitive to others' needs and reflective about the implications of what they see and hear. They have a strong moral sense and are both inventive and generous in their charitable work. They eagerly take on responsibilities and carry them out with aplomb. The school council develops girls' leadership skills very well and it effects change. Pupils' awareness and respect for their own and others' cultures are exceptional

and their participation in the arts is impressive. They act very safely when, for example, crossing the roads between sites and they know how to live in a healthy manner. Their personal confidence, willingness to share, excellent grasp of basic skills and commitment to whatever they do will stand them in very good stead for future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Inspectors agree with the school's evaluation that teaching and learning are outstanding. Mutual respect and high quality relationships create an atmosphere of trust and confidence within which pupils and students thrive. Teachers' depth of subject knowledge and their understanding of examination requirements enable them to plan work, which very effectively build on pupils' existing knowledge and understanding. Teaching strategies are well chosen to achieve the planned learning, but these expected outcomes are not always fully clear to pupils. Very effective use of time leads to well-paced lessons with opportunities to confirm learning at the end. Teachers use new technology well to support their teaching. Pupils use ICT to support their learning much more than at the time of the last inspection, but, because of lack of access in some subjects, not yet as effectively as they could. Activities, supported by well produced and effective resources, interest and enthuse pupils. They rise to the challenge offered by their teachers. Their excellent attitudes to learning, their whole-hearted involvement in lessons, their obvious enjoyment and their sustained concentration and effort result in them learning very effectively and making exceptionally good progress.

Assessment is thorough and accurate and gives learners a good understanding of the quality of their work and what their personal targets are. Pupil progress is closely monitored and analysed. In many departments, assessment arrangements ensure that teachers' comments and supportive peer assessment lead to learners reflecting on their own work and how they can improve it. The school is now looking to ensure that this exemplary practice is shared across all subjects.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is very well matched to pupils' and students' needs and aspirations. It ensures that pupils in Years 10 and 11 are well prepared for continuing their education either in the school or in other local colleges. Choices in the sixth form provide very wide opportunities. The skills taught in Years 7 to 9 are used in Years 10 and 11. Good provision for pupils' social and health education fosters their understanding of citizenship and what is needed for a healthy and safe lifestyle. Enthusiastically supported sporting activities contribute effectively here, also. Provision for ICT has improved dramatically. Sixth form students have good provision for ICT.

Links with local business and other agencies support pupils' learning very well, in aspects of citizenship, for example. An unusually wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities provides excellent opportunities for personal development. Pupils appreciate and take full advantage of the many opportunities for subject support. The sixth form curriculum makes very good provision for extension studies and enrichment activities allow and encourage students to work with and support pupils. Opportunities to take and show responsibility are very effective and prepare pupils and students well for their future.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care for learners is exemplary and is the result of the very high level of commitment of staff. The health and safety of learners are actively promoted and issues presented by the split site are vigilantly addressed. Child protection arrangements are sensitively managed and regularly reviewed. Risk assessments are very thorough and closely monitored by senior managers and governors. Pupils are set appropriate targets and given excellent support based on rigorous monitoring. Achievements are recognised and celebrated within an ethos of challenge and support. Pupils and students in the sixth form are very well informed about their future options and career opportunities. They enjoy a vast range of experiences that deepen their understanding as global citizens. Learners with difficulties and/or disabilities are identified early and given effective support. The very small number of pupils in public care are monitored effectively and well supported. The school works closely with parents, who are very supportive and positive about the quality of support it offers. This is a school within which every child really does matter and where tolerance and harmony are tangible.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The leadership of the experienced headteacher is exceptional. She has created a very cohesive, highly talented, and exceptionally influential leadership team. Middle managers rightly talk of being inspired by leaders. Non-teaching staff make pivotal contributions to financial management, building developments and the smooth running of the school. Leaders at all levels trust and support their staff and expect them to contribute. They do so willingly and, as a result, adults' morale and pupils' achievement are high, learners' well-being is assured and the school has the capacity to deliver sustainable improvement.

Following the recent restructure, the new leadership of the sixth form is very effective. Sixth form students pay tribute to the support they receive, both academically and in relation to future plans. The governing body has a very clear and accurate understanding of performance in all areas of school life and hold senior managers to account very effectively. The governors' diverse talents and experience provide important insights and support for the leadership team.

Self-review is very well established and accurate. Annual reviews, on subject effectiveness and also pastoral matters, are central to the steady improvement on already high performance. The annual reviews of other processes, such as open evenings, work experience, activity week and induction evenings, benefit from surveys of the views of parents and learners. Staff are competent in the use of data on pupil performance. The quality of teaching and learning is regularly monitored and the school is now placing more emphasis on learning outcomes. Performance management is very well established and has had a very positive impact on the staff's capacity to contribute to wider school

improvement. Specialist language college status has made the school more outward looking and influential, both locally and further afield.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you all so much for welcoming us into your school and for being so kind, polite and helpful. We enjoyed our visit and want to share with you what we thought about your school.

What we liked most about your school

- We agree with you that Altrincham Grammar School for Girls is an outstanding school. - We are pleased that you behave superbly and work hard. We also like the wonderful way you get on with each other and with your teachers.
- We think the standards you reach are already very high indeed and we also know that they are improving each year.
- We think that the teaching you receive is excellent and we also believe that you make exceptional progress in your studies.
- We are pleased that your teachers look after you very well and that sixth-formers and other pupils have so many responsibilities in school, running clubs and organising charity events, for example.
- Your headteacher and other senior staff are excellent leaders and know exactly how to make the school even better!
- Your parents and carers are very pleased that you come to this school.

What we have asked your school to do now

- We have asked your teachers to give you even more information about how you can improve your work and talk to you more about what you can achieve in each lesson.
- We think it would help you if you had more opportunities in all your subjects to use computers when you are working things out for yourselves.

We appreciated talking to you and watching you learn. We wish you well for the future.