



Almondbury High School and Language College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 107758
LEA Kirklees
Inspection number 277837
Inspection dates 22 February 2006 to 23 February 2006
Reporting inspector Ms Sara Morrissey HMI

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

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|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Type of school | Secondary | School address | Fernside Avenue |
| School category | Community | | Almondbury |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 16 | | Huddersfield, West Yorkshire HD5 8PQ |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01484 223910 |
| Number on roll | 821 | Fax number | 01484 223912 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair of governors | Mr Ray Nichols |
| Date of previous inspection | 8 November 1999 | Headteacher | Mrs Janet Tolley |

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|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Almondbury High School and Language College is a slightly smaller than average secondary school in Huddersfield, which caters for girls and boys aged 11-16. It serves a district that includes areas of social and economic disadvantage and is a specialist school in modern foreign languages. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is higher than average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average and those who have a statement to support special educational needs is higher than average. There are more boys than girls at the school. The school accepts from elsewhere in the district a number of pupils who are challenging or are difficult to place. The number of pupils with English as an additional language is much lower than average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Almondbury High School is an improving school that provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Pupils feel safe in school and are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles; their attendance is satisfactory. Pupils' personal development and well-being is good overall, although the behaviour of a small minority of pupils sometimes disrupts the learning of others, particularly when agreed school procedures are not consistently applied. As a result of satisfactory teaching and good care, guidance and support, pupils make satisfactory progress overall, although not all achieve as well as they can and do not all develop the skills to learn independently. Standards are below national average. The curriculum is satisfactory but opportunities are missed to broaden its appeal to meet better the needs of all pupils. It is, however, enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are enjoyed by pupils.

The headteacher provides clear direction and has managed the school well through a period of change. Senior and middle managers know the strengths and weaknesses of the school which have informed planning. Systems have been introduced which provide sound foundations for future improvement, although not all have been in place long enough to impact on pupils' achievement. Pupils, teachers, other staff and governors understand the priorities for raising standards in the school and are committed to making the necessary changes to achieve school targets. Sound leadership of the Language College has further strengthened existing good partnerships within the wider community. The school provides satisfactory value for money and is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

Focus on raising standards and achievement by:

- improving the proportion of teaching that is good or better
- increasing opportunities for pupils to learn independently
- providing a broader range of courses which engage pupils more in their learning
- ensuring that systems and agreed procedures are applied consistently to address priorities for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree with the school's judgement that achievement and standards are satisfactory overall. The standards achieved by pupils are below average. However, pupils met their targets in the 2005 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 and results indicate that they made satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science relative to their starting points in Year 7. The percentage of pupils attaining five or more A* to C grades in the 2005 examinations at the end of Year 11 was below average. Standards in Years 10 and 11 have fluctuated over the last three years, but remain below average overall. Pupils make slightly better progress during Years 10

and 11, although their performance varies between subjects and they do not all make the expected progress from starting the school in Year 7. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall and the focus on raising boys' achievement has closed the gap in performance between girls and boys, so that boys currently make better progress overall.

The school is emerging from a period of turbulence following a lengthy building programme and significant changes in staffing. Senior leaders have recognised the negative impact that this has had on pupils' achievement and worked hard to accelerate their progress. Existing tracking systems have been refined to monitor the performance of individuals and different groups of pupils. Pupils at risk of underachievement have been systematically targeted and supported in order to increase their rate of progress, with the valued support of local authority consultants. As a result, pupils' progress has improved and is satisfactory overall. The school is confident that challenging targets will be met in the summer examinations in 2006.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The provision for pupils' personal development and well-being is good. The school is successful in its central aim of making every pupil feel valued. Most pupils attend regularly and enjoy their lessons when teaching is good and engages their interest. Whilst the behaviour of most pupils is good, a minority of pupils find it difficult to conform to the school's expectations of good behaviour. Parents express their concern about the disruption this sometimes causes in lessons. Pupils confirm that they welcome the school's strategies to promote good behaviour because it helps them to feel safe and secure. There has been a reduction in the number of exclusions from school.

Pupils willingly take responsibility as seen in the many school improvements resulting from the efforts of the school council. They are encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle through personal, social and health education and pupils' personal development is further enhanced through a range of activities including the 'community lifestyle week' and cross-curricular days. Established partnerships with the Connexions Service, local industry and training providers promote students' economic well-being. Good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is enriched by links with other countries and by the various projects developed with the support of the local and wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The school accurately judges teaching and learning to be satisfactory. The school's procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are thorough and are leading to improvements in its quality. However, pupils refer to variations in the quality of teaching between different teachers and the effect this has on their learning and behaviour.

Where teaching is good or better, teachers make use of their good subject knowledge to provide a variety of interesting activities to capture the pupils' interest and engage them in their learning. Expectations are high and pupils are set challenging tasks, to which they respond enthusiastically. Consequently, pupils behave well and make good progress. However, a significant amount of teaching, while satisfactory, lacks the necessary pace and variety to engage pupils fully in their learning, with the result that they respond passively and without obvious interest. Some become restless and engage in off-task chatter and their learning suffers as a result. Many such lessons are 'teacher led' and pupils have only restricted opportunities for independent learning or to pursue their own ideas.

The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and varies from books which contain few, if any, helpful comments to those where marking is exemplary and teachers' comments indicate clearly to pupils how well they have done and what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school evaluates its curriculum as good but inspectors judge it to be satisfactory with some good aspects. In Years 7 to 9 pupils follow a broad curriculum which meets statutory obligations. All pupils study two modern foreign languages in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, nearly all pupils follow an academic curriculum of General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) courses, including at least one language. The school does not offer a range of vocational options to broaden the appeal of its curriculum and is missing the opportunity to develop quickly to respond to the needs of its changing cohort. However, the recently introduced 'collegiate initiative' promoted by the local authority is encouraging the school to increase its range.

Provision for personal, social and health education is good, as are the cross-curricular days organised for all year groups. Pupils are very appreciative of the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer and numbers taking advantage of them are high. Nearly all pupils participate in trips abroad as part of the school's specialist language college programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are a strength of the school. Pupils' emotional and physical well-being is at the heart of the school and pupils benefit from the good links with a range of external agencies. Appropriate health and safety and child protection procedures are in place. Adults take time to nurture pupils' emotional health through timely interventions from teachers, learning mentors and senior management. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and they achieve as well as others.

Pupils are encouraged to become mature members of the school through roles such as peer mentors and the school council. Supportive links with primary schools ensure that pupils are well prepared for the move to the next stage of their education. For

example, Almondbury teachers take lessons in primary schools and pupils act as reading buddies. Regular assessment of pupils' work is used well to monitor the progress of each pupil and, where potential underachievement is identified, additional support and monitoring are provided.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school judges the effectiveness of its leadership and management to be satisfactory and inspectors agree. The headteacher provides a clear direction for the school, based upon a good understanding of the needs of the pupils, which has been communicated and shared effectively with the staff, particularly through the school improvement plan. Good use is made of resources and accommodation. The school seeks and acts upon the views of parents and other external agencies

The school runs smoothly. Senior and middle managers are committed to improving the school and raising standards of attainment. Roles and responsibilities are clear and middle managers use recently agreed procedures to monitor progress effectively. Data on pupils' performance is being used increasingly well to identify underachievement and raise their aspirations. Systems have been introduced which place a strong emphasis on inclusion and improving teaching and learning. As a result, there have been improvements both in pupils' behaviour and the quality of teaching. However, many of these systems are relatively new and have yet to demonstrate sustained impact; some are not applied consistently by all teachers, such as the policy for managing behaviour.

Procedures for managing the performance of teaching and non-teaching staff are thorough, supported by good arrangements for the professional development of teachers. The governing body is supportive, well informed and knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The school provides satisfactory value for money and has the capacity to improve further.

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Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

| | | |
|--|-----|----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 3 | NA |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 | NA |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage | NA | NA |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 3 | NA |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | Yes | NA |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes | NA |

Achievement and standards

| | | |
|--|---|----|
| How well do learners achieve? | 3 | NA |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 4 | NA |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 3 | NA |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 3 | NA |

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 | NA |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 | NA |
| The behaviour of learners | 3 | NA |
| The attendance of learners | 3 | NA |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 3 | NA |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 | NA |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 3 | NA |

The quality of provision

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 3 | NA |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 3 | NA |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 | NA |

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? | 3 | NA |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 | NA |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review | 3 | NA |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 3 | NA |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 | NA |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 3 | NA |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected | Yes | NA |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 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 very much for welcoming us to your school during our recent inspection. We appreciated the time so many of you spent talking to us about your work and life at Almondbury High School. As a result of our visit, we have identified a number of strengths and some areas for improvement, which we have agreed with your headteacher.

The following list gives a summary of what we think your school does well:

- you are well supported and guided from the time you start at the school; you receive the help that you need to develop into mature and responsible young adults by the time you leave school - you told us that you appreciated teachers' support, especially in Years 10 and 11 as you prepare for examinations
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities, links with the community and opportunities to go abroad add much to your school experience
- when teaching is good, it is interesting and challenges you to do your best so that you make good progress
- your headteacher and all the staff are committed to helping you make good progress and get the most out of your time at school.

We have agreed with your headteacher that the following areas could be improved:

- although you enjoy good lessons, not enough of them involve you actively in your learning
- for example, you told us that you enjoy lessons when you can take part in practical work or a variety of different activities with less copying
- agreed codes, for example in promoting good behaviour, are not consistently used by all teachers: you told us that some pupils take advantage of this and misbehave and we agree
- the range of courses available to you in Years 10 and 11 are not as broad as they might be to give you wider opportunities when you leave school.

You have a vital part to play in helping the school to improve further by working hard to meet your teachers' high expectations for behaviour and to do your best to make good progress in all your subjects which will prepare you well for life beyond school.

With best wishes for the future.