



Acklam Grange School A Specialist College For Maths and Computing

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 111751
LEA Middlesbrough
Inspection number 278768
Inspection dates 23 November 2005 to 24 November 2005
Reporting inspector Heather Richardson

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Lodore Grove
School category	Community		Acklam
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		Middlesbrough, TS5 8PB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01642 277700
Number on roll	1357	Fax number	01642 277701
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Cllr Hazel Pearson OBE
Date of previous inspection	1 November 2000	Headteacher	Mr John Bate

Age group 11 to 16	Inspection dates 23 November 2005 - 24 November 2005	Inspection number 278768
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Acklam Grange School is a popular school which serves a mixed area on the outskirts of Middlesbrough. With over 1300 pupils aged between 11 and 16, it is much larger than average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for a free school meal is higher than average, as is the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. The number of pupils from minority ethnic heritage has increased, but remains lower than average. The school has been a specialist school for mathematics and computing since September 2003 and is well-resourced for information and communication technology. A new centre provides facilities for additional support for pupils and their families, as well as sports facilities for the school and community.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Acklam Grange School is a good school which is rightly held in high regard by pupils and parents. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils so they make good progress, both academically and in their personal development. As a result, pupils are well equipped for further education and employment. The quality of care is a strength of the school and is tailored to the needs of individual children. Pupils are taught well overall, although there is some variation. There is much good guidance for pupils, but the marking of their work does not always set out how they can improve. The school is well led by the headteacher and senior staff. They, and the governors, know the school well. They provide clear direction, a commitment to improvement and use resources well. The school has built good relationships with a wide range of partners. These links help to enrich the experiences of pupils and support their progress. The school monitors its performance routinely, although it has yet to develop fully its use of both data and observations. It does, however, use the information it has gained to plan improvements. This, together with the progress the school has already made in raising standards, contributes to good capacity for further improvement. The school provides good value for money.

not applicable

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the use of data and observations to focus on how well pupils are learning and making progress.
- Improve the quality of feedback to pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress and achieve well in this inclusive school. Overall, pupils enter the school with average results. The standards they reach by the time they leave school have risen significantly since the school was last inspected. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more good grades at GCSE improved markedly in 2004 and was above the national average. Standards were maintained in 2005 and exceeded the school's target. The potential of pupils of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, has been realised by the time they leave the school at 16. Pupils' basic skills are sound and their use of information and communication technology (ICT) is good. Pupils achieve well in English, mathematics, geography, vocational courses and ICT, but their achievement in science and history is poor. The school is taking rigorous action to bring about improvement in these subjects. In 2004 there was underachievement at Key Stage 3 in the core subjects. This was recognised by the school and targeted intervention has led to improved results in 2005. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level. Standards at Key Stage 3 are now broadly average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well-being of pupils are good. Pupils like being at this school and almost all behave well and enjoy their education. Their attendance is close to the national average. In lessons pupils relate well to teachers and to each other, often working collaboratively in pairs or groups. They are aware of the importance of their personal health. Many join in voluntary activities that help them to keep fit and stay healthy, as well choosing healthy meals. Pupils know that bullying is not acceptable and know who to talk to if they experience it.

Pupils show good understanding of moral issues and are keen to contribute to charities, especially the link school in Tanzania. They show increasing awareness of their own and other cultures, but their spiritual awareness is less well developed. Many are prepared to take on responsibilities, including membership of the School Council and representing the school at external events. Older pupils act as peer mentors and prefects. Pupils are well informed about the choices they have when they leave school and almost all 16 year olds move into further education, training or employment. This is higher than the national average and significantly above that in the local area.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. Some lessons have exemplary features, such as very good questioning to enable pupils to express their own views. Most lessons are well planned and carefully structured, with a range of activities to engage pupils' interest and promote effective learning. Teachers set timescales for tasks in order to keep a good pace in the lesson. However, teachers do not always use the final part of the lesson to best effect to check pupils' understanding. Opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are not always taken.

Pupils are attentive and keen to participate in lessons, especially in practical activities. They particularly enjoy using laptops and other forms of ICT and this aids their learning. For example, Year 9 pupils eagerly evaluated each other's computer-based presentations, noting how well they had collected, organised and displayed information. Pupils' learning is also benefiting considerably from the work of support staff, who have been well-trained by the school and now provide very good support and encouragement to pupils.

Pupils' work is marked regularly, but most comments do not set out clearly what has been achieved or how to improve. However, pupils are aware of the levels at which they are working and the overall targets they should reach. Older pupils appreciate the advice they are given by teachers, for example on coursework.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. It is broad, balanced and enriched by the school's specialisms in mathematics and computing. In particular, pupils benefit from the integration of ICT into other subjects. This helps to ensure the curriculum is relevant to pupils, as well as providing them with many opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills. There is a good focus on developing pupils' knowledge of staying healthy. The school has extended the curriculum to match pupils' needs. As a result, Key Stage 4 pupils have increased flexibility to choose vocational and academic courses. Pre-vocational courses at Key Stage 3 raise pupils' awareness of the options available to them. The school responds well to the needs of particular groups of pupils. For example, pupils with reading difficulties follow a specially-designed course which is producing measurable improvement. There is also a good programme for gifted and talented pupils. All pupils benefit from a wide range of popular extra-curricular activities and visits.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is good and is valued by pupils and parents. Some features are outstanding. Heads of years and tutors provide good daily support for pupils and monitor their progress systematically. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are in place. The restructured special needs department is very well staffed and provides high quality care for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities. Individual education plans for these pupils are detailed and give subject teachers good advice about ways to help their learning. Special needs staff work well with pupils, parents and external agencies to help pupils overcome a wide range of difficulties. Support is well co-ordinated. The school has given careful consideration to ensure the needs of pupils with challenging behaviour are met. The new inclusion centre enables many pupils at risk of exclusion to remain in school. The quality of this work has received local and national attention.

The school has sound systems for tracking the progress of individual pupils as they move through the school. However, the tracking of particular groups of pupils, to compare their performance, is less well established. The school supports pupils well as they move from one stage of education to the next. Strong links with primary schools and targeted support staff help pupils transfer from primary to secondary school smoothly. Clear advice about subject choices assists pupils as they move into Key Stage 4. Good careers education and links with post-16 providers helps to ensure students progress into appropriate courses and employment when they leave school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school benefits from good leadership and management by the headteacher and senior staff. There is a very clear sense of purpose which is directed towards raising standards and promoting the welfare of all pupils. All staff are focused on improvement, and this is a mark of the effectiveness of the senior team. The school has made good use of resources, including the benefits of its specialist status, to drive improvement. This includes developing the expertise of teachers and support staff and extending the use of ICT in all aspects of the school's work. The school takes care to reflect on its own performance and it can demonstrate that it has made improvements when weaknesses have been identified. Its self-evaluation matches the views of the inspection team. The success of the school has been acknowledged in a number of external awards. These include membership of the specialist schools trust 'Most Improved Club', and the Healthy Schools award. Governors make a significant contribution to the work of the school. They know the school well, and provide good support and challenge.

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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	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	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	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	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	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?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	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	2	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

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Dear Pupils

The members of the inspection team would like to thank you for the way you made us feel welcome when we inspected your school. We already knew that the school is very popular and we were pleased that so many of you, your parents and carers told us the things you like about school. We were impressed with the high standard of your behaviour in lessons and around the school. We also noted how many of you are involved in activities at lunchtime and after school, as well as on the visits the school arranges. It was a pity the special helicopter landing had to be cancelled because of the bad weather when we were there. We were looking forward to it as well as you!

Many of you will know that the GCSE results in your school have improved, particularly in the last two years. This means that, in comparison with other schools, pupils at Acklam Grange make good progress by the time they leave school. We think that the way in which you are using computers in lessons is helping you to make good progress and you clearly enjoy using them. The school has done a lot to improve the facilities you have in school, and your ICT resources and the new Acorn Centre are very good. We like the way in which teachers and support staff work together to help you learn. You are learning a lot. You know about the importance of staying healthy by taking exercise and eating healthy food. You also know that bullying is unacceptable. It is important that you know who to talk to if it happens, and we were pleased that you could tell us about this.

We have asked the school to do two things to help it move from being a good school into a really excellent one. The first is to improve the systems that the school uses to check on how the standards of teaching and learning are rising. We have also asked teachers to improve the ways in which you are given guidance on how well you are doing, and on how you can improve.

We hope that you continue to enjoy your time at Acklam Grange school and that you are successful.

Yours sincerely

Heather Richardson HMI

(on behalf of the inspection team)