

The Armthorpe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106782
Local Authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	287608
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Josephine Nowacki HMI

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
Number on roll	
School	833
6th form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Shearman
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Pattinson
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2005
School address	Mere Lane Armthorpe Doncaster South Yorkshire DN3 2DA
Telephone number	01302 831582
Fax number	01302 300757

Age group	11–18
Inspection dates	16–17 May 2007
Inspection number	287608

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Armthorpe School is situated in the village of Armthorpe, approximately three miles to the east of Doncaster. The village was built around Markham Main Colliery which is now closed.

Students' ability on entry is average and below, and many come from the surrounding areas which have high levels of social and economic deprivation. The majority of students come from White British backgrounds. The number of students for whom English is a second language is very low but changing as the number of students arriving from Eastern Europe increases. The percentage of students identified as having special educational needs is above the national average, although the proportion of students with a formal statement of needs is average. A bid for specialist status in sport and the arts is pending.

Sixth form provision is offered jointly with a nearby sixth form and another 11 to 16 school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with many good features. The headteacher has a clear vision, understood and shared by all, which is transforming the school into a place where students and staff want to be. He is well supported by senior and middle managers and there is strong commitment to raising standards. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. After a prolonged period of high staff turnover, and a restructuring of the senior leadership team, the headteacher has created a more stable staffing structure throughout the school. Although this has led to some variation in the impact of strategies across departments, much has been accomplished since the last inspection and the school's capacity to improve is good.

Standards are below average. At the end of Key Stage 3 there is a trend of overall improvement although standards were below the national average in 2006. This was due, in the main, to unexpected high levels of staff turnover in English which had a negative impact on results at Key Stage 3. These staffing issues have now been resolved. Results in the GCSE examinations are below the national average but they have been rising since the last inspection. Nevertheless, results in English, mathematics and science are still quite low. Most students are now making at least satisfactory progress although boys, especially those of average ability make less progress than they should. The school is aware of areas of underperformance and robust strategies are in place to tackle the issue. The school is well placed to achieve its targets for 2007.

The amount of good and outstanding teaching and learning has increased significantly since the last inspection: this has been a key aim of the school. However, overall teaching and learning are satisfactory because not all lessons involve students sufficiently in varied activities. No inadequate teaching was seen during the inspection.

The curriculum is good. Well established partnerships have enabled the school to expand curriculum provision to better meet the needs of most learners. The school provides a welcoming and inclusive environment in which students are well cared for. Processes for monitoring students' progress are robust and lead to early identification of underachievement so that appropriate support can be put in place swiftly. Students enjoy coming to school and their behaviour is good both in and out of lessons.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The school judges the sixth form to be good but inspectors judge it to be satisfactory. Standards and achievement are average. Small group sizes mean that year on year comparisons need to be treated with caution. However, most students make satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. Students generally perform well in vocational subjects, but in a few other subjects students underachieve. Teaching and learning are satisfactory; some of it is good but too much of it lacks the challenge required to develop the skills for advanced level study. The curriculum is good; the college works well within the joint provision to extend the options available to students. The contribution sixth formers make to the rest of the school is good. They mentor younger students and help to develop the literacy skills of students who have recently arrived at the school from other countries.

The sixth form is a small and close knit community where students feel comfortable and well looked after. They value highly the individual support they receive from the head of sixth form

and all of their teachers. There are effective systems in place for setting targets and tracking students' progress. Students receive good advice and guidance for the next stage of their education or future employment. Progression to higher education, especially for students coming from families with no previous history of higher education is good. Leadership and management are satisfactory because the drive to raise standards is not as focused in the sixth form as it is in the rest of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in English, mathematics and science.
- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching by improving the opportunities for students to engage more actively in learning.
- Eliminate the inconsistency in performance in A-level subjects.

A small proportion of the schools, whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance, will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Inspectors agree with the school that students' current level of achievement is satisfactory and much improved from previous years.

At the end of Key Stage 3 in 2005 standards in English, mathematics and science improved markedly although they remained below the national average. In mathematics in 2006 standards improved to the national average. In English and science students did less well and standards remained below national averages. However, there are clear signs that students are making better progress from Year 7 to Year 9 than they have done in the recent past.

Standards in Key Stage 4 have improved since 2004 and the decline from past years has been reversed. However, pass rates in English, mathematics and science are still quite low. Progress is improving in Years 10 and 11 and the school is aware that it needs to improve still further. The relative progress of individuals and groups of students is closely analysed by the school. Well focused actions to tackle underachievement by boys and other groups of students are in place and beginning to have a positive impact.

In all lessons visited, inspectors judged that most students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, are making at least satisfactory progress. A significant number of students are making good progress. This improved performance is the result of a number of well focused actions taken by the school. Of greatest significance is the rigorous approach to improving teaching and learning. Evidence from mock GCSE, standard attainment tests and the school's own assessment data indicate that standards are rising and that the school is well placed to meet its targets in 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The spiritual moral, social and cultural development of students is good. This results in the school being a calm and welcoming place. Pupils' attitudes to learning, and their behaviour

both in lessons and around the school are consistently good, though a minority of their parents disagree. Attendance is average, and the school is working very hard to improve this. The number of students being excluded from school is falling. Students say they feel safe, and that the few instances of bullying are dealt with quickly. They strongly value the trust placed in them at lunchtimes when they have full access to all parts of the school.

The inclusive ethos of the school ensures that all students feel valued. Many speak warmly about their teachers and other staff, including support staff. Effective links with the local and wider communities promote readiness for work, and for life after school very effectively. Few students leave school without a firm placement in work, training or further education. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs which are very well used by students. This leads to improved access to sport and an understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles. The elected school council has been instrumental in ensuring that healthy meals are available at lunchtime. However, the school has yet to exploit the potential of this group of dedicated students in seeking and shaping the views of others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning in the school and the sixth form are satisfactory with some significant strengths. The school has put considerable energy into improving the quality of teaching and learning. In the main they have been successful; the proportion of good or better teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection and the remaining proportion is satisfactory. The school takes firm action to eliminate any inadequate teaching. In the best lessons students are well motivated and eager to learn because relationships are good and there are high expectations. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this to plan lessons which engage students of all abilities in a range of activities. Questioning techniques are used skilfully to develop both thinking and oracy skills. Where teaching is satisfactory it is often because lesson planning does not take account of the way students learn. In these lessons students are not given enough to do. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are satisfactory because lessons do not always provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop the higher order skills needed for advanced level study.

Most teachers make effective use of data to inform lesson planning and track students' progress. Underperformance is identified early and steps taken to ensure continued progress. Teachers increasingly involve students in assessing and understanding their own performance, taking responsibility and helping them improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Curriculum provision is good although the school judged it to be satisfactory. It is reviewed regularly to ensure that it meets the needs of all. Literacy skills and students' personal development are promoted well across the curriculum and in tutor periods. Provision for students who are gifted and talented is good. A 're-engagement' curriculum for Year 11 is effective in meeting the needs of some students with additional needs. Provision for those who need extra

support in developing their literacy and numeracy skills is good, as is the range of vocational courses at Key Stage 4. The curriculum is well supported by a wide range of additional school activities that are well attended.

The Armthorpe School works well with the local sixth form consortium to provide a good range of academic and vocational courses at different levels.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The school seeks to integrate all students, whatever their learning needs, at the earliest opportunity. It has good links with outside agencies and professional organisations to support this aim. Transition arrangements with primary schools, colleges and employers are good. A very flexible and responsive range of support is available to ensure students with particular difficulties are helped to learn and make progress at the same rate as their peers. A good example of this is the Year 7 'Nurture Group', which helps the most vulnerable pupils to achieve success.

The school takes its responsibilities for safeguarding pupils and staff seriously. The necessary checks to ensure health and safety are carried out rigorously. Child protection arrangements are in place.

Systems for checking students' progress are robust. Students who underperform are identified quickly and timely interventions put in place. Pupils speak highly of the care and guidance that they receive. Regular student review days help focus the attention of staff, students and parents into identifying the next steps for improvement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory with some considerable strengths. The determination of the headteacher to raise standards is indisputable. In this, he is ably supported by his senior management team and the governing body. Progress in the school has been hampered for a number of reasons, including high levels of staff turnover. However, there is an overall trend of improvement and the school is set to meet its targets in 2007.

Procedures for self-evaluation are well embedded and are generally accurate. Day-to-day management is good and the school runs smoothly. Middle managers are fully involved in evaluating the school's strengths and weaknesses and in identifying appropriate priorities for development. They implement clear procedures to improve standards and the quality of teaching in their subject areas but this work is still developing and has yet to make its impact fully felt across the school, including in the sixth form. However, as a result of actions already taken, standards have improved since the last inspection and much more effective use is made of assessment data to track and monitor students' progress.

Governance is good. Governors carry out their roles well, ably led by their chair. They hold school managers to account for standards and ensure systems are in place to identify underachievement where it occurs. Governors play a key role in the departmental reviewing

process to identify strengths and weaknesses. They are working stringently to reduce the current agreed deficit budget.

The challenges faced by the school are well understood by governors and senior managers and there is an optimism to the strategic planning. The school development plan is ambitious but achievable and the leadership team recognise they still have more to do to achieve their goals. The school is successfully addressing the weaknesses in past performance and is on course to move to the next level. The school is tackling all the issues arising from the last inspection, though much of the accommodation remains worn and tired. The capacity for further improvement, both in the school and sixth form, is good.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for welcoming the inspection team into your school. We appreciated the time many of you gave to talk with us and to let us know your views. The purpose of our visit was to find out what your school does well and the areas that need to improve.

- Your behaviour is good and you really appreciate being able to use all parts of the school at lunchtime.
- Most of you said you enjoy coming to school even though your attendance is just satisfactory. The school is working really hard to try and improve this because good attendance is essential for your success. Help them to improve attendance by making sure you have time off school only if it is really necessary.
- Most of you are reaching the standards and make the progress that is expected of you. We think you can do better than this, especially in English, mathematics and science and the school agrees.
- There are good systems in the school that allow your teachers to see if you are making good progress or falling behind and need extra support.
- There is some good teaching in the school and in these lessons teachers give you interesting activities that keep you on your toes and help you to learn quickly. However, this is not the case in all of the school or the sixth form. In some lessons you are not given enough work which stretches you and which really gets you to think for yourselves. The school is aware of this and is working to ensure that all lessons are interesting.
- The teachers and all staff at the school and in the sixth form really care about you and give you good support and guidance. The school council is enthusiastic and has been successful in getting more healthy food options in the school canteen. However, the inspection team have asked to school to allow the school council to be more involved in other areas of the school.
- Although the school is welcoming and the classrooms are full of wonderful displays of your work, the buildings are shabby and worn and the inspection team think you deserve a better environment to encourage you to learn and enjoy your time at school even more.

On behalf of the inspection team I wish you well for your future education.