



# Alsager School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 111404  
**Local Authority** Cheshire  
**Inspection number** 288953  
**Inspection dates** 11–12 October 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Susan Wareing HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Hassall Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Alsager, Stoke-on-Trent
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18		Cheshire ST7 2HR
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01270 871100
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1210	<b>Fax number</b>	01270 871139
<b>Number on roll (6th form)</b>	269		
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Allan Ward
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr D Black
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 November 2001		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–18	11–12 October 2006	288953

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Alsager School is a large 11 to 18 community comprehensive. The school has specialist status in Business and Enterprise. It is popular and highly regarded by the community and attracts students from a wide area. Fewer students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, speak English as an additional language or are entitled to free school meals. Almost all pupils are of European origin and attainment on entry is above average.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

Alsager School is a good school. Leaders at all levels share a very clear focus on improving teaching and learning in order to raise achievement.

Achievement is good in the main school. Students reached above average standards in the Year 9 national tests in 2005 and performance was well above average in English. By the end of Year 11 students attain standards well above national averages. Students' personal development throughout the school is good.

Teaching and learning are good and enable students to achieve well. The impact of the school's investment in improving teaching and learning is clear in the majority of lessons. However, students are not challenged enough in some lessons. The curriculum is good. All students in Years 10 and 11 study a business and enterprise element and new vocational subjects have been introduced. There is good take-up of the wide range of enrichment activities.

Care, guidance and support are good in the main school and contribute to students' good personal development. Most students know their targets. However, some pupils are unsure of how well they are doing and exactly what they need to do in order to improve their work.

Leadership and management are good in the main school. The school has effective systems of self-evaluation which take careful account of students' views. Governors have active links with the school and hold the school very effectively to account. Since the last inspection the school has tackled the single issue of increasing opportunities for students' spiritual development. The school achieved specialist business and enterprise status in 2004. This has enabled the development of community partnerships to share good practice and increased support for vulnerable pupils. The specialist status therefore contributes to the good value for money and good capacity to improve that the school provides. One of the main challenges for the school's leaders is to refine their use of the extensive data that they collect to provide a sharper overview of students' performance throughout the school.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 3**

The school assesses the effectiveness of the sixth form as good. Inspectors judge it to be satisfactory. Satisfactory teaching and learning, combined with the maturity and commitment of the students, leads to satisfactory achievement. Standards attained at AS and A level are above the national averages. Performance at AS improved from 2005 to 2006 although there are still too many entries that are unclassified. An analysis of sixth form results shows satisfactory performance when compared with similar students in other schools and colleges. Recently introduced systems for tracking student progress have led to an improvement in achievement, particularly in Year 12, over the last two years. The quality of care and guidance is satisfactory. A minority of students do not always have a good enough understanding about courses or future

pathways to make informed choices. The school has taken steps to improve induction and other guidance arrangements for the current Year 12. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although data is analysed effectively this information does not sufficiently inform future planning or address the variability in achievement across subjects.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Refine the use of data to provide a sharper overview of students' performance throughout the school.
- Ensure that all pupils know exactly how to improve their work in all subjects.
- Raise achievement in the sixth form.
- Ensure that in all lessons all students are offered a level of challenge appropriate to their learning needs.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 3**

The majority of the students enter the school in Year 7 having achieved standards that are above average. In 2005, students in Year 9 obtained above average results in the national tests in English, mathematics and science.

When compared with schools having similar intakes progress was broadly in line with expectations although varying across the subjects. Achievement in English was well above average, but for science and mathematics were below average. The results obtained by students in 2006 followed a similar pattern.

By the end of Year 11, however, students attain standards well beyond national averages and achievement is good. In 2005 and 2006 approximately 75% of students obtained 5 or more GCSE passes at grade C. The proportion obtaining 5 such grades that included English and mathematics was well above the national average. In 2005, no pupil left school without gaining at least one GCSE grade C. Results in GCSE English Language have been consistently outstanding. There is no significant difference between boys' achievement and that of girls. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make similar good progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

#### **Grade for sixth form: 2**

Personal development and wellbeing are good. There is good provision for social, cultural, moral and spiritual development throughout the curriculum. Spiritual development is particularly strong. In some lessons, students are encouraged to record their reflections on spiritual questions and their developing spiritual awareness.

Students are also enabled to take on roles and develop skills that will equip them for their future lives. They are given opportunities to engage in and contribute to the school and local community, for example through organising charity work, participating in the school council and youth councils, peer mentoring and the running of the school shop.

Students display positive attitudes towards their learning. Attendance is well above the national average, taking account of the school's own data for 2005–2006 and behaviour is good in lessons because it is skilfully managed by teachers. Occasionally a minority of students behave less well around the school at break times and between lessons. Students know how to keep themselves safe and are encouraged to look after themselves and to eat healthily. For example, they are offered a range of healthy options in the canteen and health issues are covered across the curriculum.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The quality of teaching and learning in the main school is good. In the sixth form it is satisfactory. Teaching and learning have been the school's development priority and senior leaders monitor this robustly and rigorously. Consequently, the majority of lessons seen were well structured and teachers used an effective mix of talk and task to sustain the interest of students and improve their response to learning. As a result students enjoy learning. They make good progress in the main school and satisfactory progress in the sixth form. The needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well understood. Such students are well supported by teachers and classroom assistants and, therefore, make good progress. Students, especially in years 9 to 11, know how well they are doing, but some are unsure of precisely how to improve their work.

A weakness in some lessons, including in the sixth form, is the lack of opportunity for students to work independently. Some teachers tend to do too much of the work themselves and offer tasks which are dull and lack challenge.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The curriculum is good and what is taught in classrooms is reviewed annually. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced and satisfies statutory requirements. More able students have the opportunity to learn two foreign languages. Students in Key Stage 4 have access to a range of predominantly GCSE options, although new vocational and applied GCSE courses are being added. As befits a specialist college, students are required to include a subject which has a business or enterprise element.

An alternative pathway is provided for those students for whom a full GCSE programme would not be appropriate. This has had a positive impact on their attitude and attendance. The weekly citizenship lesson prepares all students for the world of work and gives effective guidance about option choice at the end of Year 9. The curriculum therefore meets the needs of all pupils and contributes to the good progress they make and to their personal development.

Most students told us they enjoyed participating in the extra curricular activities available to them. The school makes good use of whole year and whole school activities such as the 'Go to Work' day for Year 9 and the enterprise and activity week. The sixth form curriculum is largely built around academic courses. Students are well supported by a good enrichment programme.

## **Care, guidance and support**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

The school provides good care, guidance and support for students in the main school. It is satisfactory in the sixth form, where some students are concerned about the lack of appropriate guidance for courses and subsequent pathways.

The school works hard to ensure that its aim of being, 'An achieving school and a caring community' is fulfilled. Students tell us there is always a range of staff they can approach for help. Parents and students are particularly appreciative of the pastoral system. This includes the work of heads of college, form tutors and student and staff mentors. The full-time school nurse has an active role in child protection and promoting healthy lifestyles. Personal problems are dealt with quickly and all students, including the more vulnerable, are well cared for, supported and guided to reach their personal and academic targets. Most students know their individual targets and generally make good progress, although some students are unsure of exactly how to improve their work. Connexions advisers provide effective advice about future options. Consequently students generally make a smooth transition from one stage of their education to the next.

All necessary procedures to ensure health and safety are in place and child protection procedures and risk assessments are rigorous.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 2**

**Grade for sixth form: 3**

Leadership and management are good in the main school. Workforce reform has been imaginatively used to offer good opportunities for professional development through new senior management roles and responsibilities. Middle managers feel valued, well supported and held to account by senior leaders through their line managers.

A clear focus on improving teaching and learning is shared by leaders at all levels and classroom monitoring of teaching and learning is robust. This has achieved a consistent approach to lesson planning, with clear objectives and good lesson structure, although some lessons remain insufficiently challenging.

The school's self-evaluation system is firmly based on students' views but a minority of parents feel that their views are not sufficiently taken into account. The faculty review system is a particularly insightful feature which has brought about good understanding, at departmental level, of strengths and weaknesses and led to effective actions to raise achievement. However, use of this rich source of information at whole school level is not yet sharp enough to inform improvement planning as precisely as it could.

The school collects a range of information about students' achievement. It makes good use of this at Key Stage 4 to identify and intervene upon

underachievement. The school's use of such data at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form is developing but it, too, is not yet sophisticated enough to provide a strategic overview of performance throughout the school and some students do not know how well they are doing. The school has dealt effectively with the single issue, from the last inspection, of increasing students' spiritual development. The designation, in 2004, of the school as a specialist business and enterprise college has increased information and communication technology (ICT) resources, funded extra support to raise the achievement of some vulnerable students and developed a range of community partnerships for the sharing of good practice. It therefore contributes to the good value for money provided by the school and its good capacity to improve.



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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>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2	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	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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.

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
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	

## Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Following our visit to inspect your school we would like to tell you about the things we found out.

Alsager School is a good school and has a satisfactory sixth form. The main school helps you to reach good standards and achieve well. We found that you do particularly well in English. In the sixth form overall achievement is satisfactory. Part of this difference is because the way the school uses information about your progress, to tell you how well you are doing, is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 or in the sixth form, although this is improving. We think that you should know exactly how well you are doing and how to improve all the way through the school and sixth form.

Teaching overall is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. You told us how much you enjoy those lessons where you can work together, share ideas and do some independent research. We think that you should have more opportunities for challenging work like this, in the main school and in the sixth form. We found that the study support and guidance in the main school are good. Teachers and connexions staff offer you good advice on choices in Year 9 and Year 11 so that most of you progress smoothly to the next stage of your education. However, we know that some sixth formers would welcome more guidance on university courses and other options after Year 13.

You told us about the good range of enrichment activities on offer and we were pleased to hear how many of you get involved in them. We also heard about the ways in which you take on responsibilities. We were impressed to hear how the youth council campaigned to improve your local park. You also take up opportunities to help others in school, by being buddies or mentors. We understand how much that support and also help from your college heads, form tutors or staff mentors, have enabled some of you to feel happier in school or improve your work.

We are glad to hear that most of you feel safe in school because there is always an adult to whom you can turn for help. It is good that the canteen offers healthy food options, so that you can put into practice what you learn about healthy living. We thought that the behaviour of most of you was good in lessons, but we agree with some of you who said that behaviour around the school and in some lessons is not always as good. You feel that the school listens to your views. Some of your parents told us that they would like the school consider their views more often too.

In the last inspection the school was asked to give you more chances to reflect on spiritual questions and the school has made good progress on this. Since then the school has become a specialist business and enterprise college and this has brought more resources into the school, for example the new language laboratory and other ICT equipment, like interactive whiteboards, which make your lessons more interesting. Being a specialist college helps the school to work with local primary schools and others in the community and funds extra support for those of you who need it in order to make more progress. We think that the school should now make sure that:

- the staff use all the information that they have about your progress to help all of you in every year group to know exactly how to improve your work in all your subjects
- achievement in the sixth form is improved
- in all lessons all of you are challenged enough, in order to do as well as you can.

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I would like to thank those of you who talked to the inspectors to let us know what you think of the school. We found this very helpful. I would also like to wish you all every success for your future at Alsager School.