



# Alder Grange Community & Technology School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 119722  
**Local Authority** Lancashire  
**Inspection number** 291517  
**Inspection date** 11 October 2006  
**Reporting inspector** John Gornall 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>	Calder Road
<b>School category</b>	Community		Rawtenstall, Rossendale
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		Lancashire, BB4 8HW
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01706 223171
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	660	<b>Fax number</b>	01706 210448
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Lawrence Forshaw
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Iain Hulland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2002		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection date</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
11–16	11 October 2006	291517

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools.

## Description of the school

Alder Grange is a smaller than average secondary school. It is non-selective within a locality that operates a selective system. Students are drawn from a wide socio-economic range. The school is over-subscribed and all parents and carers made Alder Grange their first admission choice. The school's population is very stable with a similar number of boys and girls. Approximately 90% of the students are of White British heritage with the remaining 10% of mainly Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage. The vast majority speak English fluently. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. There are an above average proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with a statement of special educational need. In 2003, the school gained specialist status in technology. It has also gained a range of awards including: Leading Edge School, Mentor School, Listening School and Healthy School. It was re-accredited in 2006 as an Investor in People. The headteacher was voted national headteacher of the year in 2004.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Alder Grange is an outstanding school. Central to its success is the strong determination by the whole school community to achieve excellence. This is effectively communicated through the school's core Values and Aims policy to which students, staff, parents and governors subscribe. The school is very well led and managed and all staff work tremendously hard. The students feel valued and they enjoy and appreciate what the school has to offer. There is a tangible sense of community spirit permeating the life of the school and this is reflected in the way the staff and students get on with each other; relationships are excellent. The students speak fondly of the way teachers know them and take a genuine interest in their lives. Parents value the work of the school very highly; one commented, 'This school provides not just excellent teaching but is also very aware of the need to develop the 'whole' child'. Two hundred and ninety two parents returned their Ofsted questionnaire, of which 97% strongly agreed or agreed that the school was providing well for their children. The school is trialling, as part of a national initiative, innovative ways of encouraging parents to be even more involved in their children's education. The quality and content of the recently produced Parents' Handbook are exemplary. The school received national acclaim for its work on citizenship in the Citizenship Report published by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector in September 2006.

Standards overall are above average. When students first enter school, their standards of attainment are below average. Throughout Years 7 to 9, students achieve exceptionally well and the school adds significant value to the students' education; it outperforms most schools in this respect. In Years 10 and 11, students continue to make at least good progress. As a result, there has been a continuous upward trend in examination results over the past few years. This year's Key Stage 4 results are the best the school has ever achieved with two thirds of all eligible students gaining five or more higher grade GCSEs. The standards seen in lessons were good and the work provided was challenging. The school has exceeded its targets for student achievement this year.

Virtually all of the students come to their lessons wanting to learn and are keen to do well; this energy and potential is harnessed well by the teachers. The quality of teaching across the school is at least good and much of it is outstanding. Teachers are creative in using innovative ways to make lessons interesting and exciting for the students. They make very effective use of new technologies such as information and communication technology (ICT) to enliven lessons and encourage active student participation.

Students feel cared for and this is a strength of the school's work. They are confident in having somebody to turn to if they experience any problems. The school is particularly effective in supporting a minority of students who may be in danger of disaffection from the educational system. The school council represents the voice of all students and is able to demonstrate impact and change as a result of its work. Child protection procedures are in place and are in line with local and national guidelines. Transition arrangements from the primary schools to Alder Grange are effective and have been

strengthened by the school's good links through its specialist status work. The students are taught to become good citizens and they have a very good understanding of morally and socially acceptable conduct. Behaviour is good; any isolated incidents are dealt with quickly and sensitively by staff. Attendance figures are similar to those of most schools.

The curriculum is good overall. Key Stage 3 is particularly successful with Key Stage 4 undergoing a period of development to better meet the needs of all students. The school has begun to explore alternative routes for training and accreditation for a small number of its students. Aspects of the vocational curriculum, however, are underdeveloped, particularly in relation to establishing and ensuring the quality of vocational provision and work-based training. The school is working with local partners to address this issue.

The school uses assessment information very well. Staff are aware of the various levels of attainment of students within their teaching groups and take these into account when planning lessons. In the best practice this knowledge is translated into subject specific targets for individual students. This enables those students to know where they are and what they need to do next to succeed. There is, however, some slight inconsistency across subjects and students are not always aware what their next steps might be to secure improvement.

The headteacher and the temporary executive headteacher provide strong and highly effective leadership. The rest of the senior management team show high levels of commitment and as a team they work very well together. Roles and responsibilities are clear and conscientiously undertaken. Senior managers know the staff and the students well. This is a self-evaluating school that knows where its strengths and areas for development lie. The school provides very good value for money. The inspection confirms the school's view that it is providing an outstanding education for its students.

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

- Improve the consistency of how students are made aware of what they need to do next to improve.
- Ensure that the development of the vocational curriculum at Key Stage 4 is regularly monitored and rigorously evaluated.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

During their time in school the majority of students achieve exceptionally well. Standards are above average and getting better year-on-year. The work undertaken at primary school is built upon successfully by staff who ensure that the students settle into secondary school life quickly and have their individual needs met. The students make very good progress in Key Stage 3 and most of them reach or surpass what might be expected of them by age 14. The educational value the school adds in terms of the progress they make is significantly better than most schools. At Key Stage 4, the students continue to make strong progress so that by the time they leave they are

attaining as well or better than in most schools. The school has consistently outperformed similar schools in helping students to achieve well. The school strives to ensure equality of opportunity and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from ethnic minorities achieve as well as their classmates because of the effective support they receive.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. It is strengthened considerably by the school's strong and effective focus on promoting citizenship. The students are encouraged to take responsibility at various levels within the school including informing management decisions through the school council, helping to recruit new teaching staff and taking posts of responsibility such as being prefects and personal mentors. The students are keen to learn and demonstrate positive attitudes towards their learning. Behaviour is good. The students get on with each other and are polite and friendly. Permanent exclusions are rare and the school works hard to actively engage all of its students. Attendance figures are similar to the national average. The students make a positive contribution to the local community through a variety of activities.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 1**

The quality of teaching and learning throughout the school is at least good and much of it is outstanding. Lessons proceed at pace in a motivating way ensuring that students remain on task and interested. Questioning techniques are excellent and teachers achieve just the right balance between humour so that students enjoy the lesson and rigour so that they achieve well. Very effective use is made of new technologies such as the interactive whiteboards located in all classrooms. In a very good French lesson, effective use was made of electronic voting pads to enable each student to indicate their choice of answer. At the end of the lesson students' choices were displayed electronically as graphs to show strengths and weaknesses; this was highly effective teaching and learning that kept the students on the edge of their seats! The school has established a teaching and learning group that is researching and developing new strategies to further consolidate the quality of teaching. The students' work is marked conscientiously and homework is provided regularly. The students are taught to become good citizens and they have a very good understanding of what is morally and socially acceptable.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is very good with some strong features including the effective use of ICT. This interplay between individual subjects and ICT has helped the students see the relevance of computers as a tool for enhanced communication. The school has modified its Key Stage 4 curriculum to incorporate local and national initiatives aimed at offering students alternative routes to accreditation. However, the school's vocational provision is underdeveloped and there have been difficulties in assuring its quality. In addition, the students do not receive consistent advice on where they are in terms of the levels of the national curriculum and how best they might improve their work, for example, in the setting and use of targets for improvement. A range of popular lunchtime and after-school activities enhances the curriculum. Since the time of the previous inspection, the addition of a new sports hall has improved the provision for physical education. The students are encouraged to be healthy through improved food and drink choice and lots of exercise opportunities.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

The way the students are cared for and supported is a strength of the school's work. A significant number of parents, in addition to completing their questionnaire, wrote very positive and detailed comments about how well their children had been cared for and supported by the school. These comments included specific examples of exceptional care and support on issues such as transfer from primary school, behavioural support and advice regarding social and emotional issues. Record keeping and documentation to support all students is detailed and of good quality. Child protection procedures are in place and in line with local and national guidelines. Transition arrangements from the primary schools to Alder Grange are very effective and have been strengthened by the school's good links through its specialist status work. Parents stated: 'We would like to compliment the school on all the good work they put in to make each and every student feel at home and achieve their individual goals'.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

The headteacher is currently engaged three days per week working on behalf of the local authority with his remaining time being spent in school. One of the substantive deputy headteachers is also on a full-time secondment to the local authority. The temporary arrangements put in place to secure leadership and management, including establishing an executive headteacher and a revised senior management team, have proved highly successful. Roles and responsibilities of each senior manager are clear and the headteacher has ensured that the new team has within its power the chance to innovate and further develop the school's aim of excellence for all. The school has a very well developed cycle of self-evaluation activities. The school's self-evaluation

is accurate and incisive. The school's development plan is well-judged and presents a thorough overview and explanation of the school's priorities. The senior managers have a good grasp of what the school does well and what needs improving. Governors are knowledgeable and have considerable educational expertise.



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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</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>	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	1
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	2
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1

<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>	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	1
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	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	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

The Students

Alder Grange Community & Technology School

Calder Road

Rawtenstall

Rosendale

Lancashire

BB4 8HW

11 Oct 2006

Dear Students

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school on 11 October. I was impressed by the way you freely told me what you liked about Alder Grange. Your comments helped me to focus my inspection and check on just how well your school is doing.

You might recall that my visit occurred on a very wet, dark and windy day; in fact it was thundering and lightning as I watched a brilliant PE lesson in the gymnasium. I mention the weather and the fact you could not go outside for fresh air, because on the day I was extremely impressed by your general cheerfulness and the way you carried on as normal; I thought you behaved brilliantly!

You told me that you are generally happy in school and interestingly that the relatively small size of the school enabled everyone to know each other really well; one of you said the school had a sort of family feel to it. This, you suggested, enabled teachers and other staff to get to know you well and you felt they really cared about you as individuals. In fact, you thought that the teachers and the senior staff were great. You are particularly proud of the improved facilities such as the new sports hall, inclusion centre, improved toilet facilities and the re-decorating programme that has taken place in parts of the building.

Thank you for inviting me to attend your school council meeting which I thoroughly enjoyed; I was even allowed to make a minor suggestion. The members of the council work hard on your behalf, I hope you continue to support their efforts. Being at the school council meeting, I unfortunately missed out on the cheerleading training session to which I was invited and so many people told me later how good it was.

I think that all of you want to do well and that you are making very good progress. I know this year's GCSE results are the best the school has ever had. I am sure you will continue to work hard to beat the record that has been set! I know most of your parents also think Alder Grange is a very good school and I agree.

I noticed through looking at your books and talking with some of you that in some subjects you don't always know what level of the National Curriculum you have achieved or how well you are doing or what you should do next to improve. I have asked the headteacher to see how this can be improved, for example, maybe setting you some mini-targets that you can aim for in your different subjects. I know this will help you, especially if you also play your part and work to achieve them.

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I was very impressed with how your school is led by your school's senior management team and the work they are doing to improve the curriculum at Key Stage 4. They are trying to offer you more choice in the courses you can do, including work-related options. I have asked the headteacher to ensure that when such courses involve other providers outside your school that he makes sure the quality is as good as if it were in the school.

I think that you are really fortunate to attend Alder Grange and I wish all of you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

John Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools