

Acle High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121213
Local Authority	NORFOLK
Inspection number	292059
Inspection dates	6–7 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Anthony Knight HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	757
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs D Bryant
Headteacher	Mr Gerard Batty
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001
School address	South Walsham Road Acle Norwich Norfolk NR13 3ER
Telephone number	01493750431
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Acle High School is a smaller than average rural secondary school for 757 students aged 11 to 16 years. The school receives students from a large catchment area and many travel to school by local authority transport. Numbers of students have risen over the last few years and the school is now over subscribed. Although the proportion of students eligible for free meals is significantly below the national average, students come from a mixture of backgrounds. Standards of attainment when students join the school are broadly in line with the national average. Few students are from minority ethnic groups and very few do not have English as their first language. The overall proportion of students with learning difficulties is below the national average but the proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is higher than average. The school has specialist status for science and has achieved Artsmark and the Football Association Chartermark. The school is a recognised centre for training teachers.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of Acle High School is good. Standards are above average and students make good progress, particularly in Key Stage 3, as a result of good teaching. Good monitoring of teaching is also helping to improve consistency in the quality of teaching within and across subjects. The school recognises, however, that there is still more to be done to ensure all teaching is at least good and that students are given sufficient support and challenge in all lessons.

While attainment on entry is broadly in line with the national average, students have an extremely wide range of ability. Good leadership and management have sensibly identified the need to raise students' individual academic targets further as many are reaching these relatively early in the courses. There is also recognition of the need to ensure all students meet their targets as there has been underachievement by a few students. The effective strategies that have increased standards in Key Stage 3 and increased the percentage of students achieving at least five A* to C grades at GCSE are now to be used to help all students reach their targets.

Staff know students well and good care and guidance are given to all students, especially those with learning difficulties and disabilities. There is good monitoring of students' academic and pastoral development but a lack of consistency in the way student's academic progress is assessed, reported and used means that students and parents are not always clear about the progress that has been made or how to improve their work further.

Students' personal development is good and they are generally very happy and support each other well. They are aware of healthy options and feel safe in the school. Many make a significant contribution to the school and wider community through, for example, the good school council and being a prefect. Students are prepared well for life beyond school. However, there is still a minority of students who find it difficult to become engaged in lessons and disrupt the learning of others. The school recognises the need to ensure consistent management of students' behaviour by all teachers and to develop the satisfactory curriculum further so that it meets the needs and engages the interests of all students.

The headteacher and senior leadership team have skilfully developed a positive reflective culture in the school so that staff and management are prepared to try different approaches, to be open and self critical so they can find the best way forward. The majority of parents expressed high praise for the school but a minority has concerns mainly about the extent to which the school listens to their views. These concerns are being addressed by the school.

Specialist status has helped the school to develop its resources and improve contact with feeder schools. The school has good capacity to improve and good progress has been made since the last inspection. There is secure financial management. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase consistency in the quality of teaching and behaviour management by ensuring all lessons meet students' learning needs and engage their interest.
- Ensure students and parents are always clear what has been achieved and students know how to improve their work further.
- Raise expectations and apply effective intervention strategies more widely to make sure all students reach their targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students make good progress in Key Stage 3, particularly in science, and attainment is significantly above national averages. Standards have risen over the last few years and good improvement was made in mathematics in 2006. Students also performed well at the highest levels.

Standards in Key Stage 4 are also above national averages overall. There has been continued improvement over the last few years particularly in the percentage of students achieving five or more A* to C grades at GCSE/GNVQ including English and mathematics. However, the progress made by students is not as strong as in Key Stage 3 and, while some improvement was made in 2006, there was some underachievement, particularly by the highest attaining boys and by lower ability girls. The progress made in English was in the lowest 10% of all maintained schools.

All the school's statutory targets were met in 2006 except in English at Key Stage 3.

Students are now making good progress in lessons in both key stages and more students are on track this year to achieve the highest grades at the end of Key Stage 4. Students with learning difficulties are also making good progress. There have been significant staffing changes in English which have affected progress in this subject but the provision is now more stable and results have started to improve.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well being of students are good overall. Students like coming to school. They are rarely truant and attend very regularly. However, attendance is only satisfactory because of the considerable proportion of parents choosing to take holidays in school time. Behaviour in the school is good, though a small number of students are less engaged in their learning which on occasion disrupts the learning of others, particularly where the teaching is less effective.

Students feel safe and secure as bullying and intimidation are infrequent and resolved effectively. They also help each other by actively discouraging bullying and mentoring younger students. Students respond positively to the school's efforts to promote healthy lifestyles as reflected in their considerable involvement in sports activities and appreciation and use of the healthy school meals provision.

Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. They respond maturely in lessons and contribute significantly to the school and wider community. The students as councillors, prefects and helpers have grasped the opportunities to help shape the new personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, promote anti bullying, improve healthy eating options, participate in staff appointments and support various school functions. Although mainly a rural community, the students have a sound understanding of other societies and cultures through lessons, overseas visits and other activities.

Students are well prepared for working life with most having secure basic skills and some economic understanding through careers and work experience. However, the school recognises that there is more to be done in developing further opportunities for vocational education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall. Almost all teaching is well informed and some teachers are making increasingly effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) facilities, such as interactive whiteboards, to enhance students' learning experience. Lessons are orderly and enjoyable with most students learning well and able to work with confidence and growing independence. The best teaching successfully engages students' interest. Such lessons have good pace, clear learning purpose and varied approaches and resources that meet the needs of all students.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities, as well as the few students at an early stage of English acquisition, are often well supported in lessons and make good progress. However, a few teachers have difficulty in engaging the small number of students who have less interest in school and learning. Their loss of interest is caused in some part by insufficient variety of learning approaches, uninteresting tasks that are not matched to students' learning needs or interests and inconsistent behaviour management.

Much has been done to develop better marking and ongoing assessment and there is good practice in a number of subject areas. However, there are too many different approaches which at times confuse students and parents. Consequently, students are not always able to evaluate their progress and they do not always know what they need to do to improve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The school's curriculum is satisfactory. While improvements have been made since the last inspection, the school is aware of the need for further development to ensure it meets the needs and interests of all students. Opportunities for vocational courses are to be increased and sensible consideration is being given to extending provision for the most able through more accelerated learning.

Good opportunities are provided in Key Stage 3 where all students take drama and all have two hours of physical education (PE) a week. However, this is not continued into Key Stage 4 when students have one hour of PE. PE facilities are limited. ICT is also not continued as a subject for all students in Key stage 4. While the majority of students develop their ICT capability through ICT related courses, there is insufficient monitoring of the ICT provision for the rest in Key Stage 4.

A good programme of additional activities enhances learning in lessons. There are visits abroad, such as to the World War I battlefields, and a good variety of visitors bring specialist skills to enliven learning and broaden students' cultural horizons. Regular concerts and drama productions involve over a quarter of the school, and there is good provision for exam preparation and revision.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good and there are secure risk assessment procedures. The care, guidance and support team play a significant role in the school through their oversight

of students' academic and pastoral development. Systematic whole school procedures regularly check students' academic progress and effective interventions support the progress of students identified as needing specific help. However, a lack of consistency in the way students' academic progress is reported means that students and parents are not always clear about the progress that has been made.

A good range of strategies, such as academic mentoring, greater involvement of parents, good use of the rewards system and the development of the Unit Awards garden, has contributed well to getting students engaged in their learning. Links with outside agencies are good and parents value the support this provides.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are well provided for and the school provides local expertise in Autistic Spectrum Disorders. Additional sessions for the lowest ability students have been successful in raising their literacy and numeracy levels.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school is led well by the headteacher and by a strong team of senior and middle managers. The monitoring of teaching is managed effectively and evaluations are accurate and perceptive. Good systems have been established for tracking students' progress and the information collected has been used effectively to increase the numbers of students achieving at least a grade C at GCSE. The school is aware that these systems now need to be used to ensure all students reach their individual targets. There is sensible use of minimal and aspirational targets although the school recognises that these now need to be raised to ensure all students are given sufficient challenge.

The majority of parents expressed strong praise for the school. However, a significant minority have concerns, mainly that the school does not take account of their views. Several parents asked for more direct contact with subject teachers and for more information about the progress their children are making.

The governing body provides good support to the school through regular contact between the headteacher and the chair of governors. There are improving links between sub committees and the senior management team and subject leaders are regularly invited to discuss subject work with the whole committee.

Good links are being developed with the community through the good range of activities and events organised by the extended schools' coordinator. Some excellent involvement of students with particular interests and needs has been achieved through skilful identification of relevant opportunities. The school has good plans to extend this approach further by proactively including more students who would also benefit from these experiences.

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	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?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	2
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	2
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
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

June 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Acle High School, South Walsham Road, Acle, Norwich NR13 3ER

We enjoyed coming to your school and would like to thank you for welcoming us and talking to us so openly. We were particularly impressed with the way you look after each other. We were pleased to see that you are enjoying being at the school and agree with your comments and the views of your parents that Acle is a good school.

We agree that there is good teaching in many subjects and have asked your headteacher and subject leaders to find ways to make sure that all teaching increasingly matches the best. Most of you are making the most of the good opportunities available to you but some of you have yet to realise that if you want to have more choice when you leave school you have to work hard in all lessons. We have asked your headteacher and teachers to help by making sure all lessons meet your learning needs and engage your interest.

Most of you are making good progress but you are not always clear about the standards you have reached or what you need to do to get even higher. We have asked your teachers to make sure that you understand what you have achieved and what you can do to improve your work. You can help by asking your teachers if you are not sure how you could provide a better answer, or piece of work.

We are pleased that your school has good plans to raise the level of your work even further and have asked the school to help you all reach your targets by using the good strategies they have developed to raise standards in Key Stage 3 and increase achievement at A* to C grades in Key Stage 4. You can help by taking increasing responsibility for your learning by, for example, looking back over your work to see how it is improving and working more on those parts you find difficult.

Your school council and prefects are working very hard to improve your school. We were impressed with what they are doing and know that they would welcome even more support and involvement from all of you.

There are many good opportunities for you at Acle High School and we wish you every success for the future.

Mr Anthony Knight Her Majesty's Inspector