

Altrincham Grammar School for Boys

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 106361 |
| Local Authority | Trafford |
| Inspection number | 309107 |
| Inspection dates | 21–22 November 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Vincent Ashworth HMI |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Foundation |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Boys |
| Number on roll | |
| School | 1134 |
| 6th form | 285 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr C Barrat |
| Headteacher | Mr T.J. Gartside |
| Date of previous school inspection | 11 October 2004 |
| School address | Marlborough Road Bowdon Altrincham Cheshire WA14 2RS |
| Telephone number | 0161 9280858 |
| Fax number | 0161 9243888 |

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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Altrincham Grammar School for Boys is a selective school which is average in size. Students come to the school from a wide catchment area. The vast majority are from relatively advantaged social and economic backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Very few students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups has increased since the last inspection and is now higher than that found nationally. Similarly, the proportion who do not have English as a first language is higher than average. The school has been a specialist Language College since 2003. Awards achieved by the school include the Healthy Schools Award and the International School Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Altrincham Grammar School for Boys provides its students with an excellent education and is an outstanding school. Standards are very high and students achieve their potential because of the school's exemplary commitment to their personal development and well-being. Highly effective support systems nurture and underpin academic achievement. The school's ethos provides an outstanding climate for learning. Students from diverse backgrounds are able to come together and study in an atmosphere of mutual respect, understanding and support. Students and parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and in particular the wide range of extra-curricular activities, which enrich and extend students' learning. A few parents still express concerns about the quality and regularity of homework. The headteacher is aware of such concerns and the issue is being monitored regularly.

Although outstanding, the school recognises that improvements are still possible, in particular ensuring that all teaching approaches the best in the school. Inspectors observed some inspirational and innovative teaching which made learning fun, challenging and exhilarating. However, this is not the case in all subjects. The school is improving its use of data very effectively to monitor progress and improving marking to provide all students with more specific information on how to attain the very highest results.

The specialist Language College programme has made an outstanding contribution to the developing global and international vision for the school. It provides an excellent range of opportunities to study an increasing number of languages, including Chinese, both in and out of normal school time. It has helped to widen significantly the extended curriculum. For example, students and staff have taken part in language immersion courses abroad. The school has exceeded its targets for improving the achievement of students and the community programme is helping other schools to benefit enormously from the school's growing expertise.

The headteacher provides very strong leadership. Senior managers are highly effective and work as a team. Governors have a good understanding of what is going on in the school: the structures and processes of governance are thorough. However, governors have yet to evaluate the extent to which the school's race equality policy impacts on school life and the experiences of students and staff.

Strengths previously reported have been sustained. Improvements have been secured in the achievement of students and the range and quality of school facilities, which when combined with the quality of students' personal development demonstrate outstanding capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding sixth form. Standards are very high. Students fulfil their potential because of the high quality teaching and care that motivates them to give of their very best. Outstanding management and excellent guidance results in hardly any students leaving before they complete their courses. Students benefit from a broad academic curriculum that suits their particular needs and aspirations for higher academic study. In 2007 fourteen students were offered places at Oxbridge. Teachers are highly knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. This results in students who are equally passionate about their studies. The majority of students engage in a wide range of additional activities which help them to develop an impressive

repertoire of skills to support them in their future careers. Students make major contributions to the positive ethos of the school by acting as role models and mentors to younger students. One student summed up the excellence of this sixth form when he said, 'Life in the sixth form has liberated me as an individual.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Systematically evaluate and monitor the impact of the school's race equality policy on students, staff and parents.
- Ensure the outstanding teaching in some subjects is shared and fostered more systematically in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Standards are exceptionally and consistently high across both key stages and in the sixth form. Students enter the school with levels of attainment that are well above average and make steady progress by the end of Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 4 students make excellent progress overall. Results in national tests taken in mathematics and science in Year 11 are very impressive. In 2007, approximately three-quarters of students attained the highest level in both these subjects. Standards in science are a significant strength throughout the school. Results in GCSE examinations at the end of Key Stage 4 show an improving trend. In 2007, approximately two-thirds of all of the grades were at A* and A grade. Achievement and standards in English and in particular English literature have been consistently weaker than in other subjects.

Students across all year groups demonstrate a strong aptitude for modern foreign languages. This is reflected in the excellent results in French and Spanish as well as the high number of students who are ready to sit their GCSE in Year 10 in French and German. There is no significant variation in standards between different groups of students. The small proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as others. The majority of students with gifts and talents are challenged appropriately.

Pass rates in AS level and A2 level results are very high. Approximately three-quarters of students who take A2 level examinations gain passes at the higher grades of A and B. Students make outstanding progress by the time they leave the sixth form.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The personal development of students is outstanding because the school provides an extremely rich and varied range of developmental experiences. Students recognise the value of these opportunities and participate enthusiastically. They also appreciate the very supportive and respectful relationships that exist between themselves and staff. Students feel safe because bullying is rare and the majority of them act responsibly and maturely. Students very clearly enjoy attending this school and are extremely proud of it. This is reflected in their exemplary behaviour, very high rates of attendance and their thirst for knowledge.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Diversity is respected and inclusiveness is celebrated by all. Students demonstrate their care and compassion for others through their involvement in a range of charitable activities and events. Safety and health are taken very seriously by both students and staff. Consequently, students are confident in their environment and flourish. Since the last inspection, improvements to the school's sporting facilities have improved the provision for physical education. This has resulted in greater numbers of students engaging in a wider range of sporting and community related activities.

Students, and more particularly students in the sixth form, acquire leadership qualities and other skills which prepare them well for adult life and their future careers. Their success in Young Enterprise and other work-related activities are a credit to the school. Language College initiatives and projects also prepare students to thrive as global citizens.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. Inspectors judged that most teaching is good and in some cases it is outstanding. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high expectations for their students. The quality of questioning is very good and this enables teachers to check students' understanding during lessons and provide effective verbal feedback. In the best lessons teachers develop students' skills of evaluation and analysis as well as their knowledge and love of the subject. Students enjoy and learn from relevant and motivational activities with a high level of challenge, debate and discussion. As a result, they excel and achieve well. In a minority of lessons, not all students are sufficiently challenged. Where teaching lacks variety, pace and focus students make less progress than they should. In the sixth form high quality teaching equips students with the skills to develop as independent learners and prepares them well for higher education.

Assessment is thorough and student progress is closely monitored and analysed. However, students do not always know the National Curriculum levels they are working towards at Key Stage 3. Teaching, learning and assessment are not always as sharply focused as they should be on supporting students to achieve their targets. Marking is regularly and conscientiously undertaken by teachers, but it does not always inform students about how to improve their work. The school is working hard to further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. It meets the needs of all groups of students and is one of the reasons why students make outstanding progress at the school. The school's specialist status as a Language College is adding a highly appropriate curriculum focus to the school. It has led to a number of innovative developments that are impacting on the breadth and quality of the curriculum offered to students. These include a strong international dimension to the curriculum: the offering of fast-track, extension and immersion courses in languages; provision for

international exchanges and visits; and the opportunity to gain vocational and skills based language qualifications. Most students stay on into the sixth form where there is an extensive and growing range of academic courses provided at AS and A2 level.

The school provides an excellent and extensive range of well supported and highly valued extra-curricular activities for its students. These complement the curriculum and contribute significantly to students' learning. Enterprise and work-related learning is well promoted and a strength of the school. Many students benefit from high quality work experience and work shadowing opportunities. As one student commented, 'This school is saturated with extra-curricular activities and we all make the very most of them.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The quality of the care, guidance and support is outstanding. Students and parents value highly the support teachers provide and the high quality relationships that exist between students and teachers. These relationships motivate students to want to learn and contribute to the positive teaching, learning and achievement ethos within the school. The vast majority of students are confident that they can turn to a member of staff if they are experiencing difficulties. Systems to guide students at key times of their education are very well developed. Induction to the school is carefully planned and students settle quickly into school life. Careers education and guidance are very good. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well managed and highly effective. In the sixth form, students are supported really well in making appropriate choices for university. Child protection procedures are in line with current statutory requirements and all staff are aware of them. Teachers know their students very well and monitor their academic and personal development systematically. Teachers intervene quickly with additional support if a student is at risk of underachieving.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The headteacher and his senior staff provide an extremely clear direction for the school. The specialist Language College status plays an excellent part in preparing students for a rapidly changing business environment in the twenty-first century. The many opportunities to study languages both in school and abroad are adding a new dimension to students' personal development. A common sense of purpose has been established amongst staff and an excellent learning ethos developed that enables students to reach their potential.

The school sets itself challenging targets for the future, which is contributing to rising standards. The use of targets with students has improved since the previous inspection, but is less rigorous with the younger students. There is a strong team of subject leaders, which is improving through a combination of effective professional development and appointments of new staff. A good range of structures is established to evaluate the school's strengths and identify areas for improvement. However, the different components are not always effectively linked and subject evaluations vary in quality.

Governors are very well informed and have an excellent strategic overview of the school. They have been highly influential, alongside the headteacher, in gaining significant funding to improve accommodation and facilities. The quality of sports facilities is significantly improved, but much of the accommodation in science remains outdated and insufficient for the numbers taking the subject. The school is becoming an increasingly multicultural establishment and attracts students from many different ethnic backgrounds, but governors have not yet evaluated the effectiveness and impact of the race equality policy. Financial management is excellent and allows the school to focus its funding to achieve its vision. The school provides outstanding value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 1 | |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 | |
| The attendance of learners | 1 | |
| The behaviour of learners | 1 | |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 | |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 | |

The quality of provision

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

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

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 1 | 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 | |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 1 | |
| 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 | 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

Thank you for the warm welcome the inspection team received when we recently inspected your school. I would particularly like to thank those of you who helped the inspection by talking to us about your studies and your life at school. Many parents also returned a questionnaire which was very helpful. I am pleased to say that we agree with you and the vast majority of your parents who say that your school is outstanding.

Your behaviour and attitudes to learning are exemplary. Inspectors were particularly impressed with your dedication and commitment to hard work. This contributes significantly to your school's success. So many of you make the very most of all the extra-curricular and Language College activities which help you to develop as good all round individuals. This all contributes to the excellent progress you make and the impressive results you achieve in national tests and examinations. Your teachers have very high expectations of you - and you certainly live up to them. Overall, we thought that the teaching you receive is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form. You told us that you are cared for extremely well. We saw lots of evidence to support this. The headteacher and the people with responsibility make decisions with your best interests in mind. Your school goes from strength to strength and many of you see the new sports facilities currently in development as the 'icing on the cake'.

While we judge your school to be outstanding, that does not mean everything is perfect. We have asked the school to look at ways of ensuring that all your lessons are as exciting and challenging as the very best. The school has a number of policies that promote equality for all students and staff. I have asked Mr Gartside and the governors to make sure that they evaluate the impact of these policies more regularly.

You are quite right to be proud of your school and I wish you all the best for the future.