

Aylsham High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121164
Local Authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	313902
Inspection date	12 June 2008
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson 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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	955
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sue Platt
Headteacher	Mr Paul Mitchell
Date of previous school inspection	29 November 2004
School address	Sir William's Lane Aylsham Norwich Norfolk NR11 6AN
Telephone number	01263 733270
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Aylsham High School is a smaller than average sized 11-16 comprehensive school serving the town of Aylsham and its surrounding areas. Approximately 20% of the students come from outside the school's catchment area. The majority of its students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational need, is above the national average. Attainment on entry is average. The school has been a specialist business and enterprise college since 2002 and is a Training School, holds the Healthy Schools award and the Schools Community award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with several outstanding features, namely the headteacher's leadership, students' personal development and well-being, the curriculum and the care, guidance and support provided for all learners. It welcomes students of all abilities and interests and ensures that they enjoy school and achieve well. Students told inspectors that they feel happy, safe and 'love school'. The majority of parents comment favourably on the school's positive ethos and the support and encouragement from teachers. In this caring and supportive environment, students make good progress and attain above average standards. Overall effectiveness is good rather than outstanding because students achieve less well in GCSE physical education, graphics and drama, where standards are below the national average. Last year, the proportion of students attaining the very highest GCSE grades was significantly below average in over one third of subjects.

In Key Stage 3 in 2007, standards in English and information and communication technology (ICT) were slightly below the national average and above average in mathematics and science. Students made exceptional progress in mathematics; 85% of them attained the expected level and the proportion that attained higher level 6 and 7 was above the national average. In Key Stage 4, 62% of students attained five or more A* to C grades and, significantly, the number of pupils achieving five good grades including English and mathematics rose to well above the national average. Almost all students attained five or more GCSE's and every student left Year 11 with at least one qualification. Students continue to excel in mathematics; over fifty students entered for the GCSE examination earlier this year have already attained a grade C or above.

Students' personal development and well-being, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural education, is outstanding. Their enjoyment of school is shown in their above average attendance. They appreciate the wide range of opportunities to help them learn and lead healthy lifestyles. Students say that they feel safe, that incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and they know who to approach if they have concerns. A 'friendly faces' service led by students is exemplary and the school has gained national recognition for its anti-bullying work. The vast majority of students behave well but a small minority of students can, at times, disturb the learning of others. Students adopt responsibility as prefects, house captains, sports leaders and school councillors. Fund-raising for charities and engagement in local community projects is promoted well through an established house system.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers share good relations with students. Their lesson planning, class management and confident use of ICT make learning interesting and enjoyable. Most teachers use questioning techniques well to involve all learners and check whether they understand. In some lessons, the pace of learning drops and teachers talk for too long, which restricts students from working independently. School leaders make regular observations of lessons but do not always share clear judgements with teachers on the quality of the lesson. Not all subject leaders seek external support to validate their own monitoring and help them to promote exemplary teaching within their departments.

Students can choose from a wide range of GCSE and vocational courses. In Key Stage 3, students follow an 'opening minds' curriculum that promotes basic skills and includes opportunities to develop their enterprise and business acumen. Partnerships with other local providers have enhanced access to work-based learning and alternative courses for those not suited to GCSE studies. The school has used its specialist status to introduce new courses in ICT and business

studies. Students achieve an accredited award following their work experience in Year 10 and a significant proportion of Year 9 students have already met the requirements for an NVQ Level 2 award in ICT. An exceptional range of sports, music, drama activities and school visits contribute greatly to students' well-being.

The school prides itself in giving all students the very best care, guidance and support that helps them to develop into confident, aspiring and knowledgeable young people. Exclusion rates are low and the school accommodates a number of new students arriving from other schools. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well because the quality of care and support they receive is exceptional. All safeguarding arrangements are in place. Mixed age tutorial groups help to induct younger students into the school but tutorial time is not always used effectively. Teachers' assessment of students' progress is effective and is sufficiently robust to spot potential under-achievement. Reporting to parents has improved since the last inspection but some parents say that they would like greater communication with the school. The school's work in promoting family learning is exceptional.

The school's success is a direct result of the exceptional leadership of the headteacher. He has created a common sense of purpose amongst staff and put the school on an improving, upward trend. He and his senior leadership team have secured its role as a specialist centre for business and enterprise and a focal point of the community. They can demonstrate that specialist status is now having a significant impact on raising standards. School leaders recognise that further work is required to promote the achievement of the most able students and increase the effectiveness of some subjects. Middle leaders are much more accountable and evaluate thoroughly the impact of their work. There is good capacity to improve further. Good governance has overseen the strategic development of the school and provided the necessary support and challenge to resolve the issues raised in the previous inspection. The school provides good value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the number of good and outstanding lessons so that those students capable of attaining the very highest GCSE grades, do so in all subjects
- Raise achievement at GCSE in physical education and drama.

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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
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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?	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	2
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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

13 June 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Aylsham High School, Norfolk, NR11 6AN.

Recently, I visited your school and found it to be a good school with several outstanding features. Your input was vital in helping me to make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me to join you in lessons and to talk with some of you. I also spent time with some of your teachers in lessons, met the chair of governors and read many letters from parents. Throughout all of this, your behaviour was good and you made me very welcome.

I was impressed with many aspects of your school. It has outstanding leadership from your headteacher and he is well supported by his senior managers. They and your teachers provide you with an exceptional level of care and support that allows you to enjoy school and achieve well. I know from talking with you and reading the comments made by your parents that sport, music, drama and school visits are highly valued and greatly appreciated. The school's specialist status is helping you to develop your understanding of enterprise and is preparing you well for further education and the world of work.

I was concerned that not all of those of you who are capable of achieving A* and A grades in GCSE examinations do so and that some of you do not perform as well as you can in all subjects, so I have asked your teachers to make some improvements:

- Increase the number of good and outstanding lessons so that those students capable of attaining the very highest GCSE grades, can do so
- Raise achievement in physical education and drama.

Your governors and senior leaders are committed to seeking further improvements to your school. You can help them by contributing your views and ideas to your school council representative and ask them to share them at school council meetings.

I wish you all well.

Yours sincerely

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector