

Astley Sports College and Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106269
Local Authority	Tameside
Inspection number	324363
Inspection dates	4–5 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Jean Kendall 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 (total)	851
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr J Taylor
Headteacher	Mr S Almond, Mrs C Moore
Date of previous school inspection	5 October 2005
School address	Yew Tree Lane Dukinfield Cheshire SK16 5BL
Telephone number	0161 3382374
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Astley Sports College and Community High School is smaller than average. It is situated in an urban area which experiences above average levels of social and economic disadvantage. There is an above average proportion of students entitled to free school meals and a well above average proportion identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. There are relatively few students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language.

The college is co-located with a special school for students with severe physical and learning difficulties. As well as being a specialist sports college, it is Tameside's designated Full Service and Extended school. It holds the Sports Mark and Healthy Schools Gold Award.

Two associate headteachers are running the school until the newly appointed headteacher takes up post in April 2009.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a notice to improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to students' achievement in mathematics and English, the progress of middle ability students generally and the quality of teaching and learning.

Students make insufficient progress in English and mathematics and standards in these subjects are lower than they should be. Students of middle ability, in particular, do not achieve as well as they might in several subjects. This is because teaching and learning, while satisfactory overall, is of variable quality. There are a few outstanding examples of teaching and assessment which provide models of effective practice. However, there is also some inadequate teaching and too little good teaching to enable students to make consistently good enough progress. Teaching in mathematics is particularly weak. Assessment and marking of students' work is also of variable quality and does not always provide sufficient guidance on the next steps for learning. The college recognises the importance of robust monitoring of the performance of students, teachers and across the college as a whole. It has put effective systems in place to monitor student progress at whole-school level and there are good examples of departmental review leading to improvement. However, the good practice evident in some subjects, such as information and communication technology (ICT) and geography, is not apparent in all subjects and this has a limiting effect on raising standards.

A collective determination exists across the college to bring about further improvement which is being driven forward by the senior leadership team and is fully supported by subject leaders and governors. The leadership team has been strengthened with support from the local authority and under the direction of the interim headteachers. College leaders have made progress in some key areas and demonstrate the necessary capacity to improve further. Staff and students report that the ethos of the college has been transformed in the last year: there is a stronger focus on raising students' aspirations and teachers' expectations of their achievement and behaviour. Behaviour has improved because of these raised expectations and is satisfactory overall. However, opportunities are missed to share routinely the good practice that exists in leadership, teaching and behaviour management to ensure that all students achieve as well as they should.

Specialist sports college status has had a positive impact on the breadth of activities and experiences offered to the students and community alike. Students adopt good attitudes towards leading healthy lifestyles and their contribution to the community is good. The college has successfully transformed the curriculum so that it more closely matches learners' aspirations and abilities. Most students now study for a vocational qualification and the school has exceeded its targets for the number of students gaining grade C and above in physical education (PE) for the past two years. Adults have the best interests of the students at heart and provide satisfactory care, guidance and support. Students develop positive attitudes about discrimination, equality and the need for good race relations. Their work with students from the co-located special school is commendable and opportunities to work together add much to the personal development of students at both schools.

Parents are generally positive about the school and the opportunities it offers their children. However, a small number are concerned about inappropriate behaviour and bullying. Students say that there is some that goes on but report that the college always takes it seriously and deals with issues effectively. Inspectors did not see any examples of aggressive or threatening behaviour during the inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Tackle underachievement and raise standards in mathematics and English.
- Raise overall achievement for students in the middle ability range.
- Improve the quality of teaching to eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching.
- Ensure greater consistency in marking so that in all subjects students know how to improve their work.
- Share the good practice in leadership, teaching and behaviour management to ensure that students adopt good attitudes to learning and make consistently good progress in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Students enter the school with standards that are broadly in line with the national average although many have poorly developed literacy skills. At the end of Year 11 students leave school with overall standards that are below the national average. This represents inadequate achievement overall.

Progress made by students as they move through the school is not good enough, particularly in English and mathematics and for middle ability students generally. In 2007 and 2008 the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C that include English and mathematics was well below national expectations. Evidence collected during the inspection confirms that there remains considerable underachievement in these vital subject areas. However, performance between different subjects is variable and there are some strong departments where students are highly motivated and achieve well in examinations. For example, results in drama, geography and ICT were all impressive in 2008 and exceeded targets based on national expectations.

There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and that of girls. The relatively small number of students from minority ethnic groups achieve in line with students from the same backgrounds at other schools. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make satisfactory progress overall and achieve in line with national expectations because they receive good out-of-class support. Very few students leave with no qualification.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Personal development is satisfactory with some strong elements. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students have a clear understanding about issues relating to discrimination, equality and the need for good race relations. They value the chances they have to work with students from a nearby special school on a regular basis, and say that it supports their own personal development and helps to raise their awareness of diversity issues. The school council helps students to develop their citizenship skills positively, and through this forum, students have been able to contribute their ideas to improve aspects of college life: for

example, regarding the school uniform and also the range of rewards for effort and behaviour. Many good quality opportunities to take responsibility enable students to develop their social skills well. Students take great pride in their work as literacy and aspiration leaders or peer mentors.

Students' attitudes to learning and behaviour are satisfactory. Many students are highly motivated and want to achieve well. The college has become stricter about the expected standards of behaviour and students view this positively. Consequently, behaviour has improved overall. However, a significant minority regularly disrupt lessons and, at times, this restricts the quality of teaching and learning. Students adopt good attitudes towards leading healthy lifestyles and they talk animatedly about the problems that can be caused by smoking and alcohol abuse. A good number take part in sports activities. Students' awareness of how to stay safe is satisfactory and they use equipment sensibly and move around the school in an orderly manner. They generally feel safe and although some express concerns about bullying they know who to turn to if they need support. Students' contribution to the community is good. In addition to the work that students do for the school community, they show much goodwill towards the wider community through their fundraising activities. Attendance is satisfactory, reflecting the adequate levels of enjoyment of school life. Although most students leave school as mature young adults, their preparation for their future economic well-being is not better than satisfactory because too few attain GCSE qualifications with higher grades in English and mathematics.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is mainly satisfactory although there is some that is inadequate and some that is outstanding. Students make good progress in lessons where teaching is dynamic and confident and expectations of their work and behaviour are high. In these lessons, students are given interesting and challenging work and they clearly understand what they are learning and how it builds on what they have done before. However, there are too many lessons where teaching is only satisfactory. These lessons have limited impact because planning does not take full account of individual student needs, their starting points for new understanding or their ability. Consequently, students do not make the required progress to catch up on ground lost in the past and this results in their underachievement. This is most evident in mathematics and in middle ability sets in English and some other subjects. The pace of learning in these lessons lacks rigour and the cumulative effect of this over time is achievement that is inadequate overall. In inadequate lessons, the methods used do not sufficiently engage and encourage different groups of learners. Where activities lack variety or challenge, students lose interest, behaviour declines and progress is limited.

Across some departments, the use of assessment, marking and feedback is underdeveloped. Feedback relates to work habits rather than skills or levels of understanding and students do not know what they have to do to progress to the next level or grade.

The college is using information about students' performance to track their progress and support those making slower progress with increasing effectiveness. The needs of students with learning difficulties are well diagnosed and planned for so that out-of-class support can help students move forward; this results in their making satisfactory progress overall. However, different subject areas do not all use information about students' abilities consistently to tailor work

closely enough to meet their needs. Some students have a low level of literacy skills which is impeding their achievement in other subjects. In the best lessons, literacy skills were an integral part of the learning activities. In many of the satisfactory lessons teachers were not including strategies to increase students' literacy skills into their lesson planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Curriculum provision is satisfactory and all statutory requirements are met. There has been a good transition from the traditional curriculum that was on offer at the time of the last inspection to one that more closely matches learners' aspirations and abilities. There is a new thematic approach to the curriculum planning for Key Stage 3. Students in Year 7 follow courses that include themes such as global development, community involvement and personal well-being. As they move through Year 9, students receive good advice regarding their choice of subjects to study in Years 10 and 11. The introduction of additional courses, particularly in vocational subjects, allows older students to choose a pathway that they see as being relevant for them.

The more able students benefit from being able to select all three separate sciences or two languages if they so choose. There has been a marked increase in the number of vocational courses and, for many students, this is motivating them to make greater effort. However, the impact of these changes in provision cannot be fully measured until the first cohort is assessed in summer 2009. Some weaknesses do remain, students are not making sufficient progress in mathematics, and literacy skills need to be developed further.

Enrichment opportunities are good, particularly in the specialist area of sport and PE. Drama and music activities are appreciated and supported by students. The after-school clubs that allow students to improve performance in a number of subject areas are also welcomed and appreciated.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Adults have the best interest of students at heart and this is reflected in some good practice in aspects of pastoral care. Attendance and punctuality are checked frequently and improvement is encouraged through certificates and prizes to value students' efforts. Good additional provision and mentoring for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and vulnerable students makes a significant contribution to their progress. The quality of support for looked-after children and students speaking English as an additional language is satisfactory. Arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of students are in place and reviewed regularly. Current government safeguarding requirements are met.

The college's work to improve behaviour is generally satisfactory. The use of fixed-term exclusions as a sanction has increased in the last year because the college has become stricter about the standards of behaviour that are tolerated. Students view this positively and report that improvements have resulted. There is an agreed strategy for behaviour management in lessons but it is not consistently applied and there are incidents of behaviour that disrupt lessons and slow progress. Academic guidance is of variable quality. There is some good practice but marking of students' work is sometimes superficial and students are not always aware of the next steps to take in order to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The senior leadership team has a sound understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses and a strong drive to raise students' achievement and secure a positive ethos for learning. The expertise of the leadership team has been developed with support from the local authority and under the direction of the interim headteachers. Their increasing role in monitoring teaching and learning and standards across the college is beginning to improve the quality of provision. Senior leaders have put effective systems in place to track students' progress and support those who are underachieving. They also have a good overview of strengths and weaknesses in teaching and are beginning to tackle the weaknesses through professional development and performance management systems. They are using challenging targets to raise standards and teachers' expectations. Subject and aspect leaders are similarly developing their skills and have an increasing role in improving provision at departmental level. However, weaknesses and inconsistencies in practice remain and the college recognises that there is more work to be done to ensure that all students make the progress of which they are capable. The systems put in place provide a good foundation for further improvement but are not yet having the necessary impact on overall standards and achievement.

Equality of opportunity is promoted well. There is little evidence of racist incidents and discrimination is not tolerated. Students have good awareness and understanding of disability through the well developed links with the co-located special school. The college works effectively with the wider community and students' awareness of cultural traditions and their understanding of national and global communities is promoted well across the curriculum. Overall the college makes a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion.

Governors have a good understanding of the college's strengths and weaknesses, and are fully committed to bringing about necessary improvement and this helps them to challenge the college. Issues identified as needing improvement in the last inspection have been tackled with some success, in respect of strengthening leadership, and putting consistent and effective monitoring procedures in place. However, variation in the quality of teaching remains, meaning that students do not make consistent progress, particularly in mathematics and English. Resources are deployed efficiently and the budget is managed well although value for money is inadequate because too many students do not achieve as well as they might.

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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?	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
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	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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?	Yes

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Inspection of Astley Sports College and Community High School, Manchester, SK16 5BL

Thank you for welcoming inspectors into your college and for your contributions to the inspection. We enjoyed talking with you and hearing your views about your life and work in the college. We found many of you to be well motivated in your studies and caring of other students. Your teachers and the college leaders have your best interests at heart and are working hard to help you achieve better results and create a good ethos for learning. We were impressed by your sports facilities and the way you adopt healthy lifestyles. Your work in the community and with the students of Cromwell Special School is commendable. It is clear that you value the many opportunities you have to take responsibility and rise to these challenges, for example as school councillors, sports leaders, literacy and aspiration leaders, and peer mentors.

We found that while your college does some things well, there are some important areas where there are weaknesses and we have given the college a notice to improve these aspects. Many of you do not do as well as you could in English and mathematics and some of you are not making the progress of which you are capable in some other subjects. This is because teaching is not consistently good enough and in some lessons, the behaviour of a few students disrupts the learning of others. We have asked the college to make the following improvements:

- tackle underachievement and raise standards in mathematics and English
- raise overall achievement for students in the middle ability range
- improve the quality of teaching to eradicate inadequate teaching and increase the proportion of good and outstanding teaching
- ensure greater consistency in marking so that in all subjects you know how to improve your work
- enable the sharing of good practice in leadership, teaching and behaviour management to help you adopt good attitudes to learning and make good progress.

You can do your part by ensuring that you behave well in lessons and doing your part to live up to the expectations placed on you by your teachers.