

Almondbury High School and Language College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107758
Local Authority	Kirklees
Inspection number	324649
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2009
Reporting inspector	Clive Moss 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)	727
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ray Nichols
Headteacher	Mrs Janet Tolley
Date of previous school inspection	22 February 2006
School address	Fernside Avenue Almondbury Huddersfield West Yorkshire HD5 8PQ
Telephone number	01484 223910
Fax number	01484 223912

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.

Description of the school

Almondbury High School and Language College is a smaller than average comprehensive school in Huddersfield. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also above the national average. An above average proportion of students are from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds and a similar proportion have a first language other than English. The level of social and economic disadvantage in the area served by the school is above average. In addition, the school accepts from elsewhere in the district a significant number of students who are challenging or are difficult to place. The school is part of a Safer Schools Partnership. The school is designated a specialist language college and has achieved the Department for Children, Schools and Families' International Schools Award. There is privately managed childcare provision at the site.

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 the school is good. School leaders have made rapid progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the last inspection. This has resulted in good teaching and learning and a curriculum that provides many opportunities for students' personal and academic development. A thorough and comprehensive system for tracking student progress has resulted in self-evaluation being increasingly focussed on students' academic achievement. This system is used well to manage the progress made by students in different subjects and has led to interventions where there is underperformance. However, there has not yet been sufficient time for it to impact fully, so that there are still variations in the performance of different subjects. There have been significant improvements in attendance and behaviour since the last inspection and a very high proportion of students go on to education, employment and training post-16. Standards have improved since the last inspection and provisional results in 2008 were the best ever. In particular, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has increased by 12% since the last inspection and the gap between the school's performance and the national average on this more challenging measure is narrower than for other measures. The school's confidence that its detailed tracking systems will result in further improvement and the meeting of its challenging targets is well placed. Most students make good progress and achieve challenging targets but those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities do not always make as much progress as their peers, although their achievement overall is satisfactory. Students make good progress in their personal development, for example, through the wide range of community activities in which they are involved. Most parents are pleased with the school. Several supplied written comments to the inspectors praising the school's rapid response to concerns they had raised, including dealing with bullying. A small number had the opposite experience and, for a small minority, difficulties communicating with the school remain a concern. The language college has played an important role in the development of the school. Capacity to improve is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Focus more closely on the academic achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in order to improve further the progress they make.
- Reduce the variations in performance between different subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with below average standards. By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 standards are broadly average. This represents good progress for most students, given their starting points. In 2008, the proportion of students gaining at least five GCSE passes at grades A to G was the same as the national average and every student left the school with at least one GCSE or equivalent. The proportion of students obtaining the highest grades in a modern foreign language was well above average. Students' progress in mathematics is particularly good. Girls make slightly better progress than boys. Students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds make similar progress to their peers. The progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, though satisfactory overall, has been more mixed. The most recent information from the school shows that the achievement of these students is improving. A significant number of students enter the school late in Key Stage 4. These students usually

arrive with very complex and challenging personal circumstances and histories. The school is very successful at re-engaging these students in education. Their attendance improves greatly and rapidly and in 2008 all of these students left the school with at least one GCSE or equivalent, and most went on to courses in further education.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students mature well and develop good attitudes towards learning. They enjoy school life and are keen to make the most of their learning opportunities. Attendance has improved and is now just a little above the national average. This is due partly to the school's particular success in reducing the number of persistent absentees. Students develop a clear sense of right and wrong about issues such as bullying, discrimination, justice and fair play, and there is a strong commitment to racial equality. Students show good awareness of the diversity of cultures in society and feel that this brings richness to their lives. Inspectors found that students' behaviour is generally good. The school has significantly reduced the amount of disruptive behaviour in lessons since the last inspection and there has been a marked reduction in short term and permanent exclusions, both of which are now very low. Nevertheless, a minority of parents continue to be concerned about behaviour and students say that disruption to lessons by a small number still sometimes slows their learning.

Students feel safe at school, are safety conscious and say that there are always adults in school they can turn to if they have any worries. They adopt healthy lifestyles and most participate in sports activities. There is an excellent range of opportunities for students to take on responsibilities and they make an outstanding contribution to the community inside and out of school, for example, through their involvement in many community projects. A very active and representative school council has played an important role in bringing about improvements. Employers who work regularly with the school say that the students demonstrate positive attitudes. Students are prepared well for the next stage of their education and employment, as is shown by the very high proportion that go on into further education, employment and training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Generally, students say they enjoy lessons. Relationships between teachers and students are good. There are now more opportunities for students to learn independently. Learners are helped to understand how they learn best. Lessons are planned well. Assessment is good. The information collected is used well to develop the curriculum and teaching. Topics, materials and activities are designed carefully to capture interest and provide a challenge. Students are able to describe their progress accurately as a result of the marking and assessment carried out by teachers. They know their target grades and current levels of performance and find teachers helpful in making them understand what is needed to improve. Teachers make good use of resources. The limited numbers of teaching assistants are used well to support learning. A minority of lessons are satisfactory rather than good as they are too teacher led and this results in students being inattentive.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum supports the learning and personal development of students well. All students in each key stage study at least one modern foreign language and there are opportunities to study up to three. A programme of 'learning to learn' in Key Stage 3 enables students to understand their own preferred ways of learning and also to appreciate different ways. A wider range of vocational and more academic courses was introduced from September 2008, to meet more closely the individual needs of all students, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. This range of courses provides students with extensive choice and enables successful work in partnership with other schools and colleges. Gifted and talented students are provided with many interesting opportunities. Students have several opportunities to be entered for GCSE examinations early, which enable them to broaden their studies, or consolidate their learning in other subjects. There is a comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education for all year groups and good provision for all students to develop work-based learning skills, for example, through the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and 'Key Steps' programmes. Many students are involved in the wide range of additional opportunities provided, including community projects, international visits and enterprise activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides high quality pastoral care for students. The staff is highly committed to enabling all students to enjoy their education and make progress. Every opportunity is taken to raise students' self-esteem and their aspirations. Academic guidance is good and students reach challenging targets. There are effective systems to reward good behaviour that have supported significant improvements since the last inspection. Arrangements to ensure the health, safety and the safeguarding of students are in place and reviewed regularly. Sensitive and skilful support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, those who speak English as a second language and other students with additional needs is provided by the Supported Learning Zone and learning mentors. Combined with effective use of the school's recently introduced process for managing students' progress, the support for these students is now resulting in recently improved rates of progress in academic achievement as well as in personal development, but this has yet to be reflected in the published performance data.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior leaders have embedded a culture where the progress of every student matters. They set clear priorities, challenging targets and detailed plans for action. They have made good progress in tackling the issues from the last inspection. There is now a thorough and well coordinated system for tracking students' progress towards their targets that is used consistently throughout the school and results in appropriate support for students' needs. The system is used also to identify action needed to improve performance in subjects, such as information and communication technology, where students have not made as much progress as in other subjects. Accompanied by regular monitoring of teaching and learning, use of data on students' progress is enabling the school to make accurate evaluations of its

work. Decisive action is taken where necessary. Staff appreciate the many opportunities provided for professional development. The governing body knows the school's strengths and weaknesses and provides appropriate challenge to senior leaders. Governors support the school in making a strong contribution to community cohesion. All relevant policies and procedures are in place to promote equality of opportunity. The school's good commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in its success in enabling students who join at other than the usual starting times to settle in quickly and get their education on track. Resources are used effectively to support learning. The school provides good value for money. The specialist language college status has been used well to support improvements in the quality of teaching and the curriculum, and to enhance the school's strong partnerships with local schools, colleges and other agencies. The school has strengthened its role in the community and simultaneously provided students with a much broader range of interesting opportunities, to which they respond well.

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	2
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	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	2

The quality of provision

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

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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

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

Inspection of Almondbury High School and Language College, Huddersfield, HD5 8PQ

Thank you for talking to me and to my colleagues and making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We spoke with you in lessons, around the school and in groups, looked at your work, read the results of questionnaires filled in by your parents and carers and spoke with some of your teachers. Here is a summary of our main findings, which I hope will be of interest to you.

- Almondbury High School and Language College is a good school. It is popular with you and your parents.
- You make good progress and achieve challenging targets for examination results. This is because of the good care, guidance and support you receive, good teaching and the wide range of opportunities provided for you. These make a significant contribution also to your personal development.
- Your attendance has improved significantly since the last inspection of the school. You told us that you enjoy school, but your learning is still sometimes disrupted by a small number of students.
- Members of staff have good knowledge of your needs and ensure those of you who need extra support get it.
- The headteacher and the staff at the school have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make things even better.
- We have asked the headteacher to make sure that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make just as much progress as other students at the school, and to make sure all subjects do equally well in helping you to gain qualifications.

Many of you already make an important contribution to the school and I am sure you will want to do everything you can to support the staff in making Almondbury High School and Language College even better.