

Airedale High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 108278 |
| Local Authority | Wakefield |
| Inspection number | 324740 |
| Inspection dates | 17–18 September 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Bernard Campbell 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 | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 1055 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs E Appleyard |
| Headteacher | Mr Paul Frazer |
| Date of previous school inspection | 30 November 2005 |
| School address | Crewe Road Airedale Castleford West Yorkshire WF10 3JU |
| Telephone number | 01977 664555 |
| Fax number | 01977 664556 |

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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

Airedale High School serves an area of socio-economic disadvantage. A higher proportion of students than average is entitled to free school meals. More students than average have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is very low. Airedale High is a specialist Performing Arts school. The school has achieved the Investors in People Award, the Healthy Schools Award and Sportsmark. In 2007, it qualified for the Specialist Schools and Academies 'most improved school' club.

A fire at the school in 2006 destroyed many specialist facilities and the new buildings are to open very shortly.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good and rapidly improving school. It has outstanding features and an excellent capacity to improve further. The outstanding leadership by the principal has raised students' aspirations significantly, and led to greatly improved results at age 16. Students feel valued and well supported by the high quality guidance and the very good relationships with staff. Excellent teamwork by teaching and support staff has generated a rapid pace of school improvement and innovation, rigorously focused on the personal and academic needs of students. The large majority of parents are happy with the school and its reputation is rising in the community. As one parent said, 'I wish Airedale High had been like this when I was there.'

Achievement is good. Since the last inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have risen very significantly. The great majority of students of all levels of ability make good progress and have gained higher than expected levels of success in their qualifications at age 16. At Key Stage 3, students make satisfactory progress in English, mathematics and science. The school has made promising changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum to better meet the needs of all students, but these have not yet had an impact on results.

The school makes an outstanding contribution to students' personal development. As a result, students' personal confidence considerably increases and enables them to achieve well by the time they leave school. The excellent student support centre (Pod4U) has resulted in exceptionally large numbers of students actively improving their personal development and well-being. There is a very high take up of healthy eating and a majority of students take part in sport or dance after school. The highly effective behaviour support team has helped many individual students to radically improve their behaviour, attendance and progress. Behaviour is good and is reinforced by the strong promotion of mutual respect between staff and students, the good teaching, and the effectiveness of school rewards and sanctions. The level of exclusions has been reduced significantly through providing a curriculum that meets the needs and interests of all students.

The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the last inspection, and is now good overall. This is the result of effective recruitment, close observation of the quality of lessons and very good systems to support professional development. Overall the curriculum is good. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is outstanding because the academic and vocational pathways provided for different groups of students have resulted in greatly improved achievement. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been reorganised effectively and is beginning to improve students' skills in reading. However, this is at the expense of the personal, social, health and citizenship education curriculum at this key stage, which currently has insufficient time and is not well enough planned. The impact of the performing arts provision is satisfactory, but has been restricted due to the lack of specialist provision caused by the school fire.

The leadership and management are outstanding. The principal provides a clear vision and objectives and the staff convey a very strong sense of collective endeavour. Members of the teaching and support staff are energetic and highly committed, which successfully encourages and motivates students. Line management is robust, communication is excellent, and self-evaluation is well informed and rigorous in all parts of the school. The high level of pastoral and academic support is exceptionally well planned and effectively implemented which accelerates the progress of students. The governing body provides good expertise, challenge and support for the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve progress at Key Stage 3.
- Improve the personal, social, health and citizenship education curriculum at Key Stage 3.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students achieve well at Airedale High. Since the last inspection, standards have risen rapidly at GCSE. Provisional results indicate that in 2008, the school has gained its best ever increases in GCSE results. This builds on the significant improvement in GCSE results in 2007. The 2007 and 2008 results for GCSE 5A* to C, including English and mathematics have steadily improved but remain below the national average for 2007. The GCSE 5 A* to C results for 2008 are well above the national average for 2007 and reflect the improved Key Stage 4 curriculum.

At Key Stage 3, standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science were below average in 2007 and the gap with national results remained static. This is already a key priority for school improvement.

Students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, were observed to make good progress at Key Stage 4 because of the impact of the improved Key Stage 4 curriculum and the high quality of student monitoring, guidance and support. Students make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3. Although the school's actions to improve the curriculum at Key Stage 3 have not yet had an impact on its national test results, there is evidence that younger students have improved their reading through the Accelerated Reading Programme.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' personal development is outstanding. Students make great progress in developing their social and personal skills and their self-esteem. Students subscribe to the school's culture of achievement, which significantly raises their aspirations and increases their drive to do well. Relationships between students and staff are first class and contribute very well to their clearly evident sense of pride in, and commitment to, the school community. Consequently, students enthusiastically take on responsibilities such as serving on student voice groups, acting as mentors or arts ambassadors. Students have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lifestyles. A high proportion of students take advantage of the very nutritious and healthy meals available in the school canteen. High numbers make use of the excellent drop-in-centre (Pod4U) to seek advice and improve their emotional health and physical well-being. Students' good enjoyment of school is shown by their active involvement in lessons and also by their attendance which, although broadly average by national standards, is higher than schools in similar circumstances. A significant majority of students participate in the many sporting and other activities available outside lessons. They are well informed about how to keep safe in school and in the wider community. This is demonstrated by their good behaviour and respect for one another in lessons and around the school. Incidents of bullying or racism are relatively rare and students are justifiably confident that they will be dealt with swiftly and effectively. Students are prepared well for their future economic well-being. They make good progress in basic and workplace related skills. They feel confident about making decisions about future work or education choices.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned. The objectives are routinely shared with students who respond well to knowing what it is they are learning and why. Tasks are usually varied and fun, which holds the students' interest well. There is some outstanding teaching in the school, especially in the specialist performing arts subjects. In one physical education lesson, the teacher showed excellent subject knowledge of trampoline techniques which enabled students to understand what they needed to do to improve their own performance. In less successful lessons, questions tend to only challenge students who volunteer answers, resulting in some students remaining quiet and not making much contribution. In these lessons, teachers talk too much and sometimes do not take prompt action when faced with chatty or inattentive students.

Teachers' professional development is extensive and well focused. Members of staff rigorously check on the quality of teaching and learning by observing lessons and investigations into aspects of the school's practice. Teachers who use information and communication technology (ICT) well in their subject are starting to help others use the improved ICT resources more effectively in lessons. A good example of this was observed when students filmed a performance of a dance, which then helped them to set targets for improvement in their use of ICT. Teaching is increasingly well informed by the use of assessment data. However, improving the use of assessment of how students learn in the classroom has been identified by the school as an area for further development.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum. In Key Stage 4, the well planned pathways meet the needs of different groups of students. This has resulted in much higher levels of involvement, faster student progress and much better exam results. The school works highly effectively in partnership with a range of outside providers to provide a rich and varied menu of vocational options. These include imaginative activities such as boxing and fire fighting. Discussion with students showed that early entry for exams strongly motivates them and builds their confidence. The school's new Key Stage 3 curriculum provides a good programme to improve students' literacy skills and good opportunities for more able students to take national tests and for all students to start some GCSE courses early. In the reorganisation of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, insufficient time has been provided for personal, social, health and citizenship education. The programme is not well planned and this results in sex and drugs education occurring too late in the key stage. The curriculum is enhanced considerably by a range of enrichment activities such as the science club, dance club and a particularly varied and well attended sports programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. All members of staff are highly committed to supporting learners. The school fully adheres to requirements for safeguarding students and for their health and safety. As a result, the school is a safe, welcoming place,

particularly for the wide range of vulnerable students. Very good use is made of outside agencies to provide the appropriate advice and support for those students who need it. The school strives to involve parents in all these circumstances.

Well-tailored and sensitive provision is made for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. For example, by establishing literacy and numeracy groups in Key Stage 3, there has been improvement in the progress of students with a weakness in reading. The work of the behaviour support team has helped to greatly reduce the numbers of students excluded from school. Beneficial guidance and help is provided by the excellent Pod4U centre, which very successfully supports vulnerable students and helps them overcome problems. This centre is very highly valued by students who really appreciate the responsive and sensitive help they receive.

The transition between primary and secondary school is helped enormously by the Year 7 base. This provides a stable and supportive environment so that new students can quickly find their feet. Careful attention is given to guiding students at all points of transition within the school so that individual needs are well met. Challenging targets are set for all learners. Effective systems to track academic progress have been developed in recent years. The school uses this information very well to provide extra support or further challenge to particular groups of students. Mentors and a wide range of enrichment activities are used very well to boost achievement and raise self-esteem and readiness for examinations.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. There have been rapid and impressive improvements in standards and progress at Key Stage 4, significantly improved attendance and a greatly reduced level of exclusions since the last inspection. In the last year, innovative changes have been made to the Key Stage 3 curriculum to improve levels of literacy and students' progress, but it is too early to show the impact on outcomes at Key Stage 3. Systems to set targets are highly effective in raising students' aspirations and managing performance. Systems for evaluating students' and the school's performance are detailed and rigorous across the school. Performance management is used very successfully to improve the effectiveness of staff and to enable them to meet school priorities. Teachers and support staff are highly motivated and they work together cooperatively and creatively. The very good systems of rewards and recognition ensure that students feel very well supported and valued. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and the curriculum provides increasingly good opportunities for all groups of students to make progress and succeed. The leadership at all levels are reflective and outward-looking. They take very good account of the views of students, parents, other stakeholders and are always looking to embrace good practice from elsewhere. The governors bring a wide range of expertise, which they use effectively to support, monitor and challenge school plans and developments. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good. The school is a strong community with good links with local agencies and it is actively involved with the wider local community.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

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| 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 | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| 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 | 2 |

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

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|---|---|
| How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| 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? | 1 |

Leadership and management

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|--|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 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 | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 1 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 1 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 2 |
| 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 |
| 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 Airedale High School, Castleford, WF10 3JU

Following our inspection of your school, on behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you all for your welcome. I particularly want to thank those of you who spoke to us in meetings, around the school and in lessons about your experiences. You had lots of good things to say about your school, especially about the teaching and support staff, the lessons and the activities you do after school. Inspectors agreed with much of what you said. This is what we found.

This is a good and rapidly improving school. Your GCSE results have been improving every year. You make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3. Students of all abilities make good progress by age 16 because the school provides good courses which meet your different needs. You also get outstanding support for your personal development from teaching and support staff and from Pod4U. Attendance has improved a lot and behaviour is good. You lead very healthy lifestyles. The healthy school dinners are very popular and many of you participate in sport and dance. Many of you make a very positive contribution to the life of the school by taking on responsibilities and by contributing your opinions. You are taught well and the principal and other managers provide outstanding leadership.

These are the improvements we have asked the principal and governors to make:

- to raise standards and improve progress at Key Stage 3
- to improve the personal, social, health and citizenship education curriculum at Key Stage 3.

Thanks again for welcoming us. We hope you will take advantage of all the opportunities provided by the school and play your part in making it an even better and more successful school.