

Acklam Grange School A Specialist College For Maths and Computing

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111751
Local Authority	Middlesbrough
Inspection number	325451
Inspection dates	10–11 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Margaret Farrow 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)	1355
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr Hazel Pearson OBE
Headteacher	Mr John Bate
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2006
School address	Lodore Grove Acklam Middlesbrough TS5 8PB
Telephone number	01642 277700
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Acklam Grange is a large popular, oversubscribed secondary school situated on the outskirts of Middlesbrough. Some students who attend the school live in communities that experience social and economic disadvantage and an above average number are entitled to free school meals. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly of Pakistani heritage, is increasing and is similar to the national average although the proportion whose first language is not English is above. An average proportion of students are deemed to have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, whilst a below average proportion has a statement of special educational need.

The school achieved specialist mathematics and computing college status in September 2003 and was re-designated as such in 2007. The City Learning Centre (CLC) on the school site is an information, communication and technology (ICT) facility and is shared with other schools across the borough. The local authority has supported the building of the Acorn Centre within the school grounds, a joint school and local community resource. It is the first school in Middlesbrough to have a new building as part of the local authority's Building Schools for the Future programme. This is planned to be completed by 2010.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Acklam Grange is a good school where the care and support provided to students are outstanding. The school's positive ethos and good relationships between staff and students help to ensure that students' attitudes to learning are good. Celebrating success and the provision of a wide range of support systems are at the heart of the school's inclusive approach, building students' confidence and self-esteem. As a result, students' personal development and well-being are good.

Students make good progress by the age of 16 and attain above average standards. In 2007 the proportion attaining 5 GCSEs grade A*-C dipped to the national average. Unvalidated results for 2008 were the best ever and well above provisional results nationally. The proportion attaining 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics also improved well although results remain below the national average. Until 2007, students' attainment and progress from ages 11 to 14 were weaker. Improvements in teaching and learning, better targeting of additional support over the last 18 months and good support from local authority have improved matters. Inspection evidence and school tracking information show that the majority of students make good progress in lessons. It also indicates that the school is well on the way to meeting its challenging targets for 2009. Decisive actions taken by the school have enabled students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities to make at least satisfactory and often good progress. Students from minority ethnic communities generally attain well and make good progress in their learning.

The school has met its specialist subject targets in mathematics. The designation of the school as a specialist mathematics and computing college has enhanced information and communication technology (ICT) provision particularly, and the school exceeded its ICT targets. The specialism has also provided a good impetus for the school's leadership in outreach work with partner primary schools and its work with the local community through the Acorn Centre and the CLC.

Teaching and learning are good overall. In the best lessons, teachers make sure that all students are challenged by their work and the pace of learning is brisk. In the minority of more satisfactory lessons, progress slows because assessment data is not used well enough to make sure work is always matched to students' individual capabilities, particularly those of higher ability. Senior leaders do not check the quality of teaching often enough to make sure the good practice in some departments is fully in place across the school. Students behave well in lessons, and act safely and considerately to each other and adults in classes and around the school. Confidence and courtesy characterise their contribution to discussion in many lessons. They say they enjoy school, and are delighted when they do well.

Students have a good grasp of the need for healthy eating and enthusiastically take part in the many physical activities available during and after school. They contribute well in many ways to their school and wider community. Good international partnerships with schools in Tanzania and Kashmir enrich the good curriculum and support the global element of community cohesion well. Students are encouraged to become responsible citizens within and outside the school, for example, by their work as mentors and school councillors, and by actively supporting the community through project work, frequently linked to and supported through work with local charities. A good range of extended activities is offered and some of these are supported by substantial numbers of students. The activities also contribute well to the very successful junior sports leader programme. Students' sound basic skills, well developed social skills and

effective work related learning opportunities ensure a high proportion continue their education or enter employment or training post-16.

The school rigorously monitors absence and determined action has improved overall attendance to average. A significant number of partner agencies work with the school to support students' needs and interests, especially vulnerable students. For example, education welfare officers and parent support workers effectively support students who are reluctant to attend school and this has resulted in a good reduction in the proportion of persistent absentees. About 10% of parents responded to the inspection questionnaire. They are overwhelmingly positive about the school and almost all believe their children are safe, well cared for and make good progress in their learning. A very small proportion of parents believe that bullying is an issue. Students who spoke to inspectors said that whilst some bullying takes place, levels are low and once reported, it is quickly dealt with.

Leadership and management are good overall. Leadership and accountability have been strengthened by the restructuring of the management team. Senior managers, staff and governors embrace and share the common vision for the school where, 'Learning is our Business', as they move towards a development of a new school fit for the twenty-first century. They are fully involved in the development of whole school priorities and the school's self-evaluation processes. Clear, appropriate priorities for improvement have been identified in the school's development plan and these link well to resource requirements. All have a broadly accurate view of the school's strengths and what needs to change to continue to improve students' attainment and progress. However self-evaluation judgements are sometimes over-stated because these are not always based on a rigorous evaluation of performance data. The leadership team's sharper and more secure focus on the standards and progress of students is improving results across both key stages and the learning of students in lessons. Leaders have tackled the few areas for improvement identified in the last inspection and the school is well placed to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure self-evaluation is always based on a thorough analysis of the data and information available, including outcomes of more regular monitoring of the impact of teaching on learning.
- Eradicate remaining inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the use of individual student data and information to inform learning, so that all lessons enable students to achieve as well as they can.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In 2007, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 were below that found nationally. Unvalidated test results for 2008, confirmed by inspection evidence shows that standards are now in line, representing satisfactory progress. This has been brought about by improvements in teaching and learning and an effective literacy intervention programme between Year 7 and Year 9. The school's 2008 unvalidated Key Stage 4 data indicates that 69% of students attained five or more GCSEs grade A* to C. Although the proportion attaining five GCSEs including English and mathematics rose well, results remain below the national average. This is mainly as a result of previous staffing difficulties in mathematics and the legacy of weaker performance at Key Stage 3. Nearly all students achieve at least one GCSE, reflecting the school's commitment to inclusion.

Accurate school tracking and performance information indicates students' make good progress overall from their entry into school in Year 7 to the time they leave. Progress has been faster in Key Stage 4 and the rate of progress has accelerated since 2007.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Many opportunities throughout the curriculum and assemblies, together with visits to heritage and environmental centres, form a strong foundation for students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have a good grasp of healthy eating fostered, for example, through enthusiastic involvement in a partnership between food technology lessons and the school catering service. They take part keenly in physical education and voluntary sports activities, and an increasing number willingly cycle to school. The school deservedly holds the Advanced Healthy School Award. Students clearly enjoy most lessons and school activities where they work industriously and well. They comment very positively on the friendships they make and are respectful of the diversity of the school community. Students say they feel safe in school. Those who are particularly vulnerable especially value the measures taken to contribute to their welfare. Effective arrangements support those whose behaviour put them at risk of exclusion from school, and minimise disruption to learning. Students also attribute this to effective peer mentoring arrangements which are a telling example of their good contribution to the school and wider community.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching enables the majority of students to make good progress in their lessons. An effective programme of professional development makes certain that staff are well informed about the best strategies to hasten the pace of learning. An example of this is the way in which teachers share with students how their work is assessed. As a result, more students understand exactly what skills and knowledge they need to acquire in order to improve. Some lessons were judged to be outstanding. Characteristics of these lessons involved good use of ICT to develop independent research, students taking more responsibility for their learning; with good links being made between assessment requirements, students' targets and the focus of the lesson. In such lessons, teachers hold high expectations of students. They fully understand what students should be capable of, because they are using assessment information to plan lessons which are challenging. Despite these strengths and an increase in the proportion of good or better lessons over time, there are still inconsistencies between some lessons and across departments. Where there is limited use of ICT, insufficient challenge, restricted opportunities for working in groups or independently, students can remain passive or become restless and their progress is more satisfactory.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum, developed in line with the revised National Curriculum, meets the needs and aspirations of most learners well. Recent changes have improved the range of vocational courses on offer at Key Stage 4. Young apprenticeship programmes are well developed with good local partnerships in industry. Students increasingly mix academic and vocational courses in their

options and are generally very positive about the range of choices available to them. Enterprise lessons and work experience are an integral part of the curriculum and students have good access to high quality careers advice. Specialist school subjects of mathematics and computing provide good levels of ICT resources across the school and students also benefit from the on-site City Learning Centre. Despite these resources, in some lessons students make limited use of ICT as a tool to support independent learning. Teachers generally make good use of ICT to deliver structured lessons that are interesting and motivating to students. Innovative and highly effective use of hand held technology supports learning for vulnerable groups in mathematics well. Safe and healthy lifestyles are high priorities that are supported by a range of initiatives and a good programme of personal, social, health and education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care and support offered to individual students by staff are exemplary. However, whilst student target setting and tracking systems have improved and are thorough, the effective use of target levels and grade criteria to help raise achievement in lessons is not yet fully in place across the school. Transition arrangements at all levels are good and links with partner primary schools are particularly strong. For example, a 'transition group' of vulnerable Year 7 students study most subjects with one teacher. This eases their transition into school and they make good progress as a result. Early identification of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good and they are supported effectively. Students and parents receive good advice about options in Key Stage 4. A sophisticated system of peer mentoring is having a positive effect on students' self-esteem and achievements. Few students are permanently excluded and an effective inclusion unit is helping to reduce the need for fixed term exclusions. Students' health and safety are a high priority and policies operate effectively. Risk assessments are robust, both in school and for the many visits outside.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Senior and middle leaders understand what is expected of them, say they are fully accountable for their areas of responsibility, feel empowered to take decisions and value the wide range of professional development opportunities provided to them. They monitor the quality of teaching in their departments but not yet consistently enough to evaluate the impact of teaching on students' learning. Governance is good; many governors are experienced and fully involved in the life of the school. They provide an effective balance of challenge and support to school leaders. Whilst they regularly scrutinise students' progress towards the school's challenging targets, the performance information they receive does not always enable them to make accurate comparisons to the national average over time. The school's very good focus on the care of students has ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fully in place. Equality of opportunity and community cohesion are promoted well and students from many cultures get on well together. Financial management arrangements are robust and the school provides good 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
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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	2
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

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	2
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	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

12 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Acklam Grange School A Specialist College For Maths and Computing,
Middlesbrough, TS5 8PB

Thank you for making the inspection team so welcome when we recently visited your school. We were impressed with your kindness, co-operation and good behaviour. We were particularly impressed with the way you conducted yourselves as you travel along the exceptionally long corridors and outside spaces to your lessons. You must all be very fit! A special thanks to all of you who spoke to us; whether in meetings or in lessons or as we went around the school. We are glad to hear that you think Acklam Grange is a good school and we agree. We found that the care and support you are provided with are outstanding. I have summarised other key findings below.

You make good progress in your learning from the time you enter school in Year 7 to the time you leave at the age of 16 and unvalidated data for 2008, indicates GCSE results were the best ever.

Relationships between teachers and yourselves are good; as is your personal development.

The quality of teaching you receive is good overall and improving.

You are provided with a good range of academic and vocational opportunities to study which are planned to meet your needs and interests.

Many of you attend and enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

You make a good contribution to your school, local and global community. For example through your work as junior sports coaches, mentors, your charitable work and links to Kashmir and Tanzania.

We have asked Mr Bate and his team to do two things to help the school to continue to improve. These are:

make sure the school's knowledge of its work is always based on a thorough analysis of the data and information available;

make sure there is consistently good quality teaching and good use of your individual performance across all departments, so that you are always challenged to achieve the best you can.

You can also help by continuing to behave well and contribute in lessons, and continuing to attend school regularly. I wish you all every success during the remaining time in your school and in your future lives.

Margaret Farrow

Her Majesty's Inspector