

Appleby Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112434
Local Authority	Cumbria
Inspection number	325607
Inspection dates	18–19 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Straw

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	635
Sixth form	125
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael Saint
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Lund
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2005
School address	Battlebarrow Appleby-in-Westmorland Cumbria CA16 6XU
Telephone number	01768 351580
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Appleby is a smaller than average secondary school in a rural area. The proportion of students entitled to receive free school meals is low, as is the proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most students come from White British families. Appleby is a founder member of the Rural Academy of Cumbria, a rural consortium of seven small secondary schools that gained joint Technology college status in 2004.

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 and improving school. The school has benefited in many ways from specialist technology status which is seen in improved standards, teaching and learning and an excellent curriculum in the main school. Outstanding collaborative arrangements with the Appleby Heritage Centre, and in conjunction with other partner schools, are developing an increasing range of academic and vocational options at levels that cater for students of all abilities. These are popular with students and enable them to achieve well. The personal support provided for students is very good. Staff know their students very well and provide them with a safe and caring environment in which they can thrive.

The school is very much at the heart of the local community and has taken as its motto, 'In the community, for the community'. The staff and students make an outstanding contribution to the local and wider communities through links with other providers, businesses and charity groups. The school has well established and long-standing links with schools in South Africa. As a result of this the school recently gained International School status and the contribution it makes to community cohesion is excellent. The very large majority of parents are enthusiastic in their praise of many aspects of the school's provision. These include the leadership of the headteacher, the quality of transition arrangements from primary schools, the commitment of the teaching staff and the education and care for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. One parent, speaking for many, described the provision as 'second to none'.

Standards are above average and students achieve well. Students have consistently achieved well in Years 7 to 9 but there have been some fluctuations in Years 10 and 11. Over time, however, standards have risen in Years 10 and 11 and provisional results for 2008 show that the school achieved its best ever GCSE results. Achievement is particularly high in science where a half of the students reached grade A* or A; this is much less evident in English and mathematics where some of the higher attaining students did not achieve as well as they should have done. Nevertheless overall achievement is good and a key factor of this is the good quality teaching and learning. Classroom relationships are excellent, allowing teachers and students to concentrate on their learning. Enthusiastic and well focused teaching, combined with students' highly positive attitudes and enjoyment of learning underpins their good progress. Students' positive experiences in and out of the classroom contribute to their outstanding enjoyment of learning and their development of good levels of self-esteem. This leads to outstanding behaviour in and around the school and good attendance. Students are courteous and welcoming to visitors and treat each other with great respect. Students are aware and sensitive of the need to be safe and to lead healthy lifestyles. Good academic achievement, very focused work experience and numerous enterprise activities alongside appropriate careers advice ensures that students are very well equipped for further studies or the world of work.

Leadership and management are good. There is a confidence and sense of purpose about the school. The headteacher and senior staff share a clear view of the direction in which they want to take the school and where there is potential for improvement. An example of this is the newly introduced tracking system called assertive mentoring in which all students are set challenging targets and regularly assessed. Middle leaders are beginning to take a greater part in the school's self-evaluation but are not yet as effective as they could be. Governors take a good, active and critical role in the process of monitoring the school's work.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form in which students achieve well. Students make good progress over two years and standards are above average. Retention rates are high. Pass rates in examinations are above average and analysis of validated data indicates that students have achieved consistently well for the last four years. Students achieve well because they have excellent attitudes to learning and they are well taught. Leadership and management are good and the sixth form provides good value for money. Relationships are excellent, teachers know their students very well and an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust pervades the sixth form. Teachers are knowledgeable, explain their subjects clearly and tailor work closely to examination requirements; all of which maximises students' chances of academic success. More effective systems for tracking students' progress are developing but these are not yet as rigorous as those operating in the main school. A good range of academic courses meet students' needs well. Excellent links with the Heritage Centre and other schools extend the choice of both academic and vocational courses. Students thoroughly enjoy being in the sixth form at Appleby. They speak warmly of the good personal care and support they receive and of the many opportunities they have to take responsibility, contribute to the community and experience a range of trips and visits outside of the school day. However, opportunities to provide similar experiences within the school day and to support students' personal development further are currently being missed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of students gaining A* and A grades in GCSE examinations, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Ensure all middle leaders including those in the sixth form, play a greater role in monitoring and evaluating the work in their areas in order to identify accurately where there is scope for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement across the school is good and at the end of Year 11 standards are above average. The attainment of students when they join the school is average. Published data shows that standards are consistently above average by the end of Year 9 and that most students achieve well. In 2007 students performed best in English and science and test results for mathematics were in line with the national average. The proportion of students gaining the higher Level 6 was well above average in English and science. In 2008, provisional results for Key Stage 3 indicate that students again achieved well and the proportion of students reaching the higher level in mathematics increased slightly.

In Key Stage 4 there was a dip in test results in 2007 and standards overall were broadly average. Results in English dropped markedly and reduced overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 to satisfactory, rather than good. Although the majority of pupils made good progress, higher attaining students underachieved. In 2008, as a result of the strategies put in place by the school, students improved on their performance. Provisional results indicate a significant increase in the number of students gaining five or more passes at grades A* to C and the best ever results for the school so far. Students performed particularly well in science with half of Year 11 reaching grade A* and A. The pass rate rose in several other subjects but there were

fewer A* and A grades overall than anticipated, particularly in English and mathematics. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well, relative to their starting points.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students thoroughly enjoy school as is reflected in above average attendance. Behaviour is excellent. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Exceptional charity work by students' has resulted in them raising around £10,000 for a variety of causes every year. The school has recently gained an international award which reflects the outstanding work it has undertaken for many years with a number of schools in South Africa. This work, alongside a wide range of other curriculum initiatives, has developed student awareness of other cultures and an appreciation of their own local community. They have close links with other partners including local businesses. Students enjoy being part of the local community and take part in numerous events including the Appleby horse fair.

Students have a good understanding of the benefits of adopting healthy lifestyles and speak with pride about their school and the extent to which they feel safe and well looked after. Student involvement in making a positive contribution to the school and the wider community is outstanding. The school council is very proactive and the school values its work enough to offer an annual budget for the group to use as it sees fit.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons teachers ask open-ended questions and skilfully chair responses and manage discussions. These lessons give many opportunities for students to work in pairs or groups. Students appreciate the value of exploring ideas because teachers set challenging and interesting tasks and allow time for them to reflect on what they have learned. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used expertly and lessons are sometimes enlivened with music and film. Teachers have high expectations and students rise to the challenge and as a result the rate of progress is accelerating in many lessons. In the less effective lessons, teachers do not give students enough time to explain or reflect on their learning and discuss their work with each other.

The school's assessment policy and practice are much improved since the last inspection and are now thorough. Work is marked well with comments which guide students towards reaching their targets. Students say they have a clear understanding about their progress and are well informed about the targets set for them. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities achieve well because of the care and attention they receive from all the staff and their well briefed and dedicated support staff.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Imaginative strategies, wide ranging opportunities provided by the school's specialist technology status, together with regular reviews of its current provision, mean that courses are evolving rapidly. They cater effectively for a wide range of student needs and aspirations, and are strongly responsive to local needs. At Key Stage 3, all requirements for the National Curriculum are met.

All subjects have revised schemes of work to meet the new requirements at this stage. A distinctive feature is the introduction of an innovative Year 7 course that enhances the students' key skills and personal development.

An expanding range of opportunities are provided in Key Stage 4. Students are able to follow programmes that they see as relevant for their current and future interests, needs and aspirations. Specialist technology status brings major benefits in resources and course provision, for example, the opportunity for students to choose from five varied science courses. Work-related learning and enterprise education are provided successfully, alongside effective careers education.

Extra-curricular activities, including sport, music and other subject clubs are numerous and varied, and are appreciated and well supported by students. These, together with a very extensive range of local and international links and visits, make a major contribution to students' personal development and growth.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care is a strength of the school. Very strong partnerships with primary schools ensure that the care for students starts before they arrive at school. The school's work on promoting good attendance and reducing exclusions ensures that students are in school to enjoy their learning. Appropriate engagement with support agencies and the use of trained school staff ensures that the specific needs of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are met. The school liaises very well with community organisations and employers and this adds to the good careers guidance and work experience which helps to prepare students for their future economic well being. Arrangements for safeguarding students and the management of health and safety are secure.

Academic guidance is good. New arrangements for mentoring individual students trialled in a number of year groups since September have been successful and are being extended to the whole school through the assertive mentoring programme. This process provides a sharp focus for students on how they are progressing against their targets and provides an opportunity for early review.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good and the school has a good capacity to improve further. The headteacher has an extremely clear vision for school improvement and has been instrumental in moving the school forward. He is ably supported by a recently restructured senior leadership team who have a clear view of, and are enthusiastic about, their new roles. Senior leaders have already had a real impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning and in implementing effective systems for monitoring students' progress towards their challenging targets. Both of these were areas for improvement at the last inspection and have now been addressed successfully. School self-evaluation is improving and is now good. Teaching and learning are monitored more rigorously and consequently the school has an increasingly clear picture of its own strengths and weaknesses. The role of middle managers is developing and they are becoming more accountable for the work of their departments. However, the school recognises the need for all middle managers to play a full part in monitoring and evaluating the work of their areas

in order to identify accurately where there is scope for further improvement. Governance is good. Governors are very supportive of the school, know its strengths and weaknesses well and are very involved in its work. Finances are well managed 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	16-19
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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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	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	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	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	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

20 November 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Appleby Grammar School, Cumbria, CA16 6XU

Thank you for making us so welcome this week when we inspected your school and for speaking to us so openly, honestly and sensibly about your experience of school. Your behaviour, maturity and politeness were impressive.

The inspection found yours to be a good and improving school. Your results in tests and examinations are above average and you achieve well. This is because you are well taught and have excellent attitudes to learning. Throughout your school you have excellent relationships with teachers and with each other based on mutual trust and respect. The school is therefore a happy and secure place where it is obvious that you enjoy your education. The sixth form is good. The curriculum in the main school is excellent – there are courses suitable for everyone and you have a wonderful range of enrichment activities when not in lessons. Your school makes a significant contribution to the local and wider communities and you are right to be proud of it. The school is well led and managed so that things run very smoothly and there is ambition for success.

The school agrees with us that some things could be improved. More of you could gain the very highest A* and A grades, particularly in English and mathematics. We also suggest that all the teachers keep an even closer check on your progress to make sure you achieve as well as you can.

We are confident that you and your teachers will continue to work together for a better school and we wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

Judith Straw

Lead inspector