

Anthony Gell School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	112968
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	325730
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	David Simpson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	645
Sixth form	108
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Forrest
Headteacher	Mr David Baker
Date of previous school inspection	1 March 2006
School address	Wood Street Wirksworth Matlock Derbyshire DE4 4DX
Telephone number	01629 825577
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Age group	11–18
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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

Anthony Gell is a below average size secondary school. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The percentage of the school's students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above the national average and the proportion of students who have statements of special educational needs is well above average, the vast majority of whom have specific or moderate learning difficulties or behavioural, emotional and communication needs. Anthony Gell attained sports specialist school status in 2001.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Anthony Gell is a good and improving school with many distinctive features. Its ethos is strongly underpinned by a valuing of each individual student and catering to their specific needs. The school has introduced a series of incremental changes in well-judged order which has significantly improved the students' education. Teachers speak of the inspirational leadership of the headteacher which encourages staff to be enthusiastic about their contribution to young people's development and provides opportunities for them to contribute to school improvement. Parents value the way in which students and staff take pride in the school and they feel that it has an energy which arises from high aspirations for all. They particularly praise the supportive care, guidance and support that families receive. This aspect of the school's work is outstanding and many agencies and local groups are used very effectively to address students' individual needs. Students have a tremendous loyalty to their school and value the many and varied opportunities which contribute to their good personal development and academic progress. Specialist sports status has had a significant impact. It promotes students' achievement and their capacity to demonstrate leadership in their own school and many others as well as in the locality. The extensive opportunities for the community to use the school's sports facilities are impressive. The promotion of community cohesion is well planned and intelligently linked to specialist status.

The students' personal development is good. They behave responsibly around the school, and in lessons they readily cooperate with their teachers' expectations. However, at times they are too quick to seek answers from their teachers rather than working out individually or in groups how they might find solutions, which would enable them to continue their independent learning. The students' academic achievement has consistently improved over the last three years and is good. Standards have risen and are now above average. The school has thorough monitoring procedures to track how students are progressing and has an extensive range of intervention strategies to address individuals who appear to be underperforming. Nevertheless, the school is in the process of introducing a more rigorous policy on assessment, reporting and recording which is designed to promote greater consistency. At present, these aspects of the school's work are too variable although there are many instances in departments of good target setting and thorough marking.

Teaching and learning are good, although the quality of teaching is inconsistent across the school. Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their students well. The relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and students are strong and often lessons are marked out by a mix of good humour balanced with challenge. However, some lesson planning does not take sufficient account of individual needs, talents and abilities. This is consequentially reflected in the learning resources provided and the learning outcomes expected. The curriculum is good and has evolved taking account of students' needs and opportunities to extend vocational qualifications. Recent developments in subjects such as information and communication technology (ICT) demonstrate the school's ability to address and tackle weaknesses in previous provision so that students make greater progress through courses which are more relevant and engage their personal as well as academic development.

Leadership and management have been developed to improve the accountability of senior and middle managers. The re-introduction of a house system dividing the student population of Years 7 to 11 into four vertical groups has been very popular. It has promoted good relationships between year groups and has established clear roles for senior staff who are knowledgeable

about their students and work very effectively with external agencies. Accountability within subject departments is not yet as strong and the school recognises that monitoring needs to be further developed. The work of the governing body is outstanding. Governors have a thorough knowledge of the school and can confidently illustrate how they have challenged it to improve. Their scrutiny of the school's finances is thorough and has anticipated recent and future funding challenges very effectively to ensure that the school maintains a balanced budget whilst seeking to offer a diverse curriculum to meet the needs and requests of individual students. The school provides outstanding value for money. Its income per student is low and the accommodation it inhabits presents many challenges. Yet despite these issues, class sizes are relatively small and the extensive provision it offers to the local community is excellent. Given the actions undertaken since the last inspection, the school has a good capacity to improve and is rightly ambitious to become an outstanding school.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Students achieve well in the sixth form and attain above average standards. They greatly enjoy their sixth form experience despite the limited study facilities available. Their personal development is good and the majority make very valuable contributions to the whole school and wider community, for example through 'buddying' schemes where sixth formers support the learning of younger students, coach in a range of sports, and work with primary school pupils. Teaching is good. Relationships are very constructive and students respond with very positive attitudes. Nearly all students complete the courses they begin and most progress to higher education. The curriculum provides a good range of mainly AS and A-level courses and there is an excellent enrichment programme. The support and guidance students receive are outstanding and help them to make good progress and informed choices for the future. The sixth form is well led and day-to-day management is also good because the head of sixth form and other tutors are readily available to support students.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the overall quality of lessons drawing on best practice to address the different learning needs of students and to encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.
- Improve middle management's monitoring of marking, assessment and lessons so that they are more consistent throughout the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students join the school with below average standards of attainment. They make good progress and the percentage of students attaining five or more higher GCSE grades in 2008 was above the national average. Evidence during the inspection demonstrates that standards of attainment are above average. Boys attain less well than girls, although the progress both genders make during their time at the school is broadly equivalent. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress in line with their peers due to the effective support they receive. Students start in the sixth form with attainment that is equivalent to other students beginning A-level courses. They make good progress and last year the school attained its best ever A-level results. The school is meeting its specialist targets and the status is making a positive contribution to improving standards amongst identified groups of potential underachievers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students demonstrate good personal development. Their clear enjoyment of school is shown in their good and improving levels of attendance, their participation in extra-curricular activities and extensive involvement in the school and wider community. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good. Exclusion levels are low and falling in response to the positive mentoring that students receive and improved curriculum provision. Students have a good understanding of the need to maintain healthy lifestyles. They say they feel safe and acknowledge that staff will take swift action if they have any concerns. Incidents of bullying and racism are rare. Students are enthusiastic about the school council that meets regularly and engages them in addressing a wide range of issues. They have been concerned with improving the school including the rewards system, provision of water, and use of tutor time. Students' contribution to the community is outstanding with regular fund-raising for charity and activities supporting learning in local primary schools. A wide range of sporting initiatives, including coaching by students, is underpinned by leadership qualifications. Students are well equipped for their future lives as they develop skills associated with economic and environmental awareness as well as ICT.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The school has focused on developing the quality of teaching and learning through senior and middle managers monitoring lessons. As a consequence, much of the teaching is good. The strongest lessons are characterised by appropriate and stimulating activities which ensure that students are well motivated. There is good use of praise that enhances learning and students' confidence. In these good lessons, teachers plan effectively to meet all abilities and learning styles. They use a variety of strategies, such as group and paired work, which encourages greater independence, discussion and collaboration. The specialist sports status has greatly enhanced learning and especially that of boys through strategies which motivate them to have positive attitudes to their learning. This has improved achievement in the core subjects as well as raising their self-esteem. However, a few lessons do not always encourage students to be fully involved in their own learning as they are too teacher directed. In these lessons, there is a lack challenge because the teachers' questioning skills do not support students to think for themselves and work does not take sufficient account of students' differing needs and abilities. The school has recently implemented a new assessment policy and this has improved the tracking of students' progress and target setting. All students have targets for improvement and the majority know them. However, marking is inconsistent and does not always help students to make improvements in their work. Communication with parents has been strengthened and they are particularly appreciative of the new homework scheme.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

At Key Stage 3, the curriculum meets national requirements and is well planned to increasingly meet the needs of individual students. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum is increasingly flexible and responsive to students' interests and prior learning. There are opportunities for students to study a range of accredited courses, aided by links with the local college, which prepare

them well for adult life. Different pathways are continually being developed for those students who are less suited to academic courses through local businesses and farms; this is particularly impressive for a relatively small school. Enterprise skills are developed through strategies such as 'Raising your game' where students have designed and marketed games while simultaneously improving their basic skills. The participation of students in extra-curricular activities is good and students have opportunities to participate in a diverse range of activities, enhanced by specialist sports status, which meets their needs exceptionally well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Students receive excellent care, guidance and support, which promote equality of opportunity for all learners. Teachers and other staff demonstrate a high level of care and concern for their students. Procedures for child protection are securely in place.

Very good transition arrangements during Year 6 help students settle quickly in Year 7. Information and guidance to help students make good choices when they progress to the next stage of their education are extensive. The tutor groups and house system provide very good continuity and effective academic and personal support. Students speak in glowing terms about the dedication and approachability of their tutors. There is a very good range of programmes to target students at risk of underachievement including the 'breakthrough project' which is addressing the needs of boys and the 'nail that grade' programme to meet the needs of girls. Systems for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. Partnership work with external agencies is outstanding. Regular meetings with representatives from a wide range of social, health and children's services ensure that the needs of individual students are met very well. Links with parents and carers are also excellent. Parents feel they are well informed about their children's progress and that any concerns they have are listened to and acted upon promptly. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good. There is an effective team of teaching assistants. The school deals very well with students whose behaviour causes concern especially through 'The Centre' provision.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher has created a collective sense of purpose and accountability which is clearly focused on raising achievement and on students' personal development and well-being. The leadership team has been strengthened by being further extended and members of the team have clear roles and responsibilities. They support the headteacher well and are equally as enthusiastic and focused on improvement. Teaching and learning are now systematically monitored. However, the school recognises that the impact of middle managers needs to be more consistent in holding their departmental teams to account. Strategic planning is good and this results in a comprehensive school improvement plan which is reviewed regularly. Financial management is outstanding as resources are well managed and focused on areas prioritised for improvement. The school's specialist status is used very effectively to raise achievement and the quality of the curriculum. Partnership with others is outstanding and enhances both academic and pastoral support. Community cohesion is good. Students have opportunities to appreciate and understand their local and wider community, through the curriculum, assemblies and visits nationally and to other countries. Governors have outstanding knowledge of the school's overall performance and they use this knowledge very well to both

support and challenge the school through subject and performance discussions. They are fully involved in the strategic development of the school.

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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	

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	
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	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	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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

13 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Anthony Gell School, Wirksworth, DE4 4DX

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful during our inspection of your school. We were very impressed by your strong commitment to your school and the many opportunities you have as a result of the generous help of the adults who work at Anthony Gell. Your views and those of your parents have helped to inform our judgements about your school.

Specialist sports status has made a big difference to your school and provides you with many chances to be leaders in the school and locally. We could see that you enjoyed your lessons and responded well when you were challenged to show your learning. The school has been very effective in identifying new courses which best meet your needs and interests and this is making you even more motivated about your studies. Anthony Gell also works in an exemplary way with a wide range of agencies to ensure that your welfare is thoroughly and consistently addressed.

To improve even more, we would like your lessons to be consistently challenging so that you have more opportunities to show how well you can learn together and in groups. Also, we would like to see the school continue to build upon its work of monitoring how you're getting on in your lessons and how well your work is marked.

Thank you again for making us feel so welcome and the team wish you every success in the future.

Yours faithfully

David Simpson

Her Majesty's Inspector