

Albany Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119768
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	327125
Inspection dates	25–26 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Ruth James 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)	482
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Brown
Headteacher	Mr Don Higgs
Date of previous school inspection	5 July 2006
School address	Bolton Road Chorley Lancashire PR7 3AY
Telephone number	01257 244020
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This small specialist science college serves the town of Chorley and students are drawn from areas that include a range of socio-economic circumstances. There are relatively few students from the most affluent areas and about one third come from significantly disadvantaged backgrounds. The proportion of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is higher than in most other schools, as is the proportion of students who have a statement of special educational need. Below average proportions of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds, or have a first language other than English. The school is a full core extended school and a Green Flag Eco School. It also has healthy schools status, and it became a Fair Trade School in July 2008.

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 school which provides outstanding care, guidance and support for its students. Most students enjoy school and parents are pleased with the quality of education. Staff know the students very well. As one parent commented, 'They really do have the child's education and well being at the top of their agenda.' A strong school ethos effectively encourages positive attitudes to learning. Standards have improved and students make good progress so that, although they arrive at the school with below average standards, they leave with broadly average standards. However, the proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A*–C including English and mathematics remains below average.

Personal development is good. Students are relaxed and friendly with each other and incidents of bullying are few. Students' attitudes to their work and the respect shown towards staff and visitors are also good. Behaviour observed in lessons and around school was very good, but exclusions are high. This is partly related to the school's 'zero tolerance' approach to all forms of disruptive and anti-social behaviour, including smoking. Attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good. The best lessons are characterised by a variety of activities which teachers manage at a good pace so that students' interest is engaged throughout and good progress is made. The curriculum is good and the range of courses at Key Stage 4 gives students a good choice of both academic and vocational options. Many students participate in the good range of extra-curricular activities and extended services. Pastoral care is excellent. The support for vulnerable students is exemplary. The school has worked very successfully to reduce the number of persistent absentees. The academic guidance system provides comprehensive data about each student's progress in each subject and students and parents are well informed about progress. Appropriate interventions are put in place for underachievers.

Leadership and management have been successful in shaping improvements which have brought about improved outcomes for students. The headteacher provides calm, reflective and authoritative leadership, setting the direction and empowering his staff to move the school forward to raise achievement. He is ably supported by two skilled and effective deputy headteachers. The middle managers, including the strategic leadership group, also make significant contributions. Improvements since the last inspection clearly demonstrate that the capacity to improve is good. Inspectors agreed with most, but not all, of the grades the school awarded itself in its self evaluation. Some good use of data has increased managers' insight into how the school and individual subjects are performing, but the wealth of assessment data available is not yet used in all lesson planning to ensure that work is closely matched to individual abilities. The majority of targets were met in 2008. Specialist status has been used well to improve teaching and learning and so to raise standards. Curriculum developments in science ensure that students are offered appropriate science courses and students achieve very well in this subject. There are effective science links with local primary schools. Governance is good. Governors are committed and provide appropriate support and challenge. Although the school's outcomes are good, the budget position of the school means that value for money is satisfactory.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the proportion of students gaining five or more A*–C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics.

- Further develop teaching and learning to ensure that all lessons provide work that is closely matched to the needs of the individuals.
- Continue to implement and develop strategies to further improve attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards have risen in recent years, largely as a result of curriculum developments which ensure that students are offered courses in which they can achieve well. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE grades A*–C or equivalent rose significantly in 2008, when it was very close to the national average. However, while A*–C pass rates are above average for many subjects they are lower for English language and mathematics. The proportion of students achieving five or more GCSE grades A*–C including English and mathematics has not improved, and remains significantly below the national average. Results for vocational courses are mainly good. A very high proportion of students gained five or more GCSE grades A*–G, which represents a substantial improvement over the previous year. Girls reach higher standards of attainment than boys, but data which take account of prior attainment and contextual factors show that overall boys make better progress than girls. Students do particularly well in the school's specialist subject of science as a result of the introduction of the first certificate course, so that the proportion of students gaining the equivalent of two GCSEs grade A*–C in science, at 86% in 2008, is well above the national average. Provisional data for 2008 show that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved and they are now broadly average. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress. The school met most of its targets in 2008, including most specialist status targets, but it fell short of meeting the GCSE mathematics' target.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students say they feel safe and valued as individuals. They enjoy coming to school and work well together. Bullying is rare and when it does occur it is dealt with swiftly and effectively. The strong emphasis the school places on personal responsibility and high standards of behaviour is taken up well by most students. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good because of the regular opportunities provided for reflection in personal, social and health education lessons and in assemblies. The very large majority of students have a well developed sense of right and wrong and relate well to each other. The school sets high standards for behaviour and the behaviour observed in lessons and around school was good. However, exclusions, both fixed term and permanent, are high. Students are well-informed about the importance of healthy lifestyles. Many eat healthily in the school canteen and take many opportunities for exercise. The school is a calm and harmonious environment and students insist that the school has their welfare at its heart. Attendance is satisfactory and the school works hard to raise students' and parents' awareness of the positive impact good attendance has on progress. Students willingly take on responsibilities within the school and are active within the local community, for example as voluntary workers in day care centres and local junior schools. Because students are able to access a range of activities which raise their awareness both of the world of work and their social accountability, they are well prepared for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. A whole school approach to improving teaching and learning has contributed to rising standards. Most lessons ensure progression in learning through clear links to previous and future work. The careful explanation of learning objectives, often enhanced by visual illustration, means that students are aware of what is expected. When good planning is combined with energetic and enthusiastic teaching students make good progress. Homework is generally well used to reinforce and extend learning. Good relationships, positive attitudes and high standards of behaviour create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Students enjoy the many opportunities for discussion, group work and the assessment of their own and others' work. Where teaching is less effective, lessons lack pace and purpose, the work is less demanding and there are fewer opportunities for students to work independently. Small group sizes and ability setting mean that teachers are usually able to pitch work appropriately. There is insufficient use of the wealth of reliable assessment data available to plan tasks and activities more closely to the needs of individual students.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the range of students' needs. Key Stage 4 students appreciate the opportunity to choose their preferred combination of courses matched to their capabilities and aspirations. Those preferring vocational subjects can choose courses ranging from hairdressing to motor vehicle maintenance, some of which are provided through the local 14–19 consortium. All courses accredit students' achievement, so very few leave without a qualification. Developments in the school's specialist subject of science mean that students at Key Stage 4 can study either the three separate sciences of physics, chemistry and biology or a first certificate applied science course. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been enhanced by the introduction of a Learning To Learn course to develop those skills which can be used to enhance learning across the curriculum. Students in Year 9 have the opportunity to gain a foundation certificate in French. Students are very positive about the range and quality of extra-curricular activities, particularly for sport, which make a great contribution to their enjoyment and personal development. The arrangements for teaching and assessing citizenship through the daily form tutor period and occasional focus days lack rigour.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, support and guidance are an outstanding strength of the school. Parents recognise this and many express their satisfaction with the actions the school takes to look after their daughters and sons. Very positive relationships between adults and students exist throughout the school. Adults know the students very well. The school underpins this personal knowledge with an excellent system for following up interventions made to support students well being. A strong atmosphere of mutual trust and respect has been created. Support is directed quickly and sensitively to where it is needed. Links with outside professional and other agencies are used well to back up the work of the school. Students say teachers 'listen to what we say', adding, 'they are trying to get a better future for us'. This helps to build confidence, encourages openness and is an important factor in creating the calm and harmonious environment within

the school. The school takes its responsibilities for safeguarding students very seriously. The current government requirements are met. Work to improve attendance has significantly reduced the number of persistent absentees and raised overall attendance levels. The school has an accurate and reliable system for measuring and checking on the progress students are making academically. Students know the levels at which they are working and are involved with setting targets for their own improvement. This information is beginning to be used to good effect in many areas of the school, although the full impact of this work has yet to be seen in the standards students reach.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good at all levels. There is a commitment to continuous improvement and managers are successfully focused on promoting students' academic progress and personal development. Standards are rising and attendance is improving. This is an inclusive school which makes every effort to ensure that all students have the same opportunities to benefit from every aspect of provision. Improvement has been founded on rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance which has guided appropriate and successful action. One example of this focused approach is the successful strategies to tackle the lower achievement of some less able boys and as a result this group made particularly good progress in 2008. The dedication and commitment to teamwork of the whole staff is an important factor in the improvements. Senior leaders and middle managers are well trained and empowered to carry out their responsibilities and they recognise that they will be held to account for the performance of their areas.

The work of the strategic leadership team and the school improvement group has been instrumental in the establishment of comprehensive systems for self evaluation and review at all levels. A sophisticated system for monitoring and tracking student progress provides reliable data for the analysis of performance. Consequently the school improvement plan accurately identifies the key areas for improvement and suggests appropriate actions for delivery, although success criteria are not always well defined. Links to financial planning are not explicit and the school's budget position means that value for money is satisfactory. A well planned and co-ordinated range of strategies has been put in place to engage with the local community. Productive links with faith, cultural and educational centres have been established to develop students' contextual awareness. Extended school provision has opened up the school to a diversity of community groups. Work related to the Eco School award and Fair Trade School status are enabling the school to reach out to global communities. All actions are reviewed and evaluated. Governors are very supportive but prepared to challenge the school. There is no sense of complacency. The school acknowledges that there is more to do to achieve even better outcomes and has a good capacity to improve further.

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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	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?	1

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?	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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**

Dear Students

Inspection of Albany Science College, Lancashire, PR7 3AY

Thank you for all the help that you gave us when we visited your school. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing the work that you were doing. You told us that you enjoy school and many of you participate in the wide range of extracurricular activities offered, especially sports. We also looked at questionnaires completed by your parents. Most of them are very positive about the school.

We found that Albany Science College is a good school and that the care, guidance and support it provides are outstanding. We observed that you have positive attitudes to school and your behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons to include a variety of activities which help you to make good progress. Results have improved and in 2008 more students left with five higher GCSE grades than in previous years.

The school cares for you extremely well and you told us that bullying is rare and you feel safe. The arrangements for setting targets for you and for checking up on your progress towards these are excellent. The school provides a good range of courses and subjects for all of you, including a good choice of vocational subjects. Specialist status has led to improvements, such as a better choice of science courses at Key Stage 4. The college is well run by the headteacher, senior staff and governors.

Although yours is a good school we found that there are some things that could be even better. We have asked your headteacher and the staff to look at ways to:

- ensure that more of you get five higher GCSE grades including English and mathematics
- make sure that all lessons include work at a suitable level for each one of you
- improve attendance so that no-one misses vital aspects of their education.

You can help in this by attending regularly and continuing to work hard in all your lessons. This will help you to get the best qualifications you can.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Ruth James

Her Majesty's Inspector