

The Armthorpe School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106782
Local Authority	Doncaster
Inspection number	336740
Inspection dates	23–24 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Sara Morrissey HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	758
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	123
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs S Shearman
Headteacher	Mr Andy Cope
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 32 part lessons; and held meetings with the chair of governors, staff and groups of students, including post-16 students. They observed the school's work and documentation was scrutinised, including assessment information that tracks students' attainment and progress, records of checks made by senior and middle leaders to measure the impact of actions taken to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and additional evidence to demonstrate how the school supports students who may be vulnerable. Inspectors also examined evaluations undertaken by the school to ensure that it meets statutory requirements with regard to safeguarding. In addition, 115 questionnaires returned by parents and carers were scrutinised along with questionnaires returned by a representative sample of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- attainment in English and mathematics to establish the effectiveness of leadership and management in implementing strategies to raise achievement and standards
- progress in lessons to determine how effectively teaching is informed by assessment information so that learning activities meet the needs of all students
- the impact of established systems of guidance and support on improving outcomes for students with specific learning needs, including those who are new to the country
- the impact of the curriculum at all key stages on developing key skills and preparing students for the next steps in their education
- the extent to which the school has engaged students and parents in its drive to secure further improvement.

Information about the school

The Armthorpe School is smaller than average. It serves the former mining community of Armthorpe to the east of Doncaster. The number of students eligible for free school meals is broadly similar to that of other schools. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds, although the school accepts an increasing number of students who are new to the country, mainly from Eastern Europe. The number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the proportion who have a statement of special educational needs are broadly in line with the national average. The sixth form is smaller than average and provision is offered jointly with a nearby sixth form and other partners. The school has had specialist status in the arts and sport since September 2007. The current headteacher took up post in September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

Main findings

A strong community spirit and determination to improve the life chances of all students underpins the ethos of The Armthorpe School. Students make satisfactory progress in their learning to attain standards that are broadly average. School leaders have been successful in raising attainment against most key indicators and in closing the gaps in performance between different groups of students since the last inspection. This is partly as a result of effective strategies used with targeted groups of students to accelerate their progress or overcome barriers to learning. Provisional results from tests and examinations taken by students in summer 2009 indicate further improvement in both Key Stages 3 and 4. For example, challenging targets were met by Year 9 students in English, mathematics and science. However, although there has been some improvement in results in English language, the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics remains below the national average.

Students are proud of their school and are welcoming and courteous to visitors. They generally get on well together within the inclusive school community. Effective care, guidance and support provided for students who are vulnerable or who have special educational needs and/or disabilities enables them to make good progress. The school is particularly successful at re-engaging students in learning so that the number leaving school who are not in education, employment or training is very low.

While there are examples of good and outstanding practice, the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. This is because teaching styles do not always take into account the full range of individual needs, and opportunities are missed for students to participate actively in lessons or take responsibility for their learning. The curriculum meets the needs of students in Key Stages 3 and 4 and is enriched by activities that are delivered through the subject specialism, for example the 'Creative Partnerships' initiative. However, in the sixth form, provision has not been adapted quickly enough to cater for the full range of abilities and needs of students, particularly in Year 12. Consequently, the overall effectiveness of the sixth form is inadequate. School leaders have already identified key areas for improvement and drafted an action plan to tackle weaknesses and build further on the existing strengths in the care and support provided for sixth form students.

Systems to monitor the work of the school are well established although success criteria, used to measure the impact of actions taken, are not always focused sharply enough on the expected outcomes for students. This affects the consistency with which some middle leaders undertake their role in checking the quality of provision in their areas and its impact on raising attainment. The new headteacher has identified the school's

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strengths and weaknesses speedily and accurately. His analysis of the most recent examination results, undertaken with senior and subject leaders, has already provided a clear agenda from which to drive further improvement. Effective teamwork by different groups of staff, to raise attainment and promote students' personal development, reflects the school's satisfactory capacity to improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and achievement, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
 - increasing the effectiveness of evaluation processes by focusing more precisely on the outcomes for students
 - ensuring that agreed procedures for checking progress towards the school's key priorities are consistently applied by leaders and managers at all levels
- Improve the quality of students' learning and progress by:
 - using assessment information to match activities more precisely to students' individual needs
 - developing a range of teaching styles that increase students' active participation and independence in their learning
- Improve the post-16 curriculum so that it meets the full range of needs of students and increases success rates in their chosen courses.
- About 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Students' progress in lessons is satisfactory overall and their pace of progress accelerates rapidly when they are actively involved in their learning. However, assessment information is not used routinely by all teachers to plan activities that match the needs of all students and enable them to gain independence as learners. Consequently, students are not always sufficiently challenged to achieve as well as they might. Performance against key indicators has improved since the last inspection and gaps in performance between different groups have closed due to effective targeted support. Scrutiny of assessment information and students' current work confirm that attainment is broadly in line with the national average. This reflects satisfactory achievement, overall, relative to students' starting points.

The school has used a range of strategies to raise attainment in English and mathematics with some success, particularly at Key Stage 3. However, provisional results for 2009 indicate that the proportion of students attaining five good GCSE passes including English and mathematics is below average. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those who speak English as an additional language, are supported effectively and make good progress as a result.

Students generally feel safe and their behaviour is satisfactory overall. Many students

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act as good role models for their peers, but there are instances where off-task behaviour during lessons detracts from learning and there is occasional over-boisterous behaviour on school corridors. A strong code of mutual respect between students and adults is embedded in the school. Students speak warmly about the support they receive from teachers and other adults and their questionnaire responses reflect the high esteem in which they hold senior staff in the school. Consistently and rigorously applied strategies have improved rates of attendance, which are satisfactory and improving. Good care and support ensure that students who are vulnerable or at risk of becoming disengaged from learning remain included in the school community. Individualised programmes support their personal and academic development well.

The curriculum promotes students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development appropriately. Students learn how to lead healthy lifestyles, although inspectors agree with the views of students and parents that this aspect could be improved. Students are able to make an active contribution to the school and wider community, for example through fundraising activities, but those interviewed would welcome more opportunities to contribute to the school's decision-making processes. Students are generally well prepared for their future economic well-being, although opportunities are missed to increase their independence and self-confidence as learners in preparation for their next steps in education.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

3

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching is satisfactory and enables students to make the progress expected of them as they move through the school. However, examples of good and outstanding practice observed during the inspection illustrate the high levels of enjoyment that students experience when they are actively engaged in their learning and are challenged to 'aim high'. Where teaching is most effective, learning objectives are clearly communicated and understood, and students make brisk progress because activities are matched well to their individual needs. Good subject knowledge and effective questioning challenges students to think more deeply about what they are learning. However, where teaching is satisfactory a number of common features limit students' learning and prevent good progress. For example, teachers dominate for too much of the lesson and focus more on delivering knowledge than on enabling students to be active participants in their learning or to reflect on what they have learnt. Where expectations are too low, students lose interest and occasionally this leads to deterioration in behaviour.

The curriculum is broadly balanced and enriched by the experiences that arise from the subject specialisms in the arts and sports. For example, a number of older students have been trained as sports leaders in the school. Students' personal development is supported appropriately by a programme of personal, social and health education. Adequate use is made of modern technologies, including information and communication technology (ICT), but their contribution to the curriculum is constrained by the limitations of the outdated school buildings. Strengths exist in the programme for vulnerable students in Key Stage 3 and leaders have recently embarked on a period of consultation in order to develop a more relevant skills-based curriculum for all students in Years 7 to 9. Adaptations to the curriculum at Key Stage 4, in collaboration with other providers, enable programmes of study to be personalised to meet a broad range of learning needs. The school has good arrangements for the transition of students from one stage of learning to the next, although the 14 to 19 programme of study does not currently meet the needs of all students.

The quality of care, guidance and support is a strength of the school and is valued highly by a number of parents and carers who responded to the questionnaire. Staff know and understand the needs of individual students well. Effective teamwork, in partnership with external agencies, ensures that students are well supported and cared for. A sample of case studies reviewed during the inspection provided clear illustration of the way in which adults 'go the extra mile' to support vulnerable students.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching

Taking into account:

The use of assessment to support learning

3

3

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The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has communicated a clear vision for the school that underlines the strong focus on improving outcomes for every student as an individual. Satisfactory leadership of the school's specialism is extending opportunities through the curriculum for students to grow in confidence as learners. Leaders and managers at all levels share a strong commitment to securing sustained school improvement. Senior and middle leaders use routinely the well-established systems to check the quality of teaching and progress towards key priorities identified in the school improvement plan. However, evaluations by middle leaders do not always focus sharply enough on the impact of actions taken to improve outcomes for students. This is partly because detailed and accurate assessment information is not always presented in a way that is easy to interpret. Since his appointment, the headteacher has been quick to identify priorities for action. For example, a rigorous analysis of GCSE results in mathematics and the performance of students in Year 12 have already resulted in action plans being formulated to secure rapid improvement.

The school's inclusive approach is supported well by the effective use of partnerships with external agencies and neighbouring primary and secondary schools. Leaders demonstrate a strong commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination and can demonstrate the impact of targeted actions on improving outcomes for specific groups of students. Suitable steps have been taken to promote community cohesion based on a secure understanding of the school's religious, ethnic and socio-economic context. The school is a strongly cohesive community and has begun to extend its links within the wider local community. Leaders have identified that links with other communities that reflect the multicultural society in which they live are less well developed and this has informed their improvement planning.

The governing body fulfils its statutory duties appropriately. Governors are kept well informed about the school's work by senior leaders and are able to fulfil their role as a 'critical friend'. However, the chair of governors recognises the need to strengthen links further between governors and different subject areas to increase their understanding of the work of the school. All safeguarding procedures meet requirements and are reviewed as part of a rolling programme of checks made by the governing body. Governors make regular checks to ensure the safety and security of the school site; resources are deployed suitably to manage the challenges presented by outdated accommodation. Staff and governors seek to increase the involvement of parents, carers and students in driving improvement by responding more directly to the outcomes of regular surveys that gather their views.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is inadequate because leaders have been too slow to respond to the changing needs of students entering post-16 education. Although some students are successful in their chosen pathways, including vocational courses and opportunities arising from joint provision, too many do not attain the standards that might have been expected of them. This is because the curriculum has not been adapted sufficiently to suit all students' capabilities. In addition, the tracking of students' progress through Year 12 has not identified early enough the potential underachievement of students across different subjects. Consequently, the success rate of students embarking on courses in Year 12 is too low. Progress is better and satisfactory overall for the small number of students who continue with A-level courses in Year 13, as a result of satisfactory teaching.

Although there are weaknesses in provision, there are also significant strengths in the quality of care provided for all students. The sixth form acts as a haven for students who are vulnerable or who have not yet developed the necessary skills for the future. They are well supported and nurtured so that almost all are able to embark on training or employment when they leave the school. Those interviewed spoke very highly of the support they receive and are very proud to take on responsibilities to support students lower down the school, for example as mentors or sports leaders. During the inspection, students were also actively involved in plans for a whole-school coffee morning to raise funds for charity.

Leaders acknowledge that the declining trends in performance over the last three years require drastic action. With the support of the new headteacher they have already begun to draft an action plan to tackle key areas for improvement and are highly

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committed to improving outcomes for all students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	4
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	4
The quality of provision in the sixth form	4
Leadership and management of the sixth form	4

Views of parents and carers

Inspectors received questionnaire responses from approximately 15% of parents and carers. Analysis of responses indicates that most are happy with their children's experience at school and that their children are kept safe and well cared for at school. A number of those who responded commented favourably about the individualised support offered to their children when it was needed. Parents and carers also generally feel well informed by the school about their children's progress. Few parents and carers made negative comments. The main concerns of those who did were about the management of students' behaviour and the progress that their children were making in school. Inspectors are satisfied that the school's provision ensures that students make satisfactory progress and that strategies to manage behaviour are securely in place.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Armthorpe School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 115 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 758 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	43	25	110	65	13	8	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	44	26	111	66	11	7	2	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	44	26	105	63	11	7	4	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	31	85	51	24	14	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	37	22	107	64	17	10	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	19	97	60	30	18	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	13	100	66	26	17	2	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	46	29	86	54	11	7	4	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	25	101	62	16	10	2	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	28	18	95	59	23	14	7	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	15	100	67	11	7	4	3
The school is led and managed effectively	34	22	102	66	6	4	2	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	32	98	60	9	6	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us during the recent inspection at your school. We appreciated the time we were able to spend talking to many of you about your work and general life at your school. Thank you also to those of you who completed questionnaires to tell us your views. You told us that you value the support you get from adults to help you improve your work. We agree with you that the staff care for you well and that this helps create a community where you feel safe and generally get on well together. Inspectors found that you make satisfactory progress, overall, as a result of the teaching you receive. Those of you who responded to the questionnaires were generally positive about how much you learn, although a number of you felt you would like to be able to share your views and ideas more with your teachers.

Senior staff and other school leaders have made some important improvements since the school was last inspected. However, we have asked them to focus on a number of things that could be improved further. In particular, we have asked the school to:

- improve results, especially in English and mathematics, by making sure that all checks are in place to enable you to make good progress
- ensure that you are involved more actively in lessons and experience a range of learning activities that challenge you to make even better progress
- improve the post-16 curriculum so that all students can follow courses that match both their needs and interests.

You have an important part to play by maintaining high standards of behaviour, attending school regularly and doing your best in all aspects of your work.

With all good wishes for the future.

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