

Alnwick the Dukes Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122353
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340133
Inspection dates	26–27 May 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Lowery HMI

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

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	236
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Ian Walker
Headteacher	Mrs Dawn Morton
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two additional inspectors. They visited 13 lessons and 12 teachers were seen; meetings were held with groups of students, governors, and staff. They observed the school's work including reviewing policy documents, records of meetings, schemes of work and samples of students' work. One inspector focused on arrangements to safeguard students. The inspection took into account questionnaire responses from students, staff and from 115 parents and carers.

- any difference in the progress made by groups or classes
- if expectations and targets are high enough to raise attainment
- whether teaching and the curriculum sufficiently focuses on raising attainment amongst boys, for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and in mathematics
- the impact of the new federation.

Information about the school

This is a smaller than average size school which draws its students from the market town of Alnwick and the surrounding villages. Almost all students are of White British heritage. The number of students known to be entitled to a free school meal and those with special educational needs and /or disability are broadly average, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The school operates as part of the Aln Community of Schools, a local hard federation led by a single governing body. It has specialist status for music in partnership with the Duchess's Community High School. The headteacher was away from the school on a professional development activity during the period of the inspection.

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

This is a well organised, calm and purposeful school. Students are cheerful and polite; the vast majority feel safe and enjoy their education. Students leave the school attaining standards that are broadly in line with the national average. Attainment continues to be similar to that found at the last inspection. Students are well cared for; the support for more vulnerable students is particularly good, enabling those with special educational needs and/or disabilities to achieve well. Inspectors found that whilst progress overall is satisfactory, for a significant minority of students writing and numeracy skills remain underdeveloped at the end of Year 8. The headteacher and her staff are rightly focusing on raising levels of achievement in English and Mathematics. Students have a secure understanding of the foundation subjects and receive good support in developing an appreciation of enterprise, teamwork and information communication technology (ICT) skills. As a result students are well prepared for their future economic well-being. They have a good understanding of what is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Attendance is above average.

Changes in staffing and the prolonged use of temporary staff have resulted in some classes experiencing considerable variations in teaching; this has slowed the progress made by a small minority of students. The new headteacher together with the governors have actively sought to resolve these issues and the school will be fully staffed for the new term. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Teachers are making increasingly effective use of assessment information to target individual support for the most vulnerable and for those with weaker literacy and numeracy skills. Whilst the majority of the teaching is at least good, in a minority of lessons the pace is too slow and work is insufficiently matched to the needs and interests of learners. Here students are less engaged in their learning and on occasions a few misbehave.

The needs of individuals and groups of students are well supported by a good curriculum; it is modified to include individual support for those with special education needs and/or disabilities. The music specialism is a strength; it is particularly effective in engaging and motivating boys. The school has established a broad range of partnerships which are used to good effect to enrich the curriculum. Students receive good care, guidance and support with effective systems to assist them during transition into and from the school. There is a clear commitment to equalities, with policies and monitoring systems in place. Following an analysis of participation rates in extra-curricular activities the school arranged additional clubs designed to better meet the interests of groups of girls.

The headteacher and her senior team have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for future development. Whilst school development planning

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prioritises improving levels of achievement, the plans are insufficiently specific and lack rigorous evaluation. Overall there is a satisfactory capacity to maintain and sustain improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and levels of achievement in English and mathematics through
 - developing students' extended writing skills
 - raising students and staff expectations on what can be achieved
 - increasing opportunities for all students to undertake investigative work in lessons by embedding the use of personal learning and thinking skills and mathematics to solve real-life problems.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that it is consistently good or better by
 - ensuring that all lessons are vibrant, interesting and engage students in their learning
 - modelling examples of the school's best practice in teaching
 - increasing the capacity of senior staff to monitor, observe and make judgements on lessons.
- Improve the systems for whole school planning and self-review by
 - ensuring targets for development are explicit and measurable
 - embedding evaluation into all new initiatives
 - rigorously monitoring the impact of all aspects of the school's work.
- 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 enter the school with broadly average standards, although a significant minority have below average skills in literacy and numeracy. These weaknesses are being increasingly addressed and overall attainment at the end of Year 8 is now broadly average. This represents satisfactory progress. In the lessons observed, the quality of learning varied. Speaking skills are relatively strong, but writing skills, spelling and grammar, are insufficiently developed. An analysis of students' work shows that too few are confident to produce extended pieces of writing or to apply their numeracy skills in cross-curricular work. Students demonstrate good ICT skills, with older students involved in digital manipulation and web design. Students enjoy school and their achievement is satisfactory.

Most outcomes relating to students' personal development and well-being are good. Students report they feel safe and demonstrate a clear understanding of safe use of

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new technologies. Students have a serious approach to contributing to the school community; they are keen to take on responsibility and represent their views through an active school council. Their spiritual development is strong and they demonstrate good moral attitudes and social skills. Students behave well around the school, but attitudes to, and engagement with, learning vary, in particular in classes where teaching is less effective. The music specialism offers considerable opportunity for students to perform in the local community and underpins their good cultural awareness. Over half of the students across both key stages are active members of the school choir.

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	2
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The school places considerable emphasis on ensuring it provides individual students with effective care, guidance and support. Secure systems have been established to track progress and these ensure vulnerable students receive carefully targeted support. Good links have been established with external agencies to provide students and their parents and carers additional specialist help. One parent commented her child had 'received all the help possible' and could now 'confidently move on to the high school.'

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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Careful thought has been given to developing the curriculum. Staff use their good subject knowledge to ensure the effective delivery of the foundation curriculum. However, the school recognises the need to strengthen the provision for modern foreign languages. The social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme is increasing students' personal and social maturity. The school has rightly developed a strong tradition for its music curriculum. Opportunities here have strengthened students' confidence and performance skills.

Inspectors found that the quality of teaching varied. Where teaching is good lessons are conducted with pace; expectations are high and students receive challenging work; they are given regular feedback on their performance and how to improve. In one particularly effective lesson younger students were enthusiastically learning how to conduct a debate, test each other arguments and appreciate how others could hold different views to their own. Where teaching is less effective planning is weak and as a result the lesson is not sufficiently matched to the needs of individuals or groups. Here students are too frequently only passive learners with poor concentration. Here there are insufficient opportunities for students to research and develop independent learning and collaborative working skills. As a result their engagement in their learning dips and progress slows.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The senior team work effectively together and share an ambition to drive up standards and raise attainment. However, development planning lacks clarity, targets are insufficiently explicit and the impact of initiatives are not routinely evaluated. Systems to monitor teaching have been established but inspectors found that the analysis of the quality of lessons to be over generous. Instances of inadequate teaching have been addressed and there is evidence that a well planned training programme has improved the quality of assessment, marking and the management of behaviour. The newly federated governing body is effective in building partnerships and focusing on longer term planning. Appropriate arrangements to safeguard students are in place, all staff have received child protection training and systems to assess risk are consistently used. There is regular communication between home and the school; parent meetings are well attend and complemented by additional information evenings. Senior staff place an appropriate emphasis on strengthening community cohesion. The development of new

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international links, including with China, offers the opportunity to broaden students' appreciation of different cultures. However, this work has yet to impact on students' attitudes and understanding. Senior leaders and governors are effective in the promotion of equality and the tackling of discrimination. The school is financially well managed; careful thought is given to improving the suitability of the old buildings. The school offers satisfactory value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
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

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire were positive about the education provided and felt that their children enjoyed school. This was also reflected in the generally positive written comments made by parents and carers. A few expressed concern about levels of staff absence. Inspectors recognised the impact of staffing changes and noted the school had sought to address this problem; it is now fully staffed for September 2010. A very small minority of parents expressed concern about arrangements for 'dropping off' students at the front gate and possible risks to their children's safety. Inspectors observed the front of school in the morning and whilst they did not directly identify a specific risk to students, they did raise parental concerns with the local authority.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alnwick the Dukes Middle 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 133 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 236 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	48	36	77	58	6	5	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	62	47	65	49	5	4	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	47	35	74	56	8	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	37	28	81	61	13	10	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	36	27	88	66	4	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	34	26	76	57	17	13	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	39	29	85	64	4	3	2	2
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)	41	31	78	59	5	4	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	31	23	84	63	14	11	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	26	67	50	19	14	5	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	21	79	59	12	9	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	37	28	77	58	13	10	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	34	78	59	8	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupil's 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.



Dear Students

Thank you for welcoming us to your school, taking the time to show us your work and talk to us during our recent inspection. We judged your school to be providing you with a satisfactory education. You told us through your questionnaires and in discussions how you feel safe in school and welcome the support and care received from staff.

Inspectors agreed with these judgements. Your curriculum offers you a good range of opportunities and in particular your school's music specialism which gives the chance to perform both within the school and to the public in the local area. Your attendance is good. You behave well around school, but a small minority do occasionally disrupt classes, particularly when temporary teachers are taking lessons or when the pace of lessons is too slow. Overall you are making satisfactory progress in your studies.

However, it is important you continue to improve your literacy, especially in writing, and your numeracy skills.

Your staff agree with us that there are a number of areas that need to continue to improve, including:

- raising attainment and levels of achievement in English and mathematics.
- ensuring the quality of teaching and learning are consistently good or better
- developing planning and systems to review how well the school is doing.

You have a critical role in helping to develop your school. It is important you all seek to cooperate with your teachers, work hard in all your lessons and place a real priority on improving your writing skills.

Good luck with your future studies.

Yours sincerely,

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