

Alder Community High School

Mottram Old Road, Gee Cross, Hyde, Cheshire, SK14 5NJ

Inspection dates 4–5 October 2012

| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Satisfactory | 3 |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| | This inspection: | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Achievement of pupils | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Quality of teaching | | Requires improvement | 3 |
| Behaviour and safety of pupils | | Good | 2 |
| Leadership and management | | Good | 2 |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Over time too few students have made better than expected progress, especially in English, in comparison to national figures.
- Although it is improving rapidly, the quality of teaching over time has not been strong enough to drive students' learning and progress at a fast pace.
- Although improving rapidly, low attendance for some students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, has acted as a barrier to achievement over time.
- Improvement has not always been rapid enough, although new leadership and management are bringing about a 'sea change' in the school's effectiveness by giving a much sharper and effective focus on improvement.

The school has the following strengths

- Students' achievement, especially in English, is improving rapidly and securely. In 2012, the proportion of students making and exceeding expected rates of progress compares favourably to national figures.
- The quality of teaching has improved significantly because leaders and managers are more rigorous in their monitoring and in tackling weaker teaching. As a result, the majority of teaching is now at least good or better.
- Students feel safe in school and are cared for well. They behave well. Attendance levels are rising rapidly and are now above average. The level of persistent absence is falling rapidly and securely.
- Leaders and managers, including the governing body, have a sharp and effective focus on improvement. As a result, achievement and the quality of teaching are improving rapidly and securely. The school has strong capacity for further improvement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 36 lessons, including two joint observations with senior school leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, members of staff, a group of support staff, students and a representative of the local authority.
- The views of 49 parents on the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were taken into account, as well as the views expressed in response to the school's parental surveys.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and examined a range of documentation including the school's records of students' current progress, monitoring and evaluation documentation, records relating to behaviour and attendance and documents relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Stephen Wall, Lead inspector | Additional inspector |
| Nell Banfield | Additional inspector |
| Pamela Hemphill | Additional inspector |
| Andrew Henderson | Additional inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

- Alder Community High School is a smaller than average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is broadly in line with the national average.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is below average. However, the proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school provides dedicated in-class support for three visually impaired students.
- A few Key Stage 4 students attend a local college of further education for vocational education on a part-time basis.
- The school has a specialism in mathematics and computing.
- Since the previous inspection, there have been significant changes to the senior management of the school, including the appointment of a new headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to at least good and increase the proportion of teaching that is outstanding in order to raise students' achievement by:
 - ensuring that activities are always closely matched to the needs and abilities of all groups of learners
 - making sure the level of challenge and expectation in lessons is consistently high
 - ensuring progress data is always used effectively by teachers to make sure students make at least the progress expected of them
 - ensuring marking is of consistent quality to show students how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- Build further on the improvements already evident in the achievement and attendance of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, by making sure that the support they receive is more sharply focused and its impact more fully evaluated.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students join the school with attainment that is generally in line with the national average.
- Over time, weaker attainment and progress in English has limited students' overall achievement.
- Leaders and managers, including the governing body, have tackled this incisively. As a result, Key Stage 4 GCSE results in 2012 showed a sharp rise in the proportion of students attaining grades A* to C in English. The proportion of students making expected and more than expected progress in English rose significantly and compared favourably to national figures. School data, confirmed by inspection evidence, show that the improvement is set to continue unabated.
- Because of the steep rise in English results in 2012, the proportion of students attaining five or more grades A* to C, including English and mathematics, was above the 2011 average after a period of only slow improvement in previous years.
- Progress in Key Stage 3 is also improving rapidly and securely. A comprehensive and effective push on developing students' literacy skills, especially in writing, reading and speaking across subjects is enabling a greater proportion of students to learn with greater understanding and make accelerated progress.
- Results at GCSE in the school's specialism of mathematics and computing are consistently strong because teaching in these subjects is good.
- The school has worked effectively to refine and use its systems to track students' progress towards challenging targets. It uses the outcomes effectively to spot underachievement at an early stage and to target support where and when necessary. This is also instrumental in improving attainment and accelerating progress.
- A previous gap in attainment between students supported through school action and students known to be eligible for the pupil premium and other groups is closing securely. However, leaders and managers are aware that the targeted allocation of pupil premium funding and more rigorous evaluation of its impact are necessary to close the gap at a faster rate.
- The progress and achievement of students who are disabled or who have a statement of special educational needs is also improving rapidly and securely because provision to support their learning has been targeted more closely and their progress is checked on more regularly and accurately.
- Students who are visually impaired achieve well because of the effective support they receive.
- Most students say that they enjoy reading and many read widely. New measures to promote reading as part of the school's literacy strategy are proving popular with students. Effective support for weaker readers is provided on a one-to-one weekly basis. Progress records show that reading ages for these students improve rapidly as a result. Overall attainment in reading is average and improving.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Even though the quality of teaching is improving rapidly and securely and much is now good or better, it requires improvement because expectations of what students are capable of achieving and the level of challenge are inconsistent.
- Over time, too much teaching has required improvement. As a result, students' progress and achievement has not advanced as quickly as it should.
- However, leaders and managers, including the governing body, have taken incisive and rigorous action to improve the quality of teaching. The success of their efforts is seen in the rapidly rising achievement of students at all key stages.
- Leaders and managers have raised expectations, made clear what good and outstanding teaching looks like and have added much needed rigour to the monitoring of teaching and

learning, using the outcomes to target specific areas for improvement.

- Teachers have responded enthusiastically to the higher expectations and appreciate the targeted professional development opportunities they now receive.
- School records of monitoring teaching and learning show significant improvement over time. While the proportion of good and better teaching has increased, a significant amount still requires improvement.
- Teaching that requires improvement is characterised by: activities that are not always closely enough matched to students' needs and abilities; a level of challenge that is sometimes not high enough; and inefficient use of progress data on individual students to check on progress both in lessons and over time.
- The majority of teaching observed during the inspection was good with some that was outstanding. This confirms the school's monitoring records showing improvement over time. Good and outstanding teaching is lively, engaging, challenging and well-planned. It has a sharp focus on learning and the progress students make both in lessons and over time. In one outstanding English lesson, for example, a group of Year 11 students were challenged non-stop. Their learning and understanding were checked on frequently so that any misunderstanding could be quickly tackled. Students enjoyed the engaging activities and relished being invited to contribute their ideas and opinions in groups and to the whole class. They made outstanding progress as a result.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly. However, the quality of their comments is inconsistent in showing students clearly the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve their work.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students' good behaviour and friendly attitudes help to promote a positive atmosphere for learning. Students are attentive and typically respond well to staff guidance and the systems used to manage their behaviour. Staff make effective use of praise to encourage positive attitudes and make certain that all are included and have the opportunity to achieve success.
- Students are polite and respectful to each other and the adults working with them. They enjoy working in groups and pairs where they listen respectfully and contribute willingly. They show good understanding of right and wrong. These facts indicate good social and moral development.
- School records show a decline in instances of poor behaviour over time and a steady decline in figures for student exclusions. Students say that the school policy on behaviour is applied consistently in most classrooms and that this has had a strong input on improving behaviour over time.
- Students say that bullying of any sort is not a problem in school and that it is dealt with effectively if isolated incidents occur.
- Disabled students are treated with respect. The visually impaired students are helped to find their way around the building and to get their specialised equipment ready for learning.
- Students say they feel safe in school. They give examples of what they see as potentially risky situations and how to avoid or handle them. They understand the dangers of inappropriate use of the internet and other social media.
- The attendance and safety of students who receive part-time education at a local college are checked on meticulously through close liaison with college staff.
- Attendance has risen significantly and levels of persistent absence have declined sharply. Students are enjoying the improved quality of teaching much more and the school has become much more rigorous in tackling absence and raising with parents and students the profile of its importance to success.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers, including the governing body, are driving the school strongly forward.
- Rigorous and accurate evaluation of the effectiveness of the school leads to good quality strategic planning to tackle weaknesses.
- Leaders and managers monitor the quality of teaching regularly and accurately. Weaknesses are identified and appropriate training and support are provided to improve its quality.
- Performance management is used astutely to set aspirational targets for each member of staff. Evaluation of progress towards meeting these targets is meticulous.
- Middle managers are held to much closer account for the performance of their particular areas of delegated responsibility.
- The combined effect of this rigour is to bring about a rapid and sustainable improvement in the quality of teaching and, consequently, in students' achievement. They demonstrate the school's strong capacity to continue improving.
- Team work is strong across the school. Staff respond positively to the sharp focus on improvement that leaders and managers provide.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. It meets students' needs and responds effectively to change. There is a wide range of extracurricular activities that are well attended and appreciated by students and parents. These opportunities play a significant role in broadening students' horizons and contributing to students' good spiritual and cultural development.
- The school works very effectively in partnership with another school in the local authority to share best practice. The partnership was brokered by the local authority with the intention of improving Alder's achievement in English. Recent test results and evidence gathered during the inspection show how successful the partnership has been.
- The majority of parents are supportive of the school and would recommend it to other parents. A few have some concerns about behaviour, which were not supported by inspection findings.
- Arrangements for safeguarding meet requirements and give no cause for concern.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body provides good levels of challenge to hold the school rigorously to account. It is knowledgeable and influential in forming and planning the school's strategic direction and it fulfils its statutory responsibilities meticulously.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
|---------|----------------------|--|
| Grade | Judgement | Description |
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. |
| Grade 3 | Requires improvement | A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | <p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 134283 |
| Local authority | Tameside |
| Inspection number | 406562 |

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

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| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 769 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr John Arden |
| Headteacher | Mr Richard O'Regan |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 December 2010 |
| Telephone number | 0161 368 5132 |
| Fax number | 0161 366 6383 |
| Email address | admin@alder.tameside.sch.uk |

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