

Alder Community High School

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

Inspection dates 5–6 June 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- As a result of good and sometimes outstanding teaching, students make good progress in their learning.
- Standards of attainment are high. The proportion of students in Year 11 gaining five or more GCSE passes at A* to C, including English and mathematics, is well above average.
- The behaviour of students around the school is good. They say they are safe and enjoy school. Consequently, attendance continues to improve and is above average.
- Leaders and managers check students' progress well. Their actions prevent students from falling behind. Progress and standards have improved since the last inspection.
- Leaders and managers have a relentless focus on improving teaching. The majority of teaching is good or outstanding due to the effective programme of professional development for staff.
- Leaders, managers and governors have developed a strong sense of purpose among staff to drive forward sustained improvement. This contributes well to ensuring good teaching and good achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Occasionally, the most able students are not moved swiftly to more challenging tasks to deepen their learning. As a result, not enough are attaining the highest grades at GCSE.
- School plans for improvement are not always sharply focused on the impact actions are intended to have on improving teaching and achievement.
- Not all subject leaders are rigorous in checking that the school's expectations of marking and the presentation of students' work are consistently upheld.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 33 part-lessons taught by 33 teachers. Two observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors spoke with two groups of students about their learning in lessons and their safety in school. An inspector listened to some students reading.
- Meetings were held with a group of governors. Also meetings were held with school staff, including middle and senior leaders.
- Inspectors also looked at the school’s review of its own performance, its development plan, subject development plans, school policies and the minutes of governing body meetings. Inspectors also considered a range of documentation in relation to child protection, safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors looked at students’ work in lessons. They analysed a sample of students’ books with senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors analysed the 33 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors took into account surveys of parental opinions about the school taken at recent parent evenings. There were 61 questionnaires completed by staff, which were analysed by inspectors.

Inspection team

James McGrath, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Peter McKay	Additional Inspector
Johan MacKinnon	Additional Inspector
Victoria Atherton	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of students eligible for the pupil premium is above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- Most students are White British. There are few pupils whose first language is believed not to be English.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is well below average. The proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational need is above average.
- The alternative provider used by the school is Age UK.
- The school holds the Gold Award for Inspiring Information, Advice and Guidance.
- The school is a local authority hub school for personal, social and health education.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, so that more is outstanding, in order to further raise students' achievement and ensure good progress for all students in all subjects by making sure all teachers:
 - move the most able students to high level tasks and activities as soon as they are ready to prepare them better to attain the highest GCSE grades
 - implement the school's policy on marking consistently and effectively
 - measure the progress of all students to ascertain when they are ready to move on
 - set high expectations for the presentation and organisation of students' work.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - making sure that all subject leaders check that the school's new marking policy and expectations for presentation are upheld by all staff
 - making sure that the measures used to judge the impact of actions identified in development plans are closely linked to improvements in students' learning and progress.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students' progress has improved since the last inspection. Good or better teaching in most subjects helps students to make good progress overall. Progress in mathematics is outstanding. It is good in English and most other subjects.
- From 2012 to 2013, students' progress improved significantly as did the standards they reached at the end of Year 11. In 2013, from average starting points on entry to the school, the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics, was well above average. However, standards in geography were well below average.
- The most recent set of assessment information provided by the school shows that in 2014 the high proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades, including English and mathematics will be maintained and overall progress will improve again. Standards in geography are set to improve due to additional support for teaching. The school has a robust system for measuring students' progress and a good track record in forecasting accurate GCSE results.
- The most able students make the progress expected of them but not enough do better than this. Although the numbers achieving the highest grades in physical education were well above average, not enough students attained the highest grades at GCSE in many subjects.
- Those courses that are equivalent to GCSE make a good contribution to students' achievement. Those very few students educated off site at alternative provision make good progress.
- In November 2013, students were entered early for GCSE English. The large majority attained grade C, or above, and the vast majority are continuing with their studies to improve their grades in summer 2014. The school is not continuing with early entry to GCSE in future years.
- The progress of disabled students and those with special educational needs is improving and is similar to other students. Precise identification of the needs of these students and improvements in the quality of teaching are supporting these students well. Improved attendance for these students is helping them achieve better. This is a good example of the school's commitment to equality of opportunity for all.
- The achievement of students known to be eligible for free school meals has improved significantly. Due to their lower starting points, those students eligible for free school meals at the end of Year 11, in 2013, were almost one GCSE grade behind others in English and in mathematics. The gap in attainment between these students and others is set to narrow in 2014. Throughout the school, targeted support for those eligible for free school meals is showing improvements in achievement.
- Year 7 'catch-up' funding is used to promote literacy and numeracy through additional literacy lessons, a 'summer school' and after-school sessions for English and mathematics. Students are benefiting well from this additional support and are making good progress.
- Reading is promoted well in many subjects. There are many opportunities for students to develop their reading and research skills. Year 11 students help younger students to read better and to develop a love of reading. A weekly 'library lesson' led by the English department is enjoyed by the younger students. Students read widely and use the new library facility well.

The quality of teaching

is good

- The quality of teaching is mostly good with some that is outstanding.
- Learning begins at a brisk pace as students' activities are well planned. Students know what is expected of them and they are keen to learn. They are given clear and concise explanations about what is required in the lesson and know what to do to achieve well. Consequently, students make good progress.
- Questioning is used well to involve students and to search out what they understand. It is used skilfully to assess what an individual might know and to search out the knowledge of others and deepen their understanding.

- A strong focus on literacy and the development of technical vocabulary are features in most lessons. Students use computers well to find out more about the work they are doing and to write extensively. There are good opportunities for them to share their work with each other and improve their own work from the findings of others.
- Teaching assistants are used very effectively to support low attaining students and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs. They also support other groups of students both inside and outside the classroom. For example, during one activity, the teaching assistant helped a least able student and several higher ability students to understand their different tasks and make good progress.
- Occasionally, progress in lessons slows for the most able. They spend too long on tasks that are too easy and are not moved on to high level tasks swiftly enough to challenge them appropriately to deepen their thinking.
- There are a few occasions when activities are moved on without students learning being assessed accurately. At these times, students do not always fully understanding what is required of them to move to the next stage of learning. Some lose interest and the pace of learning slows.
- An analysis of students' work showed that there is high quality marking adhering to the school's new policy in almost all departments. However, it also showed that in many departments there is inconsistent marking that does not adhere to the school's policy and there are variable expectations of students' presentation and the organisation of their work. When marking and expectations are high, students respond well and they make good or better progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They are keen to learn, follow the instructions of their teachers and enjoy sharing their ideas to support their learning. Occasionally, when the pace of learning is not appropriate students can lose concentration.
- Students are very proud of their school. They wear their uniform with pride and are dressed smartly. Students welcome visitors and enjoy telling them about the things they do in school.
- Around the school, students treat each other with great respect and move sensibly and safely at all times. They know what is expected of them and behave accordingly. This leads to a harmonious community.
- Students are punctual to school and to their lessons. They make sure they have the right equipment for their lessons and they are ready to learn. They enjoy collecting their merits and badges for good behaviour and academic achievement. The rewards and sanctions system has had a marked effect on ensuring good behaviour.
- The 'Stage 2 Centre', for the few students who continue to misbehave, has reduced exclusions to below average and is providing good learning support for the few who are placed there.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students spoken to by inspectors said they felt safe in school. The school provides good information through its curriculum and assemblies on how to stay safe. Students know how to stay safe when using the internet.
- There are good arrangements for the very few students who attend off site provision with alternative providers to ensure their safety while off school premises.
- Students are clear about what constitutes bullying. Discussions with students and checks of the school's behaviour records by inspectors indicate that bullying is exceptionally rare. Students are confident that when bullying occurs the school deals it with very effectively.
- Arrangements to support vulnerable students are good with good links to outside agencies to support these students. The school's work to improve the attendance of these students has been highly effective. Regular checks from 'progress leaders' and senior leaders along with the support of their own attendance officer has rapidly improved attendance and is supporting improvements in academic achievement.
- Students enjoy coming to school and as a result, attendance is above average.

- Parents and staff share the same, positive views about students' behaviour and safety.

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders and managers, including governors, share a common sense of purpose and commitment to sustained improvement. They set ambitious targets for staff and students. This has resulted in significant improvements in achievement since the last inspection.
- The school has rightly prioritised improvement to the quality of teaching in seeking to raise students' achievement. It is successfully improving teaching through judicious use of well planned, in-house sharing of best practice and targeted use of training programmes from Teaching Schools and other external consultants.
- Self-evaluation is rigorous and gives the school a clear idea of its strengths and areas for improvement. The plan for improvement correctly states the main priorities for the school. However, measures to judge the success of planned actions do not focus sufficiently on whether actions will improve students' achievement and the quality of teaching, thus contributing to the leaders' understanding of how well the school is doing.
- There is a very thorough system for checking pupils' progress. It is used well by leaders and teachers to identify those students who require additional support so they do not fall behind in their learning. Leaders and managers use this information, that from lesson observations and students' books to ascertain the progress pupils are making and what needs to be improved.
- Not all subject leaders are rigorously checking that the school's policies relating to the new system for marking and presentation of work are being followed. This leads to some inconsistent application by staff and, as a result, a few students are not progressing as well as they should.
- Performance management for teachers is robust and identifies the skills they need to improve. Teachers say the process 'is challenging but fair and supportive of their professional development'. The school provides for the training needs of teaching assistants to make sure they provide good quality support to all groups of students with whom they work.
- The curriculum prepares students well for their future education and training as there is a good range of subjects, an emphasis on the development of literacy skills and high achievement in mathematics. Students have a strong appreciation of art, music, diversity, other cultures and faiths. They are keen to engage in working for charities. All of this contributes well to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of students.
- Supported by good information and advice about future careers, almost all students leaving school at the end of Year 11 continue in education, employment or training.
- The local authority has reviewed the school with senior leaders to establish an accurate view of strengths and areas for development. It is beginning to develop the capacity to support the school in its work to improve achievement in geography.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are well informed about the school and well placed to support and challenge leaders and managers appropriately. Governors take opportunities to speak to teachers and check on the quality of teaching. This gives them independent intelligence to hold the school to account for its work. Governors have a full understanding of students' progress data and are clear about areas for improvement. They have high ambitions for students' achievement and personal development. Governors make checks on the school's budget. They have approved the use of pupil premium funding and monitor its impact. Governors understand the arrangements linking teachers' performance and pay. When teachers' targets are not met, they challenge the headteacher to ensure there is improvement. Governors are diligent in ensuring that the schools arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.

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

Unique reference number	134283
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	442428

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 of pupils on the school roll	743
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Ardern
Headteacher	Richard O'Regan
Date of previous school inspection	4 October 2012
Telephone number	0161 368 5132
Fax number	0161 366 6383
Email address	admin@alder.tameside.sch.uk

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