

Aigburth High School

Minehead Road, Aigburth, Liverpool, L17 6AX

Inspection dates 25–26 February 2015

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The headteacher has brought to leadership and management consummate expertise, determination and relentless effort in moving the school to good.
- Leaders, managers and governors are responsible for a series of well-planned and sharply focused actions since the last inspection which have driven good improvement in teaching, behaviour and students' achievement. This has raised expectations and morale to a high level throughout the school.
- Effective teaching over time secures good learning and progress across the school. Teachers and their assistants team up well to support and encourage learning. They set high expectations which improve learning, progress and behaviour.
- Students, including disadvantaged students, are supported effectively in tackling well-planned and challenging work. As a result, they make good progress and achieve well.
- The behaviour of students is good. The management of challenging and disruptive behaviour is extremely effective, leading to students conducting themselves well in lessons and around the school.
- Students feel safe, attendance has improved and the number of temporary exclusions has fallen.
- Sixth form provision is good. Its success, as a result of good leadership and management, has seen it blossom. The sixth form programme offers a good breadth of relevant work and activities geared effectively to preparing students for further education, employment and adulthood.
- Students who have part of their education in alternative provision make good progress in a variety of courses well matched to their interests, strengths and preparation for the future.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There are too few opportunities in all key stages for students to practise and improve their writing outside of English lessons.
- The gaps in some students' mathematical skills are not being closed early enough, preventing them from tackling harder problems later on.
- Leaders are not rigorous when checking on teaching and students' progress for weaknesses in the provision for writing and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning across the school and were joined by the headteacher in one of their observations.
- Policies and procedures for child protection and the safeguarding students were scrutinised.
- Meetings were held with senior staff, middle leaders and teachers.
- Discussions took place with representatives of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- An inspector met with a group of students to hear their views of the school and their experiences of learning.
- A brief visit was made to a provider of alternative education.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents including information on students' progress, the school's development plan, curriculum policies and the school's own view of how well it is doing.
- There were too few parental responses to Ofsted's on-line questionnaire (Parent View) to allow inspectors to take account of these views. An inspector met with a group of parents to hear their views of the school. The views of staff who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire were considered.

Inspection team

Alan Lemon, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Doreen Davenport

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Aigburth High School is a special school providing education for students with moderate and severe learning difficulties.
- Many students have an autistic spectrum condition and other additional needs such as communication difficulties, sensory impairments and medical conditions. A large majority of students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.
- All of the students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The large majority of students are in Key Stages 3 and 4. There are 11 pupils in Year 6 and 25 students in the sixth form.
- Students are admitted to the school at any point in their education and at different times during the school year.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium is well above average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- A classroom is set aside and staffed for students who need help with their behaviour. The additional resource centre offers short periods of time out of lessons during the school day.
- The three alternative providers used by the school are: the Fairbridge Programme, a Prince's Trust Centre, providing short courses for life skills, and preparation for leaving school; Myerscough College which offers land-based courses; and, occasionally, Alder Hey Hospital School when students with a medical condition are being treated.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the opportunities and raise expectations in all subjects at all key stages to promote students' achievement in writing to match that in English.
- Assess thoroughly students' mathematical skills, ensuring that shortfalls are detected quickly and eliminated at an early stage.
- Senior leaders should review the rigour with which they check the work of the school to ensure early detection of weaknesses in all key stages in relation to the provision for, and teaching of, writing and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Effective leadership and management have rapidly improved the school. Good progress on improvement has been in spite of the obstacles presented by the school's poor accommodation. Transforming the staff into the capable, committed and cohesive team they now are has been instrumental in the school rapidly moving forward.
- The school's reputation has grown and it is increasingly a popular choice. Parents' views are very favourable, and those spoken to are greatly impressed by the school's work and its impact on their children's development.
- Leaders foster good relationships and, through their effective policies and work, promote equality and eliminate any risks of discrimination.
- Senior managers have a firm hold on every aspect of the school's work. They strive for excellence and ensure that there are high expectations throughout the school and in the alternative provision used by Key Stage 4 students. The progress, attendance and behaviour of students using alternative provision are rigorously checked upon by a deputy headteacher.
- The local authority gives good, wide-ranging support to leaders and to supporting the progress of a project to build the much needed new school premises.
- Middle leaders benefit from clear direction and understanding of what to achieve in their roles, resulting in a wide distribution of good leadership and management. They are held strictly to account for achieving senior leaders' clearly articulated aims. This stands out particularly well in the leadership of the sixth form, the provision for safeguarding and the support for students. It also stands out in relation to the improvement of attendance and behaviour, and in promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- High priority is given to keeping students safe; the measures leaders take to safeguard students are robust and meet requirements.
- The quality of teaching is managed effectively and is good. Leaders take decisive actions to improve teaching through regular checks on lessons, encouraging teachers' continued professional development and ensuring that newly qualified teachers are fully supported. Teaching is improved systematically through regular reviews of teachers' progress towards targets set by leaders. These are securely linked to what teachers should do better, school improvement priorities and students' achievement.
- The curriculum offers a good, broad range of relevant work and activities that are expertly adapted to students' different needs. It enables students to enjoy learning, discover strengths and find new interests. By the end of Key Stage 4 or the sixth form, students are well advised about careers and prepared for moving successfully to the next stage of education, training or employment. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences are extremely well threaded through the curriculum. As such, it broadens students' horizons effectively, making them well-rounded individuals prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The systematic checks on students' progress have delivered a clear picture of their achievement, the impact of teaching and the use of the pupil premium. These rigorous checks rightly confirm leaders' assessment that outcomes have steadily improved and that their spending of the pupil premium is effective. The analysis of students' outcomes at the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form provides a clear and accurate picture of the performance of different groups of students.
- Leaders are steadily progressing with adapting assessment procedures to the new curriculum. Links with an outstanding special school are proving valuable in dealing with the challenges involved.
- Leaders have not given enough close attention to double checking teaching by assessing its impact through the work in students' books. Here there is evidence of insufficient attention to promoting writing in different subjects, although it is very good in English. The gaps in some students' mathematical skills have not been immediately recognised and dealt with swiftly.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors are very closely involved in the life and work of the school. They are deeply committed to its continued improvement and success in meeting the needs of all the stakeholders, especially students and their parents. Governors are diligent in fulfilling all of their responsibilities and work effectively, making sure the school's way forward is smooth. They are well equipped with up-to-date information they glean from their meetings, the headteacher's and other reports, conversations and regular visits.
 - Teaching, students' achievement, including for those supported through the pupil premium, and safety are high on their agenda and given close scrutiny. Governors question and seek to be convinced that all students make good progress and that the promotion of teachers and progress in their pay fits with a favourable assessment of their performance.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. This applies equally in school and in the alternative provision attended by students. The considerable extent to which many students improve their behaviour is a strength of the school. The youngest students are more inclined to be disruptive occasionally, although this is not the case for older students. This is reflected in students' and their parents' positive comments about behaviour and their recognition of the school's high expectations for good order.
- Students learn to recognise when their moods put good behaviour at risk and take steps themselves to prevent disrupting their own and other students' peace and learning. Students who need 'time out' find sanctuary in the school's additional resource centre. This is a considerable help to them feeling safe and calm at times of crises.
- The curriculum is enriched with a good variety of clubs and activities at breaks and lunchtimes which students enjoy; these keep them purposefully occupied.
- The number of temporary exclusions of students because of poor behaviour is greatly reduced and on a downward trend. Attendance has improved and is on an upward trend. A part of the pupil premium spent on tackling absences has had a good effect on students getting to school on time every day.
- Relationships with adults are positive and students have good respect for staff and each other. They contribute to and thrive on the school's calm atmosphere, clear routines and good order. As a result, good personal qualities, such as self-confidence, trust in others, independence and responsibility, increase in each student.
- Students look out for each other and opportunities to help are appreciated and welcomed. Raising money for good causes is undertaken enthusiastically on a regular basis.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students feel safe and the high degree of regard they have for each other ensures that bullying is not a feature of their experience of school.
- The school undertakes a substantial amount of work using specialist agencies and interest groups to teach students about bullying in all of its forms. Students play an active part in formulating and reviewing the anti-bullying policy which ensures that they stay conscious of the respectful treatment of others.
- In equal measure, students learn the risks in using computers and social media and are taught to be digitally aware.
- The staff are all appropriately trained in safeguarding students. They are expert in supporting students' well-being. The strong links developed with parents and many agencies bring quick and effective responses to meeting students' social and emotional needs.
- The arrangements for keeping students safe when using alternative provision are checked rigorously by leaders. In the alternative provision visited, the measures for safeguarding students were robust and students felt very safe.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching over time is good. Teachers and their assistants have a good knowledge of their students; this results in lesson planning which succeeds in engaging and motivating students. Once students have spent some time in school, they come into lessons ready to settle and get on with some work. They are not put off by difficult work or subjects they do not like.
- In lessons, teachers ensure that the objective for what should be learnt is made clear. These objectives are firmly linked to what students have already learnt. The point of their work is clear to them and they can see the progress they are making.
- Leaders have ensured that all teachers follow the marking policy and this has achieved considerable consistency across subjects. Teachers correct work meticulously and give clear written advice to students on improving their work.
- Teaching is lively, confident and captures the interest of the class. Students understand complicated ideas which are explained clearly and in detail. For instance, Year 9 students began work on the area of rectangles with reference to digital whiteboards and excellent visual demonstrations.
- Appropriate to their age, students are encouraged to take charge of their own learning effectively, particularly by agreeing targets and identifying the knowledge and skills they would like to develop.
- Students are encouraged to read as much as possible. The good opportunities to read, and read aloud, in

different subjects have raised confidence and produced a positive attitude to reading. This reflects the success in raising the profile of literacy across the school.

- The teaching of English is particularly effective in promoting writing. Challenge and high expectations run through the wide variety of writing planned for English lessons. However, these expectations are not always replicated in the writing completed for other subjects.
- A broad range of mathematics is taught and the demands of examination courses are expertly managed by teachers and their assistants. However, gaps show in what some students know and can do in mathematics. For example, they lack good multiplication skills and quickly come unstuck when these are needed to solve a problem. Equally, the opportunities for solving mathematical problems are limited, which is where gaps in knowledge and skills show.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students achieve well by the end of Key Stage 4 and sixth form. The accreditation gained from their courses and examinations prepares them well for carrying on with education and training and their eventual employment.
- The increased offer of accredited courses and qualifications, closely matched to students' different points in learning, better enables them to perform to their strengths and capitalise on their interests. As a result, students in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form now gain more qualifications than students did in previous years.
- The very large majority of students from Year 6 onwards learn to enjoy school and value all of their school experiences. This is the result of good teaching, good behaviour and relationships, and interesting and relevant work and activities.
- The courses offered by alternative providers are effective in building students' self-confidence, social skills and teamwork skills, which students bring back into their school work to good effect. Students also make good progress in improving work-related skills on alternative providers' vocational courses.
- Continued improvement in attendance raises the proportion of students making expected progress or better.
- From their different starting points, the large majority of students make at least the expected progress or more than this.
- By the end of Key Stage 4, the most-able students all gain at least one GCSE pass in either English, mathematics, science or art. A few students achieve a higher grade GCSE. Most students finish Key Stage 4 with one or more GCSE or equivalent vocational qualifications, or lower-level accreditation, including in literacy and numeracy.
- Disadvantaged students supported through the pupil premium make the same good progress as others in the school, gaining similar qualifications by the end of Key Stage 4. There are too few disadvantaged students in the school to make comparisons with other students nationally.
- Students across the school read regularly and their interest in books is positively encouraged. Their engagement in lessons with a wide variety of reading develops students' skills in interpreting and understanding texts and finding the information they are looking for. Even though they may not be accomplished at reading aloud, students willingly and confidently do so in class.
- From Year 6 onwards, students make good progress in writing, improving their skills in spelling, punctuation and the breadth of language to express thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively. Over time, students manage the challenge of writing at length, increasing the skill with which they use language imaginatively and making their work interesting to read. However, the good level of challenge set in English lessons is not replicated when writing takes place in other subjects.
- In Key Stage 3, most students make good progress in consolidating number and calculation skills such as addition and subtraction, including with sums of money. They make graphs from information they have collected which sometimes involve using positive and negative numbers, such as graphs of temperature changes. However, some students have not secured multiplication and division skills by Year 9 and work in books indicates these are practised less than other parts of mathematics. In Key Stage 4, students progress well on their chosen routes to gaining accreditation in mathematics.

The sixth form provision is good

- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form is a very experienced

and visionary leader. She has developed an ethos which encourages adult values of independence and responsibility in students effectively, particularly in respect of their own learning.

- Behaviour is exemplary and students feel very safe in the calm, mutually supportive atmosphere of the sixth form.
- Good teaching and classroom support ensure that students stay well focused on completing all of their coursework. Careful assessments of each student's progress lead to effective planning of their work and marking that details helpful advice to students on the next steps.
- Students benefit considerably in their learning and personal development from the extra years spent in sixth form, rather than moving at the end of Key Stage 4 to college, training or employment. They carry on making good progress and achieving well by adding to the accreditation they gained in Key Stage 4 and by increasing their experience of work-related learning. Accredited courses offer challenges to match each student's point in learning and which qualify them for their chosen pathways on leaving school.
- Threaded through their courses are good opportunities for students to plan and manage tasks, learn skills of working in teams and for taking responsibility. While students are challenged to use their literacy skills in doing so, and in reading in particular, opportunities to improve their writing and mathematics are not planned specifically.
- Students take turns at managing the sixth form reception desk and greeting visitors. They support younger students in lessons and help them on the playground at break times. Students gain work experience, such as by helping at the local library.

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 | 134658 |
| Local authority | Liverpool |
| Inspection number | 453601 |

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

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 11–18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 120 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Bob Davies |
| Headteacher | Cath Piercy |
| Date of previous school inspection | 20 March 2013 |
| Telephone number | 0151 427 1863 |
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