

Alder Community High School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 134283 |
| Local Authority | Tameside |
| Inspection number | 316254 |
| Inspection dates | 17–18 April 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Janet Palmer HMI |

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 on roll | |
| School | 819 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mr N Lowther |
| Headteacher | Mr Bob Wakefield |
| Date of previous school inspection | 22 November 2004 |
| School address | Mottram Old Road Gee Cross Hyde SK14 5NJ |
| Telephone number | 0161 368 5132 |
| Fax number | 0161 366 6383 |

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|--------------------------|------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Alder Community High School opened as an 11 to 16 mixed comprehensive in September 2001. The school moved to a new building in 2003 which accommodates advanced technology and sports facilities that are available for use by the community. The school was awarded mathematics and computing specialist status in September 2006. It is smaller than the average secondary school; the number on roll has increased and the school is now full and oversubscribed. The school serves a diverse, but largely disadvantaged, area. A higher than average number of students are entitled to free school meals. The percentage with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is in line with the national average. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is well below the national average. The school was awarded Healthy Schools status in 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Alder Community High offers its students a good education. The headteacher provides a very clear educational direction; the inclusion of all students and the dismantling of barriers to learning are at the heart of his vision for the school. Consequently, a range of strategies are in place to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve as well as they can. This commitment is well communicated to all members of the school community, creating a common sense of purpose.

When students enter the school their attainment is broadly average, although there is some variation between individual subjects. They receive effective support to ensure that the transfer from primary school is successful, and this provides a secure base from which to begin their secondary education. Most students demonstrate a keen commitment to their studies and are eager to improve. Consequently, at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 there has been sustained improvement in students' achievements; standards have improved, although results in English have lagged behind those in mathematics and science.

Teaching and learning are good and this makes a substantial contribution to the students' achievement. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and are built upon mutual respect. Teachers have strong behaviour management skills and these contribute to the positive relationships in lessons. Specialist status in mathematics and computing has enabled information and communication technology (ICT) to be developed across all areas of the school. Teachers conscientiously track students' academic progress and keep them informed about what they need to do to improve.

The personal development and well-being of students is good. Students feel safe, enjoy school and are loyal to it. This is reflected in their good behaviour, positive attitudes and the good relationships that exist in this happy community. Many students recognise and value the opportunities they are given, both to show initiative and make a positive contribution to the local and wider community. The broad academic curriculum is well supported by a wide range of enrichment activities, ensuring that students' needs, aspirations and ambitions are met well. Teachers, including the headteacher, have a high profile around the site at break and lunchtimes and give unstintingly of their time to extra-curricular activities. Students feel that there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem.

Effective monitoring and self-evaluation on the part of leaders and managers has led to a thorough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Issues from the previous inspection have been vigorously tackled by a senior management team that is committed to improvement. Governors discharge their responsibilities well, taking a full part in the strategic development of the school. They are well informed and strike an appropriate balance of support and challenge. Leaders and managers provide the school with a good capacity to further improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards at Key Stage 4, particularly in English.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students enter the school with broadly average standards, although there are marked differences between subjects. During the past three years at Key Stage 3, standards have continued to rise

and the rate of progress made by students has shown sustained improvement. The school has shown convincing evidence from its tracking data that current Year 9 students are making good progress towards their targets and to achieving above average standards by the end of the Key Stage. Over time, Key Stage 4 results have demonstrated an improving trend and swift actions taken by the school's senior leadership has ensured that the factors contributing to the disappointing GCSE examination results in 2007 have been tackled effectively. Consequently, the current Year 11 cohort is making good progress in line with predictions in mathematics and science and satisfactory progress in English.

Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress in line with their peers because the support which they receive is both well planned and carefully targeted. The school's specialist status has had a wide impact on students' progress, particularly through the use of ICT as a tool to aid learning, and as a management application to quickly and reliably identify any underachievement and to intervene swiftly to effect improvement.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good. They are developing into young people who show a sense of responsibility and concern for others. Through assemblies, citizenship education and enrichment activities, students learn to reflect on complex issues, including the concept of prejudice.

Attendance has been below average in recent years but is improving as a result of recent initiatives, and is now in line with the national average and above average for similar schools.

Most students respond well to the school's efforts to encourage them to adopt healthy lifestyles. For example, the uptake of extra-curricular sporting activities is high and many students choose to eat healthily at lunchtime. Students express their views and take responsibility for decisions made through the school council. They readily give their time to fundraising activities. In addition, some of the older students take the opportunity to be peer mentors, a support mechanism which is appreciated and valued by the younger students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In the many successful lessons seen during the inspection, teachers were enthusiastic, had good subject knowledge and were competent in the use of interactive whiteboards as a resource for learning. In most lessons the high quality teaching ensures that pace is maintained and students make good progress. A particular feature of the teaching and learning is the good use of open questions to challenge students and extract confident, well informed and appropriate responses.

Most lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives that are shared with the students to help them to understand the purpose of the lesson and create a suitable context for the work they are given. Lessons' closing sessions are used effectively to consolidate learning and promote a sense of achievement.

Marking is most often effective. It gives students clear feedback about how well they have done in their work and about how to improve through teachers' written comments and clear learning targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The quality of the curriculum is good and meets all statutory requirements. It is flexibly implemented in order to meet the needs of students and provides opportunities for them to take early entry for qualifications such as GCSE French in Year 9, and AS-level mathematics in Year 11. It gives a very wide range of academic and vocational options in Years 10 and 11, thanks in part to the very good collaborations with colleges of further education and training providers.

An extensive array of external visits and visitors into school helps to bring learning to life for students. The many extra-curricular sports, creative experiences such as visits to the theatre, trips abroad and special interest activities such as the Mah Jongg club, successfully help students to broaden their horizons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are good. Vulnerable students and those in public care receive sensitive and targeted help through the school's learning support centre, which is very effective in meeting individual needs. Arrangements for safeguarding students' welfare and safety are robust and procedures are securely in place.

Students new to the school settle in quickly to the learning routines because of the good induction arrangements and partnerships with local primary schools. In addition, there is a thorough guidance programme for Year 9 students and their parents to support them in making important option choices. Students develop the personal qualities that will enable them to lead fruitful working lives through a well-structured careers education programme and are well informed about their future career options.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher and senior team know the students very well, are visible around the school, and lead by example. The leadership takes good account of the views of all stakeholders, responding promptly to issues of concern; for example, by providing a mini-bus service for students attending after-school activities in response to parental concerns for their children's safety. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and its leadership.

Leaders and managers have successfully focused on raising standards and achievement. Challenging targets, including for attendance, are used well to raise standards. Middle managers are well qualified for their role and effective in their practice. Regular departmental reviews provide supporting analyses of the quality of teaching and learning and, combined with a thorough system of tracking student progress, help to identify areas for development.

Governors show commitment and ambition for the school. They demonstrate an appropriate balance between challenging the school to improve, and supporting senior managers and staff to be effective.

Resources are well used to improve outcomes. Specialist college status has enabled the appointment of new staff and the upgrading of ICT facilities, including the development of the virtual learning environment. The school provides good value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 3 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|--|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

I would like to thank you for welcoming me and the other inspectors to your school and being so friendly and courteous. I appreciated the time many of you gave to tell us about your work and other activities. These were the things that I found out during my visit.

- Alder Community High is a good school. It is well led and managed by the headteacher and senior team and provides you with a good education.
- The curriculum is well suited to your needs and interests, lessons are interesting, and your teachers are enthusiastic and highly committed to your success. You take up the many opportunities the school provides for extra-curricular activities.
- Your attendance has improved and is now satisfactory. Your behaviour in lessons and around the school is also good.
- Your teachers provide good care and support. Students who are vulnerable or need extra help are well looked after. You told us you feel safe and secure in school. Many of you take on important responsibilities such as peer mediators and student councillors.

You make good progress during your time at school. However, we have asked the college to improve standards at Key Stage 4, particularly in English where you are not quite meeting your targets.