

The Alsop High School A Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104693
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	308651
Inspection date	2 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Clive Moss HMI

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1740
6th form	259
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Cllr M Fielding
Headteacher	Mr P Jamieson
Date of previous school inspection	19 January 2004
School address	Queen's Drive Liverpool Merseyside L4 6SH
Telephone number	0151 5252600
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out over one day by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector. It focused on the personal development of the students in the school, the quality of the curriculum in the school and sixth form, and achievement in the sixth form. This was done by gathering evidence from observing lessons, scrutinising school documentation and questionnaires completed by parents, and by talking with students, teachers, school managers and the headteacher. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified.

Description of the school

The Alsop High School is a very large secondary school with 1,740 students, including 259 in the sixth form. It is located in an inner-city area with many social disadvantages. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is three times the national average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is more than twice the national average. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are well below average. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds. There are significantly more boys at the school than girls. The school is designated a Technology College and Vocational Specialist School. The sixth form is part of the Liverpool North Central 14-19 Collaborative. The school has achieved a number of awards including the Investors in People standard, the Quality Award for Careers Education and Guidance, and the Healthy Schools Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Alsop High School is an outstanding school. Students make exceptional progress. The school is in the top 3% nationally and has been high achieving since 2004. Students' behaviour during the inspection was impeccable. The school provides a safe and orderly environment to which the students respond very well. They develop good relationships with each other and with adults. They show respect for their environment and have a high regard for their school. Students enjoy their education and are right to say that the guidance and support they receive help them to make outstanding progress. They appreciate the opportunities they get to express their views, and speak with confidence about how these have influenced changes. A very high proportion of parents expressed extremely positive views about the school and the benefits it brings for their children. Typical comments include: 'It is a very good school. I am proud that my child is part of it' and 'The school has become better than ever before'. The school is led and managed to a very high standard. As a result, staff work consistently to ensure that the curriculum and support for students are matched closely to individuals' needs. There is an unequivocal focus on improving the life chances of students by increasing standards of attainment. This has resulted in a strong trend of improvement. The school meets its targets as a specialist college well, having been successfully re-assessed twice and awarded an additional specialism in vocational subjects.

By the end of Key Stage 3 standards are below the national average and broadly average by the end of Key Stage 4. Currently just over half of students achieve five or more higher-grade GCSEs or equivalent, although the proportion including English and mathematics is much lower at 30%. These results are well above what national data suggests might be expected given the students' attainment levels when they started school. The proportion achieving higher-grade GCSEs has increased since the last inspection and more than doubled since 2001. It has improved at a rate much faster than the national average. The proportion including English and mathematics has also increased since the last inspection. Most groups of students achieve better than might be expected given their starting points and none achieve less than might be expected.

The personal development and well-being of the students is outstanding. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. They readily adopt safe practices in lessons and act sensibly when moving around the often cramped confines of the school buildings. They are polite and considerate towards each other, the staff and visitors to the school. The atmosphere around the school is calm, orderly and purposeful. Students are happy and feel safe. They say there is very little bullying and that any problems are dealt with swiftly and effectively by the school. The school's approach to tackling racist incidents is equally thorough and students know that the few instances reported are dealt with rapidly. Students respond very well to the wide variety of carefully planned activities both in the school and the sixth form which promotes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Many take part in the broad range of extra-curricular and sporting activities. Relationships between students and with the staff are strong. The school has extensive rewards systems and makes good use of attractive and well-maintained displays throughout the buildings to celebrate students' achievements and promote their personal development. Attendance at the school has improved since the last inspection as a result of the introduction of comprehensive and rigorously applied procedures for monitoring attendance and following up absences. In particular, there has been a significant reduction in the percentage of persistent absences. At the time of the inspection, the level of

students' attendance was broadly in line with the national average. The school's success in raising standards means that students are increasingly well-prepared for their future lives and careers.

The quality of teaching and learning is good and sometimes outstanding both within the school and the sixth form. Students respond very well to their teachers and, as a result, virtually no time is wasted in lessons dealing with poor behaviour. This contributes significantly to the progress students make. Most work is planned well and provides an appropriate level of challenge for the students. Most lessons are conducted briskly and teachers use a variety of activities well to reinforce students' learning and maintain their interest. Teaching assistants are briefed well and make a positive contribution to the progress of students who receive their support. There is a strong focus across the curriculum on developing basic skills. Most students clearly enjoy their lessons. One summed up the views of many, saying 'Teachers push you to do your best.'

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which contributes significantly to students' motivation and enjoyment, and has been important in raising the standards they reach. The school offers a wide range of subjects at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students say that the range of choices they get is one of the things they value most about the school. They are guided well in making their choices, which ensures that their individual curriculum is relevant to their needs, interests and aspirations, whilst being balanced. Individual programmes of support are provided for students identified with additional learning needs. As a result, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make excellent progress, for example in increasing their reading ages. The school has used its specialisms in technology and vocational studies to ensure there is a strong practical and work-related dimension to the curriculum. It has been innovative in linking these developments with its work with the wider community; for example, by running a hairdressing salon in premises for the local community. The curriculum is enhanced by excellent partnerships with businesses and other agencies. Events such as a fashion show have raised students' aspirations and improved their confidence.

Students are very well cared for, guided and supported in both the school and the sixth form. This has a significant effect on students' motivation and enjoyment of school. The school makes excellent use of detailed data on attainment to ensure all students have realistic and challenging targets, and to monitor their progress towards these targets closely. As a result, it has a very clear view of how well individual students are progressing, including those who are looked after, those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and gifted and talented students. Most parents are engaged very successfully in supporting their children and gain a clear understanding of their progress. Arrangements for students to transfer into the school and into the sixth form, both from within and outside Alsop High, work very effectively and ensure new arrivals settle in very quickly. The work of the mentors makes a very important contribution to the development of students' social skills and the individual attention they give is highly valued by the students. Students receive very good support to help them choose from the very wide range of courses available to them both at Key Stage 4 and post-16 and this has contributed significantly to increasing the number staying in the sixth form and completing their courses. Procedures for safeguarding students are clear and communicated effectively to staff and checks on the suitability of staff to work with students are kept up to date. Detailed records are kept of health and safety checks.

The headteacher and senior staff provide outstanding leadership to the school. They have established a culture of openness, accountability and constant improvement that has resulted in significantly higher standards of attainment, improved attendance and increased participation

in post-16 education and training. They have ensured that heads of faculty and other managers at the school are playing a full part in bringing about these improvements. The performance management of faculties is very thorough and makes excellent use of data on students' achievement. As a result, the school offers an environment in which both staff and students can give of their best. The school runs very smoothly on a daily basis as a result of clear and well-communicated procedures and routines. These have, for example, helped to increase attendance. The school has excellent relationships with other schools, most notably through the collaborative sixth form. These have been used extremely effectively to ensure students have an extensive choice of subjects and courses, which has had a significant impact on both their motivation to learn and the progress they make. Governors are closely involved in the work of the school and financial management is very good. The school is diligent in evaluating all areas of its work and uses information gathered through its monitoring, along with parental and students' views, intelligently to plan improvements. The school has demonstrated good capacity to improve.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Standards in the sixth form have improved significantly since the last inspection. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. Students on BTEC programmes make excellent progress and reach standards which are above average. Students on A-level courses make good progress and reach standards that are broadly average. Excellent partnerships with other sixth forms in the North Central Liverpool 14-19 Collaborative have enabled the school to make a much wider range of courses available to students and have provided opportunities for study elsewhere. Changes to the curriculum have been planned carefully to ensure students are able to build on their studies at Key Stage 4. As a result, the number of students staying into the sixth form has increased significantly.

What the school should do to improve further

- No areas for improvement were identified of which the school was not already aware and taking appropriate action.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	IE 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	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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.

² IE - denotes that insufficient evidence was available to inspectors for a judgement to be made.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	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	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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

Thank you for talking to me and my colleague and making us welcome when we visited your school recently. We spoke with you in lessons, around the school and in groups, looked at your work, read the results of questionnaires completed by your parents/carers, and spoke with some of your teachers. Here is a summary of our main findings, which I hope will be of interest to you.

- Alsop High is an outstanding school. It is very popular with your parents.
- It is led and managed very well.
- The progress you make is exceptional when compared with your starting points.
- You enjoy being at school and feel that the teachers care about you. You are confident that the staff will help you with your work or any problems.
- The quality of the care, guidance and support you receive is excellent. This makes a very important contribution to the progress you make at school.
- You enjoy the very wide range of courses on offer at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- You enjoy lessons and feel safe at school.
- The headteacher and the staff at the school have a good understanding of what needs to be done to make things even better.

I ask you to do everything you can to support the staff in making Alsop High an even better school.