

# Alfreton Grange Arts College

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	112931
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	325719
Inspection dates	17–18 June 2009
Reporting inspector	Philippa Francis HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	707
Sixth form	122
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Chris Slater
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Sharp
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 January 2006
School address	Grange Street Alfreton Derbyshire DE55 7JA
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 30 lessons, and held meetings with staff, governors and students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a wide range of documentation, including whole-school policies, improvement plans and the school's analysis of a range of data. They considered the responses included in 39 parental questionnaires which were returned to the inspection team.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of actions taken by the school to ensure that the achievement of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities improves
- achievement, including of broader outcomes, of students in the sixth form
- whether teaching and learning meet the needs of students of lower ability
- the impact of the college's arts specialism and vocational provision across the curriculum.

## Information about the school

Alfreton Grange Arts College is smaller than average in size with a small but growing sixth form. The college took on its new name at the point of gaining arts college specialist status in September 2008. Students' attainment on entry aged 11 varies slightly across cohorts between broadly average and below average. The proportions of male and female students are similar. Many more students than average are eligible for free school meals and a high percentage of students in the sixth form receive educational maintenance allowances. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. A higher than average percentage of students has learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

3

Capacity for sustained improvement

3

## Main findings

Alfreton Grange is a satisfactory and improving college. The college is welcoming and inclusive. Staff promote a high level of care and support for students from a wide range of backgrounds. A distinctive feature of the college is the way in which it promotes the development of creativity through college life in all students, regardless of their artistic skill.

The college has a satisfactory capacity to improve. Since the last inspection, managers have put in place many much-needed actions to bring about improvement, albeit some relatively recently, such as actions to improve the achievement of underperforming groups of students. The trend of improvement overall is positive but is not yet consistent across all areas of the college's work. The quality of care, guidance and support and the curriculum have improved compared to the previous inspection, but other aspects of provision, such as teaching, are satisfactory. Self-evaluation is largely accurate in identifying areas of strength and aspects of the college's work in need of improvement. The majority of self-assessment grades awarded, however, are over generous. Self-evaluation of the sixth form is insufficiently evaluative.

The college provides a safe and welcoming environment: students feel safe and most enjoy coming to college as shown by the significant improvement in attendance.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory: students make satisfactory progress in almost all lessons and develop a useful range of skills to support their future economic well-being; lessons contain many good features although the use of assessment to support learning is insufficient. In the sixth form there are insufficient opportunities for students to develop their independent learning skills.

Care, guidance and support are good: vulnerable students and those at risk of underachieving receive a high level of care and are guided well through transition points during their college life.

Governance is satisfactory: governors are gaining confidence and skill; their role in strategic planning and the robustness with which they hold the college to account

are underdeveloped. Governors have not yet ensured that a comprehensive strategy for community cohesion is in place.

Partnership work is good and beneficial in supporting students' learning: staff at all levels, strongly led by the headteacher, foster productive partnerships between a wide range of stakeholders.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to be consistently good at Key Stages 3 and 4 by ensuring that:
  - assessment is used consistently to support learning and marking of work and feedback is of high quality and used constructively to help students improve their work
  - teachers use a broader and more interesting range of strategies tailored to meet the needs of the most and least able students and to increase the level of challenge to all students
  - the good practice in the use of creative and inspiring learning strategies which exist in a few subject areas is shared more effectively across all subject areas.
- Strengthen the role of governors in determining the strategic direction of the school by ensuring that:
  - remaining underperformance within the school is challenged robustly
  - governors have an increased influence on strategic planning
  - a comprehensive strategy for community cohesion is developed.
- Improve the quality of provision in the sixth form by ensuring that:
  - self-evaluation is sharply focused on all aspects of the work of the sixth form
  - teaching and learning strategies encourage the development of independent learning skills.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3
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Standards in national tests and examinations have improved since the last inspection and are broadly average. The college achieved its best ever results in GCSE examinations in 2008. The percentage of students gaining five or more good GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, was more than double the low attainment of 2007, closing the gap significantly between the school's and national performance. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those with lower than average prior attainment have made limited progress. The school has put

actions in place to improve the performance of both these groups in the current year and inspectors' observations of lessons confirmed that the progress made by these students is now satisfactory. Students enjoy their learning, especially in the school's specialist subjects, and where they are engaged practically in activities. Other features of students' learning and performance in lessons include:

- satisfactory progress in most lessons: students work effectively and most students tackle set tasks willingly, they work well in groups and with adults but are, at times, inclined to be passive in their approach to learning
- good progress in many lessons in the school's specialist subjects and in vocational subjects; students develop their creative skills increasingly effectively and become more self-confident and competent in a range of practical skills
- an increasingly high awareness of safety and the importance of healthy lifestyles; students show a good understanding of the need to protect their own and others' safety and a keenness to improve their health and fitness
- good development of a wide range of personal, social, basic and life skills
- much improved attendance.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	3
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	3
To what extent do pupils feel safe?	2
How well do pupils behave?	2
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

## How effective is the provision?

Lessons contain many good features. However, these features are not widespread enough in all lessons and, consequently, not enough lessons are consistently good. As a result, students' learning and progress varies across subjects. Features of the teaching and learning include:

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

- good relationships, a positive learning environment and good behaviour
- very effective deployment of teaching assistants in the majority of lessons
- improved planning of learning using detailed pupil profiles as a basis
- particularly good encouragement and support for vulnerable students
- some inspirational and motivational approaches to learning developed through the use of specialist status
- a tendency for some lessons to be over-directed by the teacher with too few opportunities for students to reflect on their own work or learn through group or paired work
- inconsistencies in the quality of marking and feedback to students on how to improve their work.

A broad and interesting curriculum and good care and guidance support learning effectively. These aspects of the college’s work have been influential in improving attendance, and personal and social development. A considerable number of students join the college from challenging backgrounds. The college’s inclusive approach and broad curriculum is a significant factor in promoting their success. Other aspects of the college’s work that support learning are:

- a wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities
- much improved systems for monitoring students’ progress that are well supported by accurate and useful data
- good transition guidance for students into the college, between key stages and into post-16 study or employment
- a dedicated ‘positive support room’ which offers an exceptionally high level of support for vulnerable students
- improved care and support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, although communication among learning support staff and the dissemination of good practice are underdeveloped
- increased and effective use of teaching assistants to support literacy development, although deployment is not uniform across the college.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

The quality of teaching	3
The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher has brought about considerable improvements to the college’s ethos. Along with increasingly effective middle leaders, the headteacher and senior managers are communicating high expectations to staff. Their actions have resulted in significant improvement for most groups of students in 2008 to a satisfactory level of achievement. Actions by managers to improve teaching and learning have not yet

proved fully successful. The governing body has not yet ensured that a comprehensive strategy for promoting community cohesion is in place.

Other features of leadership and management are:

- good partnership arrangements which provide a breadth of learning opportunities
- ensuring a safe and well-cared for campus
- good promotion of equality of opportunity through the curriculum and a determination by all to give every student an equal chance
- increased use of challenging targets but insufficient embedding of these at all levels and for all groups of students
- the implementation of comprehensive safeguarding arrangements.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

The effectiveness of leadership and management in communicating ambition and driving improvement	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

## Sixth form

The majority of students enter the sixth form with well below average prior attainment. The curriculum meets their needs because it has been extended to include a broad range of courses at Levels 1 to 3. Students make satisfactory progress and develop maturity. Results in GCE AS and A-level examinations are well below average, but results in qualifications at Levels 1 and 2 and vocational courses are more average. Other features of the sixth form include:

- high levels of progression to further or higher education
- improving retention
- satisfactory teaching and assessment
- an increased and more effective one to one and group support for students
- a developing, but not yet formalised, curriculum for personal and social development with insufficient focus on the statutory requirement for religious education.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3
Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3

## Views of parents and carers

The rate of response to the parental questionnaire was extremely low. Most responses expressed a high level of satisfaction. A very few parents raised concerns about limited communication about their children’s progress. Inspectors identified some isolated occasions where reports had been delayed but did not find that this was widespread.

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of students registered at Alfreton Grange Arts College to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. If a parent has more than one child at the school, we ask them to record an answer against all the questions, for each of their children.

The inspection team received 39 completed questionnaires. In total, there are 1,186 parents and carers registered at the school.

	Always	Most of the time	Occasionally	Never
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	16	19	3	1

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007-8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007-8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007-8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007-8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

- Attainment:** the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
- Progress:** the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
- Achievement:** the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, training or development. This may refer to the acquisition of skills, knowledge, understanding or desired attributes. Attributes include qualities or personal competencies which are important to the development of the pupil; for example personal, social, cultural, emotional or health.
- Capacity to improve:** the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
- Leadership and management:** the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.

19 June 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Alfreton Grange Arts College, Alfreton,  
DE55 7JA



Thank you for welcoming us to your college, we enjoyed meeting many of you and seeing you at work. We were particularly impressed by the high standard of creative work many of you have produced, both in displays around the college and in the artistic productions you contribute to. Thank you for the time and trouble you took to talk to us. Below is a summary of what we thought of your school.

- Alfreton Grange is a satisfactory and improving arts college.
- You receive satisfactory teaching and attain average results in examinations.
- Your learning, and the progress you make in lessons have improved considerably in the last two years, especially most recently for those of you who find learning difficult.
- Your behaviour is good and most of you work diligently; sometimes you are too passive in lessons and do not think and act for yourselves; we have asked your teachers to increase the levels of challenge in all lessons so that you are all stretched to reach your potential.
- Teachers do not always use assessment, including homework, sufficiently well to ensure this supports your learning; we have asked teachers to increase their focus on assessment and its role in all lessons.
- You receive good care, guidance and support, especially those of you who need extra help to overcome barriers to learning.
- The college provides a safe, welcoming and creative learning environment.
- The sixth form is satisfactory and supports the transition into post-16 studies that an increasing number of you make; we have asked managers to evaluate the sixth form more thoroughly to improve its provision further.
- Governors support the college well but we have asked them to have a stronger influence on the strategic direction of the college.

I hope many of you will read the report, thank you again for your contribution to the inspection. I wish you all the best for your future.

Yours faithfully

Philippa Francis  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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