

Altrincham Grammar School for Girls

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106362
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	324381
Inspection dates	18 September 2008
Reporting inspector	John Coleman HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll	
School (total)	1,218
Sixth form	327
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs C E Foan
Headteacher	Mrs D Ross-Wawrzynski
Date of previous school inspection	November 2005
School address	Cavendish Road Bowdon Altrincham WA14 2NL
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and of the sixth form and investigated the following issues: students' achievement and standards, the impact of the school's Specialist Status on the opportunities available to students and the effectiveness of leadership and management, particularly that of middle leaders. Evidence was gathered from: the school's own self-evaluation form (SEF); national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records; curriculum, planning and monitoring documents; observation of parts of lessons; discussions with staff, governors and students; and from parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Altrincham Grammar School for Girls is a larger than average selective school with a relatively large sixth form. Students who meet the academic standards set for admission are allocated places on the basis of living nearest to the school. It is a Specialist Language college and is also a Specialist Training school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is very low and the school has very few students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Around one in five students come from a range of minority ethnic groups and very small numbers do not speak English as their first language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Altrincham Grammar School for Girls is an outstanding school. As one parent wrote, reflecting the views of many, 'The school engenders a very special sense of pride in its students and will stretch them to reach their potential and obtain a great sense of achievement.' Examination results are exceptionally high but the school shows no complacency and the school's leadership is firmly focused on further improvements. Students work very hard, behave impeccably and display excellent attitudes to learning. The impact of Language College and Training School status permeates the life of the school and is very effective in providing many enriching opportunities for students and increases their impressive achievement.

Students enter the school with well above average levels of attainment overall when compared to all schools nationally, although the school's admission policy results in a lower than average attainment on entry when compared to most other grammar schools. The end of Key Stage 3 national assessments in 2007 reveal students reaching very high attainment levels in English, mathematics and science. Outstanding progress is made throughout the school and GCSE examination results in 2007 show that 100% of students gained at least five A* to C grades including mathematics and English. In all subjects at GCSE standards are above average. The proportion of students achieving the highest A*/A grades is four times the national average. This represents exceptionally high standards and outstanding achievement.

Students achieve outstandingly well because the quality of teaching throughout the school is of a consistent high quality. The vast majority of lessons are good or better and many are outstanding. The relationships between teachers and students are first class and built upon mutual trust and understanding. Students say that teachers are approachable and always available, for example, in the many extra sessions at lunch-time when students can catch up following a lesson. The result is that students demonstrate a remarkable appetite for learning: they show interest and sustain concentration in lessons so that they achieve the maximum from their teachers' input. The leadership of the school is extremely effective in deploying almost every teacher to teach lessons in their subject of expertise. They are also able to teach the subject to all year groups. Consequently, students gain from lessons in which the subject knowledge of the teacher is very high. Additionally, teachers are very aware of the prior learning of students and of the next steps needed. This leads to well matched tasks for students which provide stimulating and challenging activities. Teachers engage students by using a variety of teaching styles and strategies but do not always provide sufficient opportunities for students to contribute actively to their own learning.

The school is superbly led by the headteacher and colleagues speak openly of her inspiration, drive and determination to attain increasingly higher achievements for the school and its students. Overall the leadership and management of the school are outstanding. The senior leadership team, provide great experience and knowledge of the school, education and the relative strengths and weaknesses in the school's provision. This is because the procedures for checking the school's performance are very well structured, tightly organised and carried out with rigour and expertise. This high quality extends to the school's middle leaders. At departmental level, staff are confident in their roles, clear about their direction and

keen to develop their subject to the highest standard. They speak with passionate conviction about their own professional development and praise the headteacher and senior leaders for distributing decision making and giving them autonomy. The skills of staff at all levels are greatly enhanced by the school's excellent provision for training and development. Governors are very well informed through the information they receive from the school's leadership. They are fully involved in the life of the school and their frequent visits means that they are well placed to fulfil their role as a critical friend. Parents are encouraged to be involved in the school, such as in the sixth form 'drop in' sessions which take place during lunch-times. Parent questionnaires received by inspectors are fulsome in their praise and appreciation of the school's work.

Since the last inspection the standards which students attain has continued to rise. There is a trend of year-on-year improvement. In particular the impact of Language College status has been excellent. There is an extensive choice of languages which students may learn. The formal curriculum offers French, Spanish and German. The numbers of students opting for extra languages is growing and the participation in the sixth form is increasing too. Grades achieved in examinations at GCSE, AS and A2 are very high and represent outstanding achievement. Additionally, students may learn extra languages as extra-curricular activities and these include Russian, Chinese and Japanese. There are several international links with other schools which are well established. Exchange visits take place for students and teachers also come to Altrincham attracted by the school's experience and notable reputation as a training school. There are outstanding partnerships with local primary schools and staff and students provide language support and guidance to the younger children. In addition the school disseminates its excellent practice to other secondary schools in the local area. A strong partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University provides trainee teachers with first-hand classroom experience. The school has outstanding capacity to improve.

The school's second specialism as a training school attracts extra funding which is well used to extend and enrich curriculum opportunities for students and professional development opportunities for staff. Visiting speakers offer expert guidance to students. For example, during the inspection a chief examiner spoke to students about the value of A2 general studies. The programme of staff development includes opportunities for educational research and to gain external qualifications such as master's degree studies. The school staff have recently established a range of working parties to organise and coordinate staff training in the identified areas for whole school improvement. Staff are also widening their experience and honing their skills through effective collaboration with other schools in different circumstances.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The sixth form provides an outstanding education for all its students. Standards are exceptionally high and achievement is outstanding. The proportion of students who transfer into sixth form from the main school is high (about 85%) and students speak enthusiastically about the very effective transition, which is due to the extensive guidance available when choices need to be made. An overwhelming percentage of students (99%) continue to study for A levels following their success in AS levels in Year 12. Every student leaving sixth form in 2007 accepted a place at

university or in higher education. The leadership and management of the sixth form are outstanding. Very close monitoring of students' progress is achieved through an excellent mentor system. Formal and informal systems complement each other so that students' subject performance is guided and supported effectively and students' personal development is nurtured well. There are close partnerships with other institutions, external agencies and with parents. There are increasing numbers of students choosing languages and work experience is provided in French, Spanish and German. The curriculum is well matched to students needs and students say they are very pleased with options available. In particular, students praise the excellent guidance they are given in deciding the next steps in their education. Heads of department are well informed about the merits of each subject and their usefulness for university application. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding with particular strengths in the subject knowledge of teachers.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the opportunities for students to contribute actively to their own learning in lessons.

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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	1	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
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 learners' needs?	1	1
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.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

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	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
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	1	
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	

Annex B



19 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Altrincham Grammar School for Girls, Altrincham, WA14 2NL

On behalf of Mrs Tolley and myself I would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and talking to you about your school.

Altrincham Grammar School for Girls is an outstanding school. Your headteacher and all of the staff and governors provide excellent care, guidance and support for you. The teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects and deliver high quality lessons. You learn extremely well because of this outstanding teaching but also because you work very hard, concentrate well and behave wonderfully. The school makes the most of its specialist language college status and you appreciate the very wide range of opportunities available to you in this area. The training school status also means that you have extra resources and additional visits and visitors. You are making excellent progress in your studies and you are achieving extremely high academic standards. You told us how you appreciate the very good guidance which you receive when making choices particularly as you move into sixth form. The very wide range of extra-curricular activities is enjoyed by a great many of you.

The school has a very clear idea of what it needs to do next to improve even further but we have identified one area which needs improvement.

- In lessons you need to be able to be more actively involved in the learning.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Coleman
HMI