

Astley Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122374
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	327711
Inspection dates	2–3 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Paul Hancock 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 students	13–18
Gender of students	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	892
Sixth form	175
Appropriate authority	The Governing Body
Chair	Mr Peter Hillman
Headteacher	Mr Ian Knight
Date of previous school inspection	November 2005
School address	Elsdon Avenue Seaton Delaval Whitley Bay Northumberland NE25 0BP
Telephone number	0191 2371505
Fax number	0191 2376891

Age group	13–18
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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

Astley Community High School is located in south east Northumberland. Many students come from average social and economic circumstances and nearly all students have English as their first language. There are very few students from minority ethnic groups. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average. The school is legally federated with Whytrig and Seaton Sluice Middle Schools and shared the same governing body from September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Astley is a good school. It was satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection in 2005 and has significantly improved. This is the result of strong leadership by the headteacher working closely with senior managers and governors and provides a good foundation to make further improvements.

Students make good progress including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Key Stage 3 test results in 2007 were average, taken after the students started in Year 9. The school knows challenging targets were not fully met and is taking the right action to make further improvements working closely with the federated schools.

The achievement of students at Key Stage 4 has significantly improved. Results rose from 58% of students in 2005 gaining higher GCSE grades to 64% in 2007. Unvalidated 2008 results show 81% gained higher grades which is significantly above average and exceeded challenging targets. A similar improvement can be seen in the GCSE results including English and mathematics.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. The proportion of good teaching has significantly risen since the previous inspection. The school knows learning is constrained by independent study skills which are insufficiently well developed. It also knows there is still not enough consistently good teaching to further raise achievement. The curriculum has improved and is better matched to the needs of students.

Attendance has improved from below to above average and behaviour is good. Both are the result of the determination by leaders and managers to drive the school forward. Personal development is good because the school has the safety and well-being of students at the centre of its work. Care, guidance, and support are good and students say they feel safe and enjoy learning. A comment by one parent reflected the views of many when saying 'Astley is a good school which really cares about their children'. Links with local and international communities promote community cohesion very well.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Strong leadership by the headteacher is making sure the school continues to improve. The school's own evaluation of how well it is doing is accurate. Capacity to improve is good. Resources and accommodation are effectively deployed to achieve good value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form is improving and provides a good education for students. Attainment on entry is broadly average to below average. Students make good progress and achieve well. Results are average and rising. Since the last inspection, good progress has been made improving the quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum, monitoring of progress, student guidance and leadership.

The improvement in guidance for both students and staff has resulted in students selecting more appropriate courses which are often a blend of vocational and academic provision. Teaching is good because it is sharply focused to individual student needs. Students are well aware of what they need to do to improve because they are familiar with the course criteria and the way in which their work is assessed.

Relationships are excellent. Students are well supported and are keen to take responsibilities within the school and beyond. For example student's work is linked with the elderly residents who attend school to develop information and communication technology (ICT) skills.

Good leadership is provided by the sixth form director and the team is well focused on raising standards by rigorously monitoring and supporting the progress of students. Many more students are finishing their courses and are leaving school well equipped for the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further increase the proportion of good and better teaching and share best practice.
- Develop independent study skills at an earlier age, particularly using ICT.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good and standards are above average. A significant proportion of students start at the school in Year 9 with average attainment and skills. They make good progress, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and standards are above average by the end of Year 11.

Key Stage 3 test results in 2007 were average. Boys did not do as well as girls, particularly in English. Unvalidated 2008 test results in Year 9 showed the number of students gaining higher levels in English, mathematics, and science has improved. The school knows challenging targets were not fully met and is taking the right action to make further improvements working closely with the federated schools.

GCSE results have significantly improved. Unvalidated 2008 results are above average and challenging targets were met and exceeded. They were best in mathematics and science. The school knows where there is underachievement, for example in religious education, drama and physical education and has taken the right action to make improvements.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The personal development and well being of students and their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development are good. They behave well and enjoy their time at the school. Attendance has significantly improved and the rate of exclusions has fallen as a result of a range of effective measures taken by the school. Personal, social and health education are well led by tutors with contributions from outside

agencies through timetabled lessons and occasional learning days. The school promotes healthy lifestyles through encouraging participation in sport, cycling or walking to school and provides healthy food which students enjoy.

Students' contribution to local and international communities is very good. For example they teach computer skills to older local residents and have excellent links with three schools in Sri Lanka and a village in Ghana. Students help teach French, mathematics and physical education in partner first schools and sixth form students help in main school lessons. Work experience placements are well matched to students' needs and good links with industry ensure students are well prepared for the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Inspection evidence confirms the school is accurate in its own evaluation. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons effectively to include a variety of tasks and teaching styles with challenging questions to develop students' thinking skills.

Teachers use ICT effectively to engage students in learning. However, student access to ICT is limited, particularly when they are engaged in personal study and independent learning. As a result, they are not always making progress as quickly as they should. Students are focused in lessons and their behaviour is good. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and one parent reflected the views of many when saying 'there is a culture of respect in the school'.

Student progress is effectively monitored and specific areas for improvement are identified. This information is shared once a term with parents and students and, as a result, all students are aware of their current levels and how to improve them. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully supported and make good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good curriculum which is tailored to meet the needs of the students. There has been a considerable change in the curriculum since the last inspection resulting in more rapid progress and higher standards. Student data on entry is used to match students with the best programmes of study at Key Stage 4. Year 9 students take part in a learning programme which provides the skills to achieve future success.

The Key Stage 4 curriculum was modified following wide consultation including local employers. There is a good balance between academic and vocational subjects and the choice of vocational subjects is being extended. There is a good range of extra curricular activities which are well attended.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support provided by the school is good and is valued by students and parents. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are in place and all staff are appropriately trained. A strong pastoral system exists and there is good support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The strong links with partner schools and the support at transition is valued by all the students and their parents, ensuring the change is smooth.

Students feel safe and know where to go should a problem arise. They say bullying is not a major problem and that the school takes swift and effective action when it is reported. Trained peer mentors are actively involved in pastoral care and support new students at transition.

Parents are kept well informed of progress through regular reports, consultation evenings and the student planners which are used as an effective means of communication. Students understand their targets. Good careers education and links with post-16 providers help to ensure progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management at all levels are good. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive and feel that school is very well led and managed. The school provides a sensible framework for improvement. Senior leaders are effective and well informed. This is because the school has thorough and accurate systems of monitoring and self evaluation. They have made considerable improvements since the time of the last inspection guided well by an effective and experienced governing body.

Governors take an active role in the rigorous monitoring of the school and provide good support for the leadership when making changes. The successful focus on raising standards has resulted in a much sharper view on what needs to be done. For example, it has involved middle leaders rigorously monitoring the progress of students in their subjects to ensure all students are meeting challenging targets. The school knows the information can be used even more effectively and is taking the right action to do this.

Resources and accommodation are effectively deployed to achieve good value for money against a background of old buildings in urgent need of refurbishment and repair. The school is working hard on the opportunities presented through the federation with two middle schools. The school's links with the community are good and promote community cohesion very well.

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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?	2	2
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?	2	2
The effectiveness of boarding provision	NA	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	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	2	
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	

¹Grade 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.

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	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	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	



4 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Astley Community High School, Northumberland NE25 0BP

Thank you for all your help when I inspected the school with my colleagues. Please would you pass on my thanks to your parents and carers for returning the questionnaires and say we took all their views into account. I thought you might like to know what we thought about your school.

- Astley has significantly improved and is a good school with a good sixth form.
- Strong leadership by the headteacher working closely with senior managers and governors is making sure the school continues to improve.
- You make good progress and standards are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The curriculum has improved and is better matched to your needs.
- Care, guidance, support and personal development are good.

Your teachers and the staff work hard and want to make the school even better. To help them do this, I have asked if they would:

- Further increase the proportion of good and better teaching;
- Develop your independent study skills at an earlier age, particularly using ICT.

I wish you every success in all you do in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Hancock
Her Majesty's Inspector