

Aigburth High School

Minehead Road, Aigburth, Liverpool, L17 6AX

Inspection dates

20–21 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Students' achievements are not always consistently good and therefore require improvement. Targets to help students know what is expected of them in lessons are not always used.
- Reliable methods to gather information about students' learning have recently been set up. Although becoming available quickly, they cannot yet fully show how students make progress over longer periods of time.
- The quality of teaching requires improvement. The very wide range of students' needs result in staff sometimes struggling to help them learn effectively in some classes. Some poor behaviour relates to lapses in staff supervision and inconsistent behaviour management.
- Occasionally, students do not receive appropriate literacy and numeracy support because some staff have not completed their training.
- Some teachers plan for what whole classes do rather than how individual students learn. This sometimes slows students' learning.
- Systems for managing the school have been introduced but are not yet fully implemented. Consequently, managers are at the early stages of showing that teaching and students' achievements are improving.
- The governing body cannot yet show that the pupil premium funding is always used for those for whom it is entitled.

The school has the following strengths

- In some subjects students gain better-than-expected qualifications. Sixth-form students are making good progress.
- Some lessons are excellent because of outstanding teaching. Here, students make outstanding progress.
- Students behaviour is generally good. Staff and parents report recently improved behaviour is leading to a safer school.
- Much is done to encourage students to learn about others. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The new headteacher has provided a new beginning. Students, staff and parents report the school is improving rapidly in every way.
- Following a full review, the governing body is becoming increasingly effective. Performance management is beginning to lead to effective targets for improvements related to pay.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 10 lessons given by 10 teachers and teaching assistants. They spent around four and a half hours in classrooms, including the school withdrawal unit. Students' reading was seen and heard during the course of their lessons.
- The inspectors observed students having their lunch and enjoying breaktimes. They watched them arrive at school in the morning and leave in the evening.
- Students' classwork and examination coursework was examined. The inspectors spoke with students informally to gain their views and opinions.
- A sample of students' statements of special educational needs were scrutinised together with records of their statutory annual reviews.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other members of the senior team, middle managers, teachers, members of the school administration team and a representative of the local authority, who is also the school improvement partner. Five parents were interviewed, three of whom are also members of the governing body. An inspector spoke formally about the governing body with the Chair of the Governing Body and another member.
- The views of staff were noted through discussing the school with them, no staff questionnaires were returned.
- There were insufficient responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) but inspectors took note of the views of those they met and by looking at the school's own questionnaires undertaken recently.
- The work of the unit was observed and important documents concerning Aigburth's own understanding of how well it works, planning, safeguarding, attendance, behaviour and the achievements of students were looked at, including for those in sixth form and any using alternative educational arrangements.

Inspection team

Terry McKenzie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Potter

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is a special school for day students. All have a statement of special educational needs.
- Aigburth admits those recognised as having complex learning difficulties comprising a variety of special educational needs. Almost all students have moderate learning difficulties but most also have specific learning difficulties and/or communication problems including autistic spectrum conditions.
- Many students also have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and, for a very few, their statement of special educational needs identifies this as their prime learning difficulty.
- Numbers are fairly evenly distributed between Key Stages 3 and 4. This year, at the request of the local authority, the school has admitted sixth-form students for the first time and the local authority is in the process of changing the registration of the school with the Department for Education to make this permanent.
- Around two thirds of students receive pupil premium funding which, in this school, comprises those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- The school serves a large area of Liverpool. The great majority of students are of White British heritage; there are more boys than girls.
- A new headteacher was appointed in September of last year and changes have since been made to the senior leadership team.
- Some years ago the school set up an on-site facility to educate those who cannot manage their behaviour in the ordinary classes. The unit is still functioning but has changed its role to provide a very short-term nurturing facility for those who require additional assistance in their learning.
- The school does not have any formal partnership arrangements with other schools, but, on an occasional basis, outreach support is provided to other secondary schools. The only alternative educational provision used is Greenbank College, Liverpool that is inspected in its own right by Ofsted. Currently, only a very few students use this facility.
- Very recently the local authority has recognised that the fabric of the school building is becoming unfit for the purposes of a special school. The authority plans to provide a brand new school building for Aigburth by 2015.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Managers must ensure that students have every opportunity to make the maximum possible progress in lessons by:
 - directing teachers to make use of the latest information about students' learning to set individual targets for improvement that can operate throughout each lesson
 - providing training for staff and then introducing clear and workable policies so that support for students' literacy and numeracy development is consistent throughout school
 - liaising with the local authority to ensure that the school admits only those students for whom it can fully meet their needs in learning and managing behaviour.
- Managers must ensure there is a consistent approach to the management of behaviour throughout the school by:
 - continuing to provide staff with training so that they fully understand how to implement the behaviour-management policy
 - routinely checking that the supervision undertaken by staff at break times is appropriate.
- Managers and the governing body must ensure that:
 - the pupil premium funding is utilised for those for whom it is intended

- the quality of teaching continues to improve through the effective use of performance management targets related to pay.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students arrive with achievements generally much lower than those of most others nationally. Often, information about their previous achievements is limited. Recently the school introduced reliable systems to handle information that helps staff understand about students' standards.
- The early indications from this information and from externally accredited examinations are that students make good progress and achieve well in some subjects. However, students do not achieve equally well in all areas of the curriculum and the information available cannot yet show that students make good progress over sustained periods of time. Therefore, students' achievement requires improvement.
- The indications from classroom observations during the inspection were that in some lessons students make good progress as a result of teaching that is effective but that this is not consistent.
- Students work seen during the inspection indicates that no group of students is disadvantaged or makes less progress than any other group. All are included in learning and none are discriminated against, including students in Key Stages 3 and 4, those from any minority ethnic groups, boys and girls and those with differing special educational needs.
- Those with weaker skills in literacy, including students known to be entitled to the pupil premium funding, have benefitted in the last year from the purchase of new resources such as additional staff time and materials to encourage reading.
- Year 11 students are on track to gain a greater range and a higher quality of external qualifications this year than any year previously. This is because of the higher expectations placed on teachers and students by the new senior leadership team. However, school records indicate that the achievements in English and mathematics will continue to be low compared to other similar groups nationally.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching seen during the inspection varied from requiring improvement to outstanding. This is in line with concerns raised by some parents about the inconsistent teaching resulting from high levels of staff absence and the regular use of temporary teachers.
- In some lessons, teachers have very high expectations of students and challenge them effectively. However, this does not happen in every lesson. When teachers teach whole-class groups they cannot easily challenge individuals with carefully matched targets for learning. In these circumstances students' progress is reduced.
- Some teachers undertake elaborate planning. However, very few lesson plans indicate exactly what it is that students will learn individually: plans concentrate on what they will do as a group and this restricts the attention that teachers pay to individuals.
- In some lessons up to 14 students are taught with a very wide range of special educational needs. Here, despite the best efforts of staff they are unable to provide sufficient consistent individual support to students. Consequently, students sometimes wait for help and this slows the rate at which they learn and, on some occasions, leads to inappropriate behaviour.
- Sometimes teachers question students skilfully, ensuring high levels of understanding and concentration. Occasionally, teachers form questions that fail to take account of students' different levels of ability resulting in them missing chances to contribute to lessons.
- Staff support for literacy and numeracy is not yet fully coordinated. The new senior team is aware of this and beginning to make improvements. In the meantime, however, whilst students receive support in lessons that is mainly effective they cannot always rely on consistent high-quality help from adults in reading, writing and number work. As a result students generally make expected, rather than good progress.

- Many teachers skilfully provide lessons with interesting things for students to do. Nevertheless, the quality of teaching overall is not always consistently good and, as a result, students do not always make the best possible progress in lessons.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Some outstanding behaviour in lessons results when there is an infectious enthusiasm for learning. Here, behaviour is supported by very secure relationships between adults and students.
- When behaviour is weaker it is when there are not enough adults to provide students with the support in lessons they require. Around the school, when adult supervision slips the standard of behaviour diminishes. This was observed when two girls were subjected to low-level harassment from a boy. On this occasion adults on duty were not far away but seemed unaware of the situation.
- Students report that the inconsistent use of the behaviour-management policy has previously resulted in adults not always intervening appropriately to prevent poor behaviour, but that this is changing.
- Students generally feel safe in school and parents support this view. There is little overt bullying but low-level harassment by others can be troublesome. Nevertheless, parents, students and staff all report that the school is becoming safer because the successful behaviour-management systems introduced by the new headteacher have provided more consistency.
- School records indicate behavioural incidents are reducing and that staff and students are safer as a consequence. Work undertaken by the school mentor and through tutorials helps students understand the consequences of their behaviour and to know more about the effects of bullying.
- Most students attend well. Attendance is improving year on year. The school is successfully improving attendance and the headteacher has set ambitious targets to improve it even further.
- Throughout their time in school students make good personal gains that help them move successfully on to the next stages of their lives. The school exposes them to a great variety of experiences through trips and visits into the city and beyond. Throughout the inspection most of the social interactions observed were good and, mostly, students obey the rules of the school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good by the time they leave school.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The school has been through a great deal of turmoil. However, with the appointment of the new headteacher it gained a new beginning. Parents, students and staff all report that the school has changed for the better since then. They say it is a more stable, calmer and more productive environment.
- The headteacher and new management team have already analysed the school, highlighting many weaknesses. They harnessed the support of the local authority very effectively and some issues including staff development are being dealt with. The school's own findings are in line with those of the inspection. Managers' plans reflect the needs of the school. These aspects of management are good and indicate that managers are capable of improving the school quickly.
- However, strategies introduced recently are only just becoming fully embedded and the early indications are that teaching is improving. Similarly, the good work done to bring in new systems capable of showing students' rates of learning are beginning to show that their progress is consistent. However, it is too early to be sure that students' rates of progress are being sustained.
- Nevertheless, through management that is gaining effectiveness, the school is improving. Successes include better guidance to staff about managing behaviour. Managers are raising expectations of staff and students about what can be achieved, and this is reflected in the predictions of what Year 11 students will gain in their examinations.
- The curriculum provides a good range of experiences and additional activities. It can be adjusted

to meet the needs and interest of any students. All are included in learning and none are discriminated against.

- The pupil premium funding has been used to purchase additional services to support students' communication developments. Generally, this money has been used wisely and for the good of all. However, managers cannot yet fully show how those entitled to the funding have benefited directly.
- Arrangements for checking the performance of teachers and other staff have been started but these are at a very early stage of development. Little has yet been done to set meaningful targets designed to improve the quality of teaching.
- The policies and practices associated with safeguarding are of a very high standard.
- The local authority is fully aware of the difficulties of the school. It provided the new headteacher with additional support, such as a school improvement partner and targeted training for staff. The authority recently recognised that the school building is no longer fit for purpose. It has plans for the construction of a new school in the near future.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body did not provide sufficient support and challenge in the past. Since the appointment of the headteacher it has undertaken a full review of its work and addressed many issues of governance, confirming its determination to provide closer support and challenge to managers. Members have successfully stabilised the finances of the school. Some members visit the school regularly to scrutinise important documents and hold the school to account. Nevertheless, the governing body has not yet ensured that the pupil premium funding is allocated to benefit those for whom it is intended. Furthermore, members have not yet introduced robust performance-management systems to improve teaching and relate the performance of staff to pay. The governing body ensures that all requirements for safeguarding are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	134658
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	402617

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bob Davies
Headteacher	Cath Piercy
Date of previous school inspection	14 July 2010
Telephone number	0151 4271863
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