

# Alderman Blaxill School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115380
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	357746
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 January 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	David Scott

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	262
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Brian Palmer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jonathan Tippett
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25 February 2009
<b>School address</b>	Paxman Avenue Colchester CO2 9DQ
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed teaching and learning in 22 lessons, observed 20 teachers, and had meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at self-evaluation documentation, monitoring and assessment information, lesson plans and school policies. They analysed questionnaires from students, staff and 24 parents and carers. The school's safeguarding procedures were also evaluated.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What has been the impact of schools' actions to raise attainment at Key Stage 4 across all subjects and to eliminate any significant variations between them?
- How well do teachers' use assessment data to ensure that all students make equal progress, including more able students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities?
- What actions have been taken to overcome weaknesses identified in the previous inspection and to confirm that the school has satisfactory or better capacity for sustained improvement?

## Information about the school

Alderman Blaxill school is much smaller in size than most secondary schools. The largest group of students are of White British heritage and there are more boys than girls in most year groups. The proportion of students who are from minority ethnic heritages are well below average. Very few students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is just above average. The proportion of students that join the school at times other than the usual starting points is much higher than that found nationally, partly because of the high mobility of families from the nearby army garrison. Around a third of all students, an above average proportion, have special educational needs and/ or disabilities. These are mainly dyslexia and moderate learning difficulties. The school has specially resourced provision for students with special educational needs. This is in the form of a unit which provides bespoke support for up to 20 students with dyslexia.

In January 2008, the governing body appointed the current executive headteacher, who also has responsibility for two nearby schools. A new associate headteacher was seconded from a partner school in September 2009 and a new hard federation and governing body were formed in March 2010.

Since October 2008, there have been three consultations undertaken by the local authority on the future of secondary education in Colchester. In all of the consultations there has been a proposal to close Alderman Blaxill School. The school is currently awaiting the decision from the local authority concerning the latest consultation.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**3**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

### Main findings

Alderman Blaxill School provides a satisfactory standard of education, but one that is improving. The school has undergone recent significant changes of senior leaders and teaching staff, mainly because of restructuring. The school's priority during this period has been to re-establish a shared vision among all staff in order to raise attainment and to bring about much needed stability. This has increased the confidence of staff, parents and carers.

The school faces exceptionally challenging circumstances mainly due to the high levels of mobility of students throughout the year, a falling roll and the threat of closure. Over the years, this turbulence had a significant impact on attainment. Recent initiatives have not yet had time to have a significant impact in raising the students' attainment further. Attainment is rising but is still below average. Progress and learning are improving securely as is the students' enjoyment of learning. Their progress accelerates as they move through the school so that their achievement overall is satisfactory. Students who join the school throughout the school year are well supported, so that they make satisfactory progress. However, many do not reach average levels of attainment due to their low starting points and interruptions in learning. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities generally make the progress expected of them. This is similar to the progress of their peers.

Students within the specially resourced unit make expected progress as a result of well-targeted one-to-one guidance. They are supported effectively in mainstream lessons and in discrete sessions within the unit so that they experience useful strategies to overcome their difficulties in literacy. As a result, their gains in literacy enable them to access more readily the mainstream curriculum. The day-to-day management of the unit is secure and it operates smoothly within the whole-school structures.

The school is a welcoming and harmonious community where students are happy and safe. They behave appropriately, respect the views of others and have a mature sense of what it means to live a healthy lifestyle. Good pastoral support and guidance, especially for those students and their families who are experiencing difficulties, make an increasingly positive contribution to the school's improving relationships with parents and carers. Students have developed a strong sense of fairness which has enabled them to improve their self-confidence and self-esteem. As a result, students are adequately prepared for the world of work and employment.

Leaders have brought about many improvements that are making a significant difference to the students. Through accurate self-evaluation and concerted action by all staff has developed teachers' skills and, as a result overall, teaching and learning are

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satisfactory, with some being good or better. Nevertheless, teachers are not routinely taking opportunities to promote students' literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects. There are pockets of good practice in assessment but teachers do not always ask sufficiently probing questions to ensure active participation in lessons or provide specific targets to help students, particularly the more able, to make consistently good progress and raise attainment. There are examples of good assessment practice but the quality is too variable. Monitoring information is used regularly by school leaders and with increasing accuracy to identify what the school does well and to plan for improvement. Criteria against which to judge the impact of any changes are not always sufficiently measurable. Some leaders are new in post and have yet to receive appropriate training and support to develop their skills to drive improvement. The governing body meets its statutory responsibilities and is supportive but has not systematically sought the views of stakeholders. Since the last inspection, the school has reduced exclusions, raised attainment and has improved attendance significantly. These actions demonstrate that it has satisfactory capacity to make the further improvements.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Improve progress and learning in lessons to raise attainment, particularly in English and mathematics, by:
  - ensuring teachers provide challenging activities matched to the needs of all students that support the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills
    - staff asking more probing questions in lessons which give students opportunities to develop and explain their ideas fully, especially for more-able students
    - ensuring students are active participants in lessons in order to challenge their thinking and accelerate progress
    - reviewing targets more systematically with students so that they clearly understand what to do to improve their work.
- Sharpen the effectiveness of leaders and managers in driving improvement by:
  - ensuring that tracking and monitoring information is analysed robustly and new developments are evaluated against measurable criteria
    - implementing a programme of coaching and mentoring for spreading good practice in assessment throughout the school
    - extending the capacity of leaders at all levels to manage their areas of responsibility effectively
    - ensuring that the governing body seeks the views of stakeholders more systematically.

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Alderman Blaxill is making a real difference to the students in its care. Year 11 students' attainment is improving steadily, although it is low. This is largely because many students have not had the benefit of being in the school from the normal starting point in Year 7 or have experienced a legacy of variable teaching in the past which has impeded their progress. From low starting points when they enter the school, students make increasingly fast progress and achieve satisfactorily. Students are motivated to learn because of the good relationships with staff and each other. They behave appropriately in lessons and have an increasing desire to improve their learning. Most of those who previously demonstrated challenging behaviour have been motivated by the school's drive to help students achieve. This was very evident in an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson where students were learning how to design a webpage. During the lesson they examined each other's work closely in order to improve their understanding of examination grade criteria. Students' learning flourished as a result of the teacher carefully planning and matching tasks to their individual needs. Similarly, in a Year 9 girls' physical education lesson on basketball, students were enthusiastically engaged in improving their attack and defense techniques. Students were very well motivated and skilled at assessing each other's performance and suggesting points for improvement and, as a result, most students made good progress. Students' progress is accelerating as they move through the school. Through changes to the curriculum and the more systematic monitoring of the work of departments, unevenness in the performance of different subjects is gradually being eliminated. For example, students' performance in English and science has improved, but as yet a sustained record of improvement has not been achieved in mathematics. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities from the on-site unit and within the main school make satisfactory progress, as do those who speak English as an additional language. This is as a result of effective guidance and one-to-one tuition.

The school has worked hard with students, parents and carers to emphasise the importance of good attendance, which has improved markedly over the last year. The number of persistent absentees has reduced significantly.

Students are very positive about the changing and improving ethos in the school. They say they feel safe and enjoy their education. Students are confident that the rare cases of bullying are addressed promptly. They have a mature understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, participating enthusiastically in sporting activities and physical pursuits.

Students are keen to take on responsibilities and report the value of the school council, whose views are regularly discussed at meetings with senior staff. For example, students were recently involved in commissioning the installation of new toilets. Older students from the health and social care group have been trained as 'youth health trainers' to give advice on a range of health issues to younger pupils. In collaboration with their peers from the federation schools, students regularly work with representatives from the local community on joint business and leadership projects.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>3</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

Teaching is improving quickly due to more rigorous monitoring by leaders and managers. Relationships between staff and students are positive and ICT is used well to make the lessons interesting. Students who find learning difficult or who have particular learning barriers are supported well because staff focus sharply on their needs. There are pockets of good practice in the use of assessment. It has been used well to drive up attainment within art, ICT and science. However, in some lessons teachers' explanations are too long and do not consistently engage students as active participants in lessons or use questions that challenge their thinking to explain their ideas, particularly for the more able. Target setting and marking do not always signpost clearly how students can improve their work.

The curriculum has recently been reorganised and is increasingly effective at meeting the needs and enthusiasms of all students, for example the introduction of some vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. Students experience a range of activities. Guest speakers, musical productions, talent shows and clubs, ranging from film club to basketball, enhance the curriculum further. This, together with visits and a residential trip for Year 7 students, provide opportunities for students to broaden their personal and academic skills. Nevertheless, the range of vocational pathways into training and employment is too narrow to meet the increasingly sophisticated aspirations of students. The school is rightly proud of its good care, guidance and support. Students who speak

<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.

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English as an additional language are integrated and supported well in lessons. Consequently they make the same progress as their classmates. Most students whose circumstances make them vulnerable benefit greatly from the support provided for them in partnership with external agencies. Staff can point to real successes in helping students overcome difficult histories and challenging episodes in their lives. The inclusion team provides a wide range of support to enable vulnerable students and those from the specially resourced unit to play a full part in school life and is increasingly successful at engaging hard-to-reach families. Although students' progress is regularly tracked, analysis of this information is not always sufficiently robust to improve the progress of all.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The new associate headteacher has a clear vision for the school. Working closely with the executive headteacher, within a short space of time, he has established new systems for quality assurance, with clear lines of accountability which are focused on raising attainment. This vision has been shared with all staff, who embrace it wholeheartedly. Strategies for tackling weaker teaching have been implemented. Consequently, teaching is improving, and learning and progress are accelerating. A number of leaders are newly appointed to the school or are new to their responsibilities. Although they have made changes, many of these are too recent to show through in terms of impact. Leaders are not all sufficiently focused on evaluating the impact of teaching on learning against clear success criteria in order to accelerate progress and raise attainment.

The school has a strong commitment to ensuring that every student has an equal chance to learn. Senior leaders guide staff so that equality of opportunity and inclusion are successful and so that students with previously challenging behaviour enjoy their learning and make the expected progress. Partnerships within the federation are strong but links with other outside agencies are satisfactory and contribute soundly to the students' steady progress. This is because the senior team's first priority was to establish a well ordered learning environment within the school. Having successfully achieved this plans are in place to extend this area of the school's work.

The recently formed governing body is supportive of the school and fulfils all its statutory duties. It has a good understanding of the needs of the community the school

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serves. The level of challenge it provides has had an impact on some areas of the school's work, for example, in the areas of personnel and financial management. It is becoming increasingly confident at holding the school to account with regard to students' performance in national tests. The school has good procedures for safeguarding and risk assessment. These meet all government guidelines and include a carefully planned approach to child protection and managing the safety of children around the school site and on trips and visits. These measures contribute to students' mature understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The school functions as a cohesive society and has a detailed understanding of its own community and the different faiths, ethnicities and cultures that exist within it. However, the school is at an early stage of raising students' understanding of the broader national context.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

**Views of parents and carers**

A low proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Almost all respondents were positive about the school and felt that it keeps students safe and helps them to enjoy their time at school. The school's own recent surveys of parents' and carers' views were similarly positive. A few parents and carers raised concerns, including the way unacceptable behaviour was dealt with, how well the school promotes students' healthy lifestyles and the quality of the communication with the school. Inspectors observed standards of behaviour and the extent to which students adopted healthy lifestyles in classes and around the school. They examined policies and relevant records and held discussions with staff and students and found that these were more positive than the

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parents and carers questionnaire's implied. In discussing these issues with senior staff, they identified that these areas will need to be strengthened.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Alderman Blaxill School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 24 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 262 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	7	29	16	67	1	4	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	10	42	12	50	2	8	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	8	33	14	58	2	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	9	38	13	54	1	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	8	33	14	58	1	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	6	25	15	63	3	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	29	10	42	4	17	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	8	33	8	33	1	4	1	4
The school meets my child's particular needs	7	29	13	54	2	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	7	29	11	46	5	21	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	5	21	11	46	3	13	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	8	33	12	50	2	8	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	9	38	12	50	2	8	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



26 January 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Alderman Blaxill School, Colchester, CO2 9DQ

On behalf of the inspectors and myself, I would like to thank you very much for the very warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed meeting you and seeing you at work and recreation. We very much valued the discussions we had with you and were particularly impressed with how your attendance has improved since the last inspection.

You go to a satisfactory school and one that is improving. Inspectors were particularly pleased to see the way you get along and treat each other with respect. You, and your parents and carers, told us that Alderman Blaxill is a caring and happy place where you feel very safe.

Your headteacher and teachers are determined to help you succeed and give you the best possible education. We have asked them to:

- plan work that will challenge and engage you in all lessons, showing you ways to learn by yourselves, particularly the more able amongst you
- give you clearer advice on how to improve your work so that you can achieve your very best
- look closely at information about your performance, in order to accurately pinpoint, design and share the necessary advice with you so that you have everything you need to accelerate your progress and attainment, particularly in English and mathematics.

You too can all play your part in improving the school by working hard to achieve your targets and by following your teachers' advice when they mark your work. Once again, it was very good to meet you all. We wish you and the school all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Scott

Lead inspector

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