
CHALLENGE PARTNERS: Quality Assurance Review Written Report

Name of School:	Altrincham Grammar School for Girls
School Address:	Cavendish Road, Altrincham, WA14 2NL
Hub:	North West

Telephone Number:	0161 9125912
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Unique Reference Number:	106362
Local Authority:	Trafford
Type of School:	Secondary
School Category:	Academy
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Number on roll:	1325
Head teacher/Principal:	Ms Stephanie Gill

Date of last Ofsted inspection:	September 2008
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	Outstanding

Date of Quality Assurance Review:	17-19 October 2016
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QUALITY ASSURANCE REVIEW – SUMMARY OF ESTIMATES¹

School Improvement Strategies: Outstanding

Outcomes for Pupils is: Outstanding

Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment: Outstanding

Area of Excellence: Confirmed
Mathematics

Previously accredited Areas of Excellence:
Modern Foreign Languages, Mathematics,
English, Partnerships, Science, Initial Teacher
Training Mentoring, 6th form provision.

Overall Review Evaluation

The Quality Assurance Review found indicators that Altrincham Grammar School for Girls appears to be firmly within the outstanding grade as judged by Ofsted in the school's previous Ofsted report in 2008. It is worth noting that this is the fifth consecutive review that has found the same outstanding indicators.

1. Please note that a Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review is not equivalent to an Ofsted inspection, and agreed estimates from the review are not equivalent to Ofsted judgements.

Information about the school

- Altrincham Grammar School for Girls (AGGS) is a larger-than-average selective school with a large sixth form located in Trafford, Greater Manchester. It converted to be an Academy in August 2011. Students who meet the academic admission standards are allocated places on the basis of proximity to the school.
- The schools' characteristics are reflected by:
 - Very few pupils with disabilities or special educational needs.
 - Very low proportions of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding.
 - Around 40% of pupils who come from minority ethnic backgrounds, significantly above the national average.
 - Few pupils, around 10%, have English as an additional language.
 - Teaching School status, one of the first schools in the country to be appointed by the National College.
 - Membership of the Bright Futures Educational Trust, a multi-academy, school-led organisation, and works closely with other schools in the Trust to improve student outcomes for all.
 - AGGS is a designated SCITT for initial teacher training and the school has been previously an accredited area of excellence within Challenge Partners for teacher training mentoring.

School Improvement Strategies

What Went Well

- The leadership team is very ambitious in their vision and determination to secure the very best learning experiences and outcomes for every girl in their care. This is evidenced in consecutive Challenge Partner reviews that have expressed the notable strengths of leadership strategies based on a passionate and holistic focus on the needs of all students.
- Most recently, individual needs have been clearly met through new curriculum and assessment expectations and initiatives. These are closely matched to students' needs, aspirations and bespoke intervention, when applicable.
- The school development plan has been deliberately slimmed down in style for this academic year. This is a conscious decision to secure greater ownership from the whole staff community and use it as a living document to deliver sustained improvement over time. As a result, the whole staff community are passionately and actively involved in the shaping, developing and reviewing of the school development plan. They work together to review whole school objectives as well as using genuine 'blue sky' thinking time to stimulate a broader sense of what could be done better or done differently.

- Whole school monitoring systems have evolved and are now carefully calendared throughout the academic year. Monitoring systems involve learning walks, regular lesson observations, book reviews and the use of pupil voice.
- Comprehensive reports are written following each monitoring point. These are shared fluidly between senior and middle leaders to enable focused work in moving towards identified next stage targets, often through bespoke department initiatives.
- The staff appraisal system is robust and clearly valued by all. It provides time for each member of staff to focus on their career aspirations and progression and therefore the importance of personal professional development is evident throughout the school.
- This academic year has seen a central and shared whole staff target to develop further an understanding of linear assessment requirements. This shared target provides a clear and tangible link between the school development plan and the appraisal procedures, within a secure common improvement agenda for the school.
- Middle leaders share the ambitions of the school and actively seek to do all they can to generate and sustain further improvement over time. Middle leaders have significant autonomy as a result of shared mutual respect and high expectations across all levels of school leadership.
- Successful school improvement strategies have resulted in greater consistency in the way staff deploy behaviour management protocols. As a result, staff deal effectively with any minor infringements linked to school expectations for learning behaviours in the classroom.

Even Better If...

...leaders further reviewed, using key performance indicators, an already robust school development plan to sustain secure, measurable impact and outcomes and a shared sense of what success looks and feels like over time.

Pupil Outcomes

- As in the four previous Challenge Partner reviews, outcomes for the school remain outstanding and in the highest quintiles of comparative data nationally.
- The 2016 data continues this trend with the school achieving an overall 'Progress 8' score of 0.45, significantly above the national average. It is also significantly higher than selective grammar schools. The school also has an outstanding 2016 'Attainment 8' score of 73.12 for all students.
- Notable outcomes within these scores show a 100% success rate for students achieving A*-C including English and mathematics at GCSE. There is an identical outcome for separate mathematics and English outcomes. Using 2015 criteria for progress measures, these outcomes show an increased number of students making better than expected progress in both subjects.

- The school is rightly very proud of their students meeting the most challenging of expectations to fulfil their true potential. In 2016, 44% of students in all GCSE examinations taken achieved the highest A* score and 81% achieved A*-A grades.
- Overall, 95% of all students achieved the full EBacc qualification and this is an exceptional outcome when compared to a national average of just 24%.
- An ethos of all students achieving their best can be seen with the progress made by those who attract pupil premium funding. All of these students secured A*-B grades in their 2016 GCSE examinations, with an overall outstanding 'Attainment 8' score of 72.60. Their overall progress score (P8) is 0.48, revealing no outcome gaps with their peers.
- 'The school has set an ambitious target for its 2017 'Progress 8' and is on course to add further value to the already exceptional 2016 performances. They are currently on course to achieve these outcomes due to new procedures for reviewing linear examination progress data and intervention and support for students who are at risk of not meeting the highest of expectations.'
- 2016 sixth form results show a 100% pass rate in both AS and A Level examinations. 90% of students achieved A*-B, with 25% awarded A* in their A Level examinations. Similarly, 78% of students achieved A*-B, with 53.3% awarded an A grade in their AS examinations. Both sets of outcomes are significantly well above the national average.
- The 'Value Added' score for A Level is 0.1, a slight decrease on the 2015 score of 0.2. However, there was a series of exceptional performances in chemistry, psychology, German, music and English language. The 'Value Added' score for AS Level is -0.2 (a slight decrease on the 2015 score of -0.1), with a series of exceptional performances from business studies, music, drama and theatre studies.
- There is no complacency with such high outcomes. The very strong procedures for subject development, planning and improvement ensure this. It can be seen with the recent improvement strategies in mathematics, initiated as a result of disappointing AS level results.
- Very positive post-16 destination information in 2016 is a testimony to these achievements. 173 students achieved life-enhancing grades to gain places at top universities: 18 at Oxbridge and 117 at other 'Russell' group universities. All students pursued further education or training.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Twelve lesson observations were undertaken across a range of subjects and key stages, as well as a learning walk. These were with teachers who had not received observations in the most recent reviews, with a focus on assessment procedures linked to new 'linear' examination and study expectations.

What Went Well

- All lessons were characterised by very positive student-teacher relationships, exceedingly high levels of student engagement and a passion and enthusiasm for learning.
- Observations show clear connections to the wider work leaders are doing to help students develop resilience in their learning. Teachers are expert in building routines and habits as part of subject approaches to problem solving and skill acquisition in their subjects.
- In response to a previous Challenge Partner review, lessons start promptly and teachers ensure immediate focus and interest, with well-planned and engaging starter activities.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is of the highest quality. Recent whole-school initiatives have ensured that they are able to focus expertly on the precise use of subject terminology and skills. These are linked to new national curriculum initiatives and revamped schemes of work.
- Teachers ensure that learning environments are purposeful places where students feel safe and confident and where both teachers and students are comfortable to take risks to improve learning. Practices such as 'fix-it' time and 'think-pair-share' prove very successful.
- All teachers consider the need for detailed planning for their lessons to produce relevant activities that maximise students' progress. This is based on the highest of expectations and the knowledge of how well students are doing. Teachers also recognise the need for variety and stimulation in learning and foster active student independent and collaborative learning. As a result, they cultivate rich discussions and deep-level thinking.
- Very positive and accurate assessment procedures are in place. These are evident when teachers give detailed, high quality verbal and written feedback to their students. For example, marking, feedback and assessment procedures in KS3 science lessons, used alongside practical learning, develop students' advanced learning skills effectively.
- When questioning is effective, students respond confidently. Teachers encourage others to develop their responses appropriately, based on an understanding of how well they have done and their next steps in learning.
- Students are fiercely proud of their school and all their achievements. As a result, students meet all the challenges presented in lessons with determination and high levels of productivity.

Even Better If...

...there was further sharing of the best teaching approaches to ensure that there are no missed opportunities in optimising the best progress for all students in every lesson.

Quality of Area of Excellence Mathematics

Why has this area been identified as a strength?

This area of excellence is a re-accreditation of a subject that has regularly shared and used its expertise to benefit students and the wider community. The school continues to base this aspect of their work on the latest research and accreditations, at the same time as maintaining outstanding year-on-year GCSE and A level student outcomes.

The very high results in mathematics are symptomatic of a willingness to innovate and change practices based on relevant research and forward thinking. There is a strong team spirit ethos within the department that both self-evaluates accurately and uses new initiatives and interventions to improve students' learning chances. These practices are regularly shared with colleagues via the work undertaken in the AGGS teaching school and within its SCITT, often through the work of the departmental Specialist Leaders of Education (SLEs) and linked to its Prince's Teaching Institute accreditation.

What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

There is a strong sense of urgency for all staff in the department, irrespective of experience, to pursue relevant and high quality CPD to maintain its high standards. There is a wide and varied list of attendance at courses, specialised training and external accreditation in order to understand and develop all aspects of the subject and its specialist role in schools. As a result, there is a significant dissemination of advanced mathematical skills and understanding and enrichment activities to all staff members and to the wider 'Bright Futures Trust' community.

What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?

Outstanding student performances at GCSE and A Level are a testimony to the impact the department makes. For a significant number of years, the percentage of students achieving the highest grades in these examinations far exceeds the national averages. An example of ongoing innovation linked to student outcomes can be seen in the outstanding A*/A achievements for both GCSE and A Level examinations in 2016.

The department is actively involved in supporting initiatives to embed numeracy across all subjects. Lessons and enrichment activities help students to recognise and succeed in the mathematical elements of other subjects, especially at A Level. High numbers of students pursue university courses and career pathways in areas such as mathematics, engineering, physics, ICT, accounting and economics.

What additional support would the school like from the Challenge Partners network, either locally or nationally?

The school has not requested any additional support at this time.

This review will support the school's continuing improvement. The main findings will be shared within the school's hub in order that it can inform future activities.