

Ashfield Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	122827
Local authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	380544
Inspection dates	7–8 March 2012
Lead inspector	Michelle Parker 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	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2487
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	504
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Gordon Wilson
Headteacher	Richard Vasey
Date of previous school inspection	26 November 2008
School address	Sutton Road Kirkby-in-Ashfield Nottingham NG17 8HP
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Introduction

Inspection team

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This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 44 teachers and 44 lessons, including 26 joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. Meetings and discussions were held with groups of students and members of the governing body, parents and carers, and the school staff, including senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at the school development plan, minutes of the governing body meetings, documents relating to safeguarding, and teaching records. Inspectors analysed 811 questionnaires from parents and carers, in addition to those completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

Ashfield Comprehensive is much larger than the average secondary school. The majority of students are White British. The remainder come from a small range of different ethnic heritages. The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs is below average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set minimum requirements for students' attainment and progress. The school has specialisms in technology, languages and vocational studies. It is also a designated training school.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- This is a good school. The sixth form is good, with outstanding leadership. The school has many strengths, and teaching and achievement have improved since the last inspection as a result of outstanding leadership and management. The school is not yet outstanding because not enough teaching ensures that all groups of students make outstanding academic progress. The curriculum, although good, does not prepare them fully for life in multicultural, multifaith modern Britain.
- Achievement is good for all groups of students, thanks to good teaching that engages and motivates them. Gaps against national figures are closing rapidly for different groups of students, but this is not yet fully reflected in students' attainment over time. The sixth-form leaders are rightly focusing on ensuring that more students gain A* to B grades.
- The majority of teaching is good. Outstanding leadership of teaching has helped staff to develop their expertise through coaching and high-quality professional development. Performance management systems hold all staff to account effectively for students' progress. Students comment on how well they are supported in their learning. Teaching usually provides good challenge but it is not always fine-tuned to really stretch students of different abilities.
- Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good. Students commented on the prompt action by staff to tackle less desirable behaviour. The school is very responsive in keeping students safe. Students enjoy coming to school. They are punctual, and attendance is above average.
- The school provides good moral, ethical and social activities but misses opportunities to promote spiritual and cultural learning. The curriculum has improved greatly and makes a strong contribution to outcomes for vulnerable students. The good range of courses are matched well to students' interests. The vocational courses provide good opportunities for pathways into further learning, training and employment.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure a greater proportion of teaching is outstanding by fine-tuning the way lesson activities are targeted to students of different abilities, so that all groups of students make a minimum of three levels of progress in every subject from joining the school to the end of Key Stage 4, and more sixth-form students gain A* to B grades.
- Increase the opportunities for spiritual and cultural learning to ensure that students have a better awareness of modern multicultural Britain.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The proportion of students gaining five A* to C GCSE grades, including English and mathematics, is in line with national averages. This indicates good progress because students enter the school with below-average attainment. Improvements in mathematics had lagged behind those in English, but the school has now addressed weaknesses effectively and all students were making good progress in the mathematics lessons observed, as well as in English. The strategies to support and improve students' literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum are bearing fruit, and the work sampled demonstrated secure improvements in students' writing and spelling, in their use of technical and key words, and in their understanding of mathematical concepts. Senior leaders are acutely aware of the weaker performance of a few subjects, such as French and geography, and are taking urgent and effective action to address them through the work of the 'leaders' for learning' and TLR post holders (teaching and learning responsibilities, middle leaders) in every faculty. These staff closely monitor the progress of all students and are particularly successful in raising the achievement of vulnerable groups. Parents and carers are rightly pleased with the progress their children make.

The school has identified weaker performance in certain groups of students, such as boys relative to girls, students known to be eligible for free school meals, and those with special educational needs at the 'school action plus' stage (those needing external support). A range of successful strategies have been employed to rectify these weaknesses. For example, the school is now running booster sessions for those who are underperforming. In addition, every teacher is now held accountable for the progress of every student they teach. The special educational needs coordinator focuses very closely on narrowing gaps in attainment or progress for any students identified as underperforming. To this end, the support provided by teaching assistants has been reorganised and specialist training provided so that they now confidently and effectively fulfil their role.

Achievement in the sixth form is good. Some students join the sixth form having previously underachieved, and the school rigorously addresses this through carefully targeted interventions. The pass rate at A level is in line with the national average, and at AS level slightly higher. Teachers are rightly focusing on increasing the

percentage of students reaching the higher A* to B grades.

Quality of teaching

Parents and carers are rightly and overwhelmingly positive about the quality of teaching. Teachers interest, motivate and engage the vast majority of students well. The pace of learning in lessons is good. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to encourage students to assess their own work. Feedback during lessons helps students understand how to improve their work and to ascertain the next steps in learning, although written feedback in marking is not so consistently helpful. Good group work is a strong feature of most lessons, and high levels of cooperation. Students understand their learning objectives and are clear about how they can achieve them. Teachers are imaginative in their planning. Students particularly commented on how much they enjoy the themed learning weeks. Year 7 were working on a *Life on Mars* project that built well on the previous term's theme of energy. Students were highly motivated to design and build their models of sustainable life on Mars. Staff provided challenging opportunities for students to achieve high levels in these sessions.

Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to extend students' knowledge and understanding, particularly through effective questioning. This was a notable strength of all the sixth-form lessons observed. Teachers demonstrate high expectations by ensuring that lessons provide good levels of challenge. However, the proportion of outstanding teaching throughout the school is not high enough to enable all groups of students to make even better progress.

The redesigned curriculum provides well for the needs of all students. It now provides greater flexibility and choice, and gives students a broad and balanced range of experiences. Students commented on how much they appreciated being able to choose to spend more time in an area they enjoy. An impressive range and quality of vocational subjects motivate and engage students well and provide them with good pathways into future learning and employment. This provision takes place in an extensive 'state-of-the-art' facility.

The promotion of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development forms an integral part of assemblies and some subjects and lessons. In particular, social and moral activities feature strongly as students are asked to consider moral dilemmas. However, opportunities are missed to consider broader cultural issues and the richness of British society. In tutor sessions and assemblies observed during the inspection there was insufficient spiritual content to promote students' development effectively.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour is typically good in lessons and around the school. Students comment on how much it has improved and the speed at which any poor behaviour is effectively tackled. The majority of parents and carers mostly agree. A few raised concerns about disruptive behaviour in lessons, but the very rare occurrences of low-level disruption in lessons are tackled effectively by the staff. Senior staff are available at all times to ensure that disruption to learning is kept to a minimum. Some parents

and carers also raised concerns about bullying. The inspection team found that students recognise the different types of bullying and are aware of how to avoid it. They are also confident that any rare bullying that does arise is quickly dealt with. The school has a zero tolerance policy for bullying or racism of any sort, and acts proactively to address issues at the initial time of identification. For example, when the school identified that some students were making homophobic comments, it swiftly introduced a series of measures to counter this behaviour. Students recognise how to keep themselves safe, for example by telling the school about cyber bullying, which allowed the school to take prompt action. Students feel that their concerns were listened to and that staff are approachable and swift in dealing with any worries. Attendance has been steadily improving and is now good. There were no permanent exclusions last year.

Leadership and management

Outstanding leadership and management, including in the sixth form, provide the school with a strong capacity for sustained improvement. The headteacher, together with his senior leaders, has worked effectively to drive improvements in teaching and the progress of all students. Since his arrival four years ago, the school has undergone several major changes. The senior leadership team has been restructured and now takes a very proactive role in leading initiatives and improving teaching. Faculties have been reorganised and the 'leaders for learning' coach and model good practice and support staff in developing their teaching. This has enabled the school to identify good practice and share it systematically. Performance management systems have been realigned to whole-school and faculty development plans, and all teachers have a measurable target for the progress of every student they teach. The school has successfully introduced twilight sessions that give staff a variety of professional development opportunities to enhance their practice. In faculty meetings, staff are encouraged to try new ideas such as using small whiteboards to give quick feedback to students, or trying 'thinking hats' to encourage better questioning.

The disbanding of the old tutorial and house systems has enabled senior staff to clearly focus on each year group. For example, Year 7 students are kept under close scrutiny to make sure that they are coping well with the transition to secondary school and are making good progress. The recently appointed 'achievement leaders', who replaced the heads of house, play a key role in monitoring achievement and ensuring that students' concerns are quickly addressed. They have reduced the time lost to students in lessons because of pastoral issues. Data systems now accurately track and monitor students' progress, so that interventions are timely and supportive.

The curriculum is good. It meets students' academic needs well and promotes good social and moral understanding. However, it is not outstanding because opportunities are missed to enhance students' spiritual and cultural awareness to a similar extent.

The members of the governing body use their professional expertise effectively to hold the school to account. They have a keen interest in promoting equality through regularly monitoring the progress of all groups of students and ensuring that the school rapidly tackles any discrimination. Arrangements for safeguarding meet all statutory requirements. The school promotes a culture of safety very effectively.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



9 March 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashfield Comprehensive School, Nottingham, NG17 8HP

Thank you for the warm welcome and courtesy you gave us during the inspection of your school. Your comments were helpful in giving us an accurate picture of your school. Thank you to those students who completed the inspection questionnaire, your comments were very helpful. We were very impressed with your positive attitudes to learning and your politeness.

We agree with you that you go to a good school, which is exceptionally well led at all levels. Since the school was last inspected, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 and on post-16 courses has improved and is now similar to that reached by students nationally. Previous weaknesses in English and mathematics have been addressed. The majority of teaching is good and we have asked the school to increase the amount of outstanding teaching, so that you can make even better progress. The school listens to your views well and this has helped to develop the curriculum so that you have greater choice.

The curriculum also helps you pursue opportunities for further education, training and employment once you leave school. You have many opportunities for moral and social education but the school has not given sufficient thought to your spiritual and cultural development. We have asked the school to improve this area of its work. Although some parents and carers are concerned about disruptive behaviour in lessons, you told us that behaviour has improved and we were impressed with your cooperation and good behaviour, both in lessons and around school. You understand how to keep yourselves safe and you are punctual to school and your attendance is now good.

We wish you success in all you do.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Parker
Her Majesty's Inspector

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