

Aston Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106957
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	356059
Inspection dates	29–30 November 2010
Reporting inspector	Stephen Wall

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 pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1650
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Barton
Headteacher	Mrs Eunice Newton
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2007
School address	Aughton Road Swallownest, Sheffield South Yorkshire S26 4SF
Telephone number	0114 2872171
Fax number	0114 2876359
Email address	acsjsanigar@rgfl.org

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by six additional inspectors. Thirty-six lessons were observed taught by 33 teachers. Inspectors held meetings with staff, groups of students and governors. They observed the school's work, and looked at the monitoring of students' progress, the school's monitoring, self-evaluation and planning for improvement and the school's documentation relating to safeguarding. The inspectors also analysed 270 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and took account of those completed by staff and students.

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

- How well different groups of students make progress in the main school, especially girls and students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The causes of the significant rise in attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 and how sustainable the improvement is.
- How effectively the curriculum supports students' learning and the impact it has on raising achievement.
- How effectively leaders and managers at all levels drive the school forward and lay foundations for raising attainment.

Information about the school

This is a much larger-than-average secondary school in which the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. Nearly all students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including students with a statement of special educational needs, is broadly average. In addition to being a specialist school for mathematics and computing and a designated Training School, the school also holds the following accreditations: Healthy Schools status; Activemark; Sportsmark; ICT Mark; and the Financial Management Standard in Schools.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. The large and expanding sixth form is also outstanding. The school offers excellent value for money. Outstanding leadership and management at all levels, including governance, are driving the school strongly forward. High expectations and aspirations underpin all the school's work. Consequently, since the last inspection, attainment and achievement have risen sharply and are set to rise even further. All aspects of the school, including the sixth form, have improved significantly demonstrating the school's outstanding capacity to sustain improvement.

In the main school students make good progress and achieve well. In the sixth form progress and achievement are outstanding because of outstanding provision and leadership. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above average and rising. Attainment has risen most sharply in mathematics because rigorous monitoring and skilful subject management have made learning more meaningful and enjoyable. The outstanding curriculum provides students with a very wide range of options and qualifications; this also underpins students' rapidly improving attainment and achievement. The exemplary use of assessment spurs students on by ensuring that they know their targets and what they need to do to achieve them. Outstanding care, guidance and support ensure that students feel exceptionally safe in school. Students have excellent knowledge of the importance of leading healthy lifestyles. Students' contribution to school and the wider community is outstanding. For example, many are very actively involved with a local special school in helping students with special educational needs and/or disabilities prepare for GCSE success in physical education.

Teaching is good. It is well planned and purposeful. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to good effect to set challenging work. Students enjoy working in pairs and groups. Occasionally, however, students in the main school and the sixth form are expected to spend too long listening to the teacher. This acts as a brake on developing their thinking skills and their development as independent learners.

Excellent leadership and management ensure that evaluation of the school's effectiveness is highly accurate and that there is a razor-sharp focus on improvement. The school's specialism and Training School status play an important role in driving up attainment and support the school in forging outstandingly successful partnerships. Procedures for safeguarding are exemplary. The school uses its excellent partnerships with other schools at home and abroad to promote community cohesion outstandingly well.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise attainment and achievement even further by providing students in the main school and the sixth form with consistent opportunities to develop their skills as independent learners and thinkers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Students enjoy learning. In lessons they are keen to answer questions. They enjoy working in groups and pairs to share ideas. Strong relationships ensure that students' behaviour is good, although occasionally their attention wanders when they are not involved in their learning actively enough. Most students take pride in the presentation of their work. Teachers mark written work regularly. Their written comments are consistently clear in showing students how to improve their work. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is average overall. Students make good progress as they move up through the school to attain above average and rising standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4. In mathematics, attainment has shot up and is now on a par with results in English: both are above average. In the 2010 GCSE examinations, 68% of the Year 11 cohort gained five or more passes at Grades A* to C including English and mathematics; a figure significantly above previous national averages. The school predicts, and inspection evidence confirms, that in 2011 the proportion is likely to be substantially higher. Girls' attainment has risen. The attainment gap with boys is closing rapidly. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress and achieve well because of the effective support they receive.

Students demonstrate excellent knowledge of how important it is to stay healthy. Participation in the very wide range of sporting enrichment activities is exceptionally high. Students enjoy the multitude of opportunities they are given to take on responsibilities. For example, sixth-form students are especially active in supporting the learning of younger students. Students are very active fund-raisers for charities both locally and internationally. They raise sufficient funds annually for the complete cost of an exchange visit to a deprived school in Zanzibar, including the return costs of the African students. Students' above-average attendance and their good levels of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology ensure that they are well prepared for future success. Students' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is the result of a curriculum that offers wide-enrichment opportunities and leadership that sets the tone across the school of respect for others and the importance of diligence and thoughtfulness.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good; some is outstanding. Teaching is consistently well planned and purposeful. Teachers have very good relationships with their students; mutual respect is a strong feature in all classrooms. Most teaching is conducted at a good pace and with a good variety of tasks to keep students engaged in their learning. Much teaching makes effective use of pair and group work to promote students' skills as independent learners. However, sometimes, teaching does not give enough opportunities for students to learn independently. Assessment information is used in exemplary fashion to tailor tasks to the needs and abilities of different groups of students. Teaching assistants are used very effectively to support students with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The taught curriculum offers an exceptional range of subjects and qualifications to suit the needs and abilities of all students. A strong emphasis on supporting students to gain GCSE at grade C or above in English and mathematics ensures that attainment in both subjects is strong and lays a firm foundation for students' future success. The figure for students who leave the school not in education, training or employment is impressively low as a result. There is a very wide range of enrichment activities that are extremely popular with students. Sports are especially strong and make a valuable contribution to students' adoption of healthy lifestyles and enjoyment of school.

At the heart of all the school does lie outstanding levels of care, guidance and support. One older student summed this up succinctly saying: 'Teachers really care about us; not

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just personally, but how well we do in our studies as well. They really do all they can to help us. They want us to succeed.' The school's specialism has helped forge outstanding partnerships with primary schools. These ensure students settle seamlessly when they join the school. Excellent guidance for older students ensures that they are clear about the options open to them when they leave. The number of students entering the sixth form is growing rapidly as a result.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher, most ably supported by other senior leaders and an outstandingly influential governing body, sets the tone of high expectations for all aspects of the school's work. Students comment on how much the school has improved in recent years, not least in the quality of teaching and behaviour. Extremely rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning forms the backbone of the school's rapid and continuing improvement. Performance management of staff is clearly linked to demanding yet realistic targets. Staff respond positively to the challenges; the level of teamwork across the school is exceptionally strong. The school's specialism and its status as a Training School are managed extremely effectively. As a result excellent partnerships with other schools and outside agencies have been forged to enhance opportunities for students in their academic and work-related pathways, and in their personal development.

The promotion of equal opportunities is good. The gap between the attainment of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 4 is narrowing rapidly. Effective provision and support for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities ensures that their attainment and achievement is rising as rapidly and in proportion to other students in the school.

The school pays excellent and meticulous attention to safeguarding. The school meets all statutory responsibilities. Record keeping is meticulous. Procedures for assessing risks are extremely comprehensive and taken exceptionally seriously. Provision for the care and support of vulnerable students is exemplary. Staff training in child protection issues and procedures is regular and of the highest quality.

The school has conducted a thorough analysis of the school's context and has used it expertly to identify what it needs to do to promote community cohesion. As a result the school is able to promote community cohesion exceptionally well. The school itself is a harmonious community; students are extremely active in their local community and excellent links have been established with other schools, including one in Africa, to raise students' awareness of those who are different and those less fortunate than themselves.

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The school is meticulous in evaluating the impact of its actions to promote community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form is outstanding. Attainment is above average and rising rapidly year-on-year. Students' progress and achievement is outstanding and inspection evidence shows that attainment is set to continue rising even further. Students speak in glowing terms about life in the sixth form. They are heavily involved in the whole school, especially in helping younger students with homework and in lessons. They organise many charity events both in the local community and to fund an exchange visit with a school in Africa. Attendance is tracked tightly with the result that attendance levels are exceptionally high. The number of students entering full-time education at the end of the sixth form, including places at prestigious universities, is rising steeply year-on-year. Students make outstanding progress because teaching is highly effective and challenging. Most teaching encourages students to think for themselves and learn independently. However, on a few occasions, didactic teaching, although effective, acts as a brake on students' development as independent learners. The outstanding curriculum has developed to meet the diverse needs of the increasing number of students opting to stay on into the sixth form. It provides a wide range of vocational courses and qualifications for students for whom traditional, academic A-level courses are inappropriate. The sixth form provides students with outstanding care, guidance and support. There is a highly effective induction programme for students entering the sixth form. Excellent careers advice and advice on further education ensure that students are fully informed about appropriate options open to them when they leave the sixth form. At the heart of this outstanding sixth form lie outstanding leadership and management. High expectations and high levels of ambition underpin its success. Self-evaluation is highly accurate. The outcomes are used skilfully to

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prioritise areas for improvement. Monitoring students' progress towards demanding targets is regular and thorough. Students themselves are involved deeply in assessing their own progress and know exactly what they need to do to succeed.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers who returned the questionnaires were happy with the education being provided for their children. A few thought that the school could do more to help them support their child's learning and a few thought the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors looked closely at these areas. Behaviour was found to be good both in lessons and around school. Inspectors found that the school works hard to keep parents and carers well informed about the progress their children are making. The school was found to be responsive to parental concerns, including inquiries from parents and carers about how to help their children.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Aston Comprehensive 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 270 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1650 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	75	28	170	63	17	6	5	2
The school keeps my child safe	93	34	167	62	7	3	2	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	124	46	131	49	12	4	2	1
My child is making enough progress at this school	103	38	151	56	14	5	1	0
The teaching is good at this school	81	30	167	62	16	6	3	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	69	26	157	58	39	14	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	46	17	182	67	28	10	3	1
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)	70	26	162	60	20	7	4	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	81	30	166	61	18	7	1	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	80	30	143	53	29	11	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	53	20	166	61	25	9	5	2
The school is led and managed effectively	81	30	161	60	15	6	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	103	38	143	53	16	6	1	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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 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. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



1 December 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Aston Comprehensive School, Sheffield S26 4SF

Thank you for the warmth of your welcome during our visit in the cold and snowy weather at the end of November.

You will be pleased to know that your school has been judged outstanding, including the sixth form. Inspectors were especially impressed with how well led and managed your school is and how much it has improved since the last inspection as a result. Attainment, especially in mathematics, is improving in leaps and bounds. The proportion of Year 11 students attaining the benchmark of five or more GCSE grades A* to C shot up in 2010 and is set to continue rising – well done! Inspectors were also very impressed with the outstanding care, guidance and support your school provides for you. The curriculum, too, is outstanding. It provides you with a wealth of study options and a very wide choice of enrichment activities, including exchange visits with a school in a less developed part of Africa.

The sixth form too has improved since the last inspection. It is also very well managed and encourages students to aim high in all they do. It was good to see that more and more students in the sixth form are applying to continue full-time education after Year 13 both in academic and vocational pathways.

In order to raise attainment even further and to help you become even more effective learners, inspectors are asking your school to do the following.

- Raise attainment and achievement even further by providing students in the main school and the sixth form with more and consistent opportunities to develop skills as independent learners and thinkers.

I am confident that you will continue to work hard and help your school go from strength to strength in the coming years.

I wish you all every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr Stephen Wall

Lead inspector

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