

Ashington Community High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122355
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	359233
Inspection dates	20–21 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Brian Blake 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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1042
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	256
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Julie Stephenson
Headteacher	Mr Rob Kitching
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Thirty-three part lessons were observed, which involved observing a total of 32 teachers. A range of documents was scrutinised and meetings were held with members of the senior leadership team, members of the governing body, nominated staff and a group of students. Other informal discussions were held with staff and a significant number of students during lessons and around the school. Inspectors also read 79 inspection questionnaires returned by parents, in addition to considering the views of those staff and students who completed separate questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. Inspectors looked in detail at the following.

- The students' attainment in English and mathematics, especially at Key Stage 4.
- The quality of teaching, especially in the two core subjects of English and mathematics.
- The quality and impact of the assertive mentoring system.
- The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels.
- The sixth form provision.
- Safeguarding within the school.

Information about the school

Ashington High School caters for students from 13 to 18 years of age. It is part of a 'hard federation trust' with two first and two middle schools within the broad catchment area of the school. Collectively, this hard federation of schools is known as the Ashington Learning Partnership and was formed in September 2007. There is one executive director for the trust and each school has its own principal. There is one governing body for the trust, but each of the separate schools has a small group of governors who work directly with it on behalf of the full governing body. The school, which has specialist status in sport and leadership development, is bigger than the average sized secondary school. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is slightly higher than the average, although the proportion of those with a statement of special educational needs is closer to the national average. Almost all students are of White British heritage. The school holds a number of awards, among the most significant of which are the Healthy School Status, International School Gold Award, Leadership Partner School and Young Enterprise Status. It is the lead school for The Northumbria Physical Education Partnership School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT).

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

Ashington High School is providing its students with a satisfactory standard of education. While there has been an improvement in the overall percentage of students gaining five or more A* to C grades at GCSE level since the previous inspection, by the time they reach the end of Year 11, their overall attainment is low, particularly in the two core subjects of English and mathematics. This trend in low attainment for English and mathematics goes back to 2007. Although yet to resolve fully these low standards, this year's results at GCSE showed signs of improvement. These improvements are, in part, the result of better monitoring and intervention, particularly with targeted students in Year 11, using the assertive mentoring system. However, although this focused intervention strategy is leading to improvements, it is not yet being used in other parts of the school. As a result of this targeted work, the students are now making satisfactory progress in their learning. A similar pattern of attainment and progress is seen for those students with special educational needs and/or disabilities. In the sixth form, some early developmental work in personalised learning is beginning to bring about better student progress also.

The school is using its specialist status in sport and leadership development to good effect. It promotes very well the students' physical well-being through a good range of extra-curricular activities, and these are being appropriately supported through the school's focus on eating healthily on a regular basis. A large majority of the students respond well to these school-based initiatives, and most say that they enjoy being at school. However, there is a very small minority whose attendance is very poor, and others whose poor behaviour means that they make slow progress in their learning. Behaviour in the sixth form is good, and attendance is average.

There is some good and outstanding teaching but, overall, the vast majority of teaching is satisfactory in both the main school and sixth form. This has the result of bringing about only satisfactory progress in students' learning, rather than the good or better levels that are required in order to raise attainment levels across the school. The school has suffered from some staff absence, which has made a difference to the students' continuity of learning in some subjects. There is often too much teacher direction in lessons, which limits the potential for independent learning and also slows down the progress of those students who are capable of more intellectually challenging work. The curriculum continues to develop well at Key Stage 4, but the planning for extensions and embellishments to the sixth form and Key Stage 3 curricula have yet to gain any significant momentum.

Senior leaders and managers, including the governing body, are developing a clearer view of what needs to be done to ensure that all students achieve more in line with their capabilities, which means the school's self evaluation is broadly accurate. Much of the strategic work of the trust, which is targeting early interventions across a number of

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areas, is still at a very early stage of planning or implementation. However, there is a shared sense among senior leaders and managers of a common purpose and desire to improve and, although some key areas are not yet improving at a fast enough rate, the school has shown itself to have satisfactory capacity to make the necessary future improvements. Although the leadership and management of the sixth form are also satisfactory, the vision for change to aid future improvements is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve attainment in English and mathematics as a matter of immediate urgency by:
 - ensuring a whole-school approach to supporting the teaching of the key skills in literacy and numeracy
 - achieving consistently good or better quality teaching in both subjects
 - more extensive targeted support for those students in all year groups who are underperforming relative to their capabilities
 - raising the students' aspirations of what they are capable of achieving.
- Improve attendance over the coming academic year and beyond by:
 - targeting those students whose attendance is poor and currently is just below the 92% threshold
 - working with external partners to continue decreasing the proportion of persistent absentees.
- Achieve an increasing number of lessons in successive terms which reach a consistently good or better standard in teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring all teachers, including temporary supply teachers, match their work more accurately to the students' needs and abilities
 - developing and implementing whole-school practice which develops students' independent learning skills
 - improving the consistency with which the challenging behaviour of a small minority of students is managed so that all students can make greater progress in their learning.
- About 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.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Although attainment on entry can vary from year to year, it is broadly average. Students' overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is low, particularly in the two core subjects of English and mathematics. However, the unvalidated 2010 results showed signs of improvement. For example, one important indicator, the average points score at GCSE level, improved to the point of now being average, having been below average in previous years. There were also improvements in the percentage of students gaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades, although when this comparator includes English and mathematics

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the increase is more marginal. Although showing some improvement, attainment levels in both English and mathematics are still too low. These improving patterns of attainment and progress were confirmed by inspectors. Although a very large majority of students make at least satisfactory progress in lessons, the pace for some is too slow. Also, a very small minority of students show a poor attitude to learning and challenging behaviour. As a result, these students make inadequate progress, which occasionally also affects the learning and progress of others in the class. The attitudes shown by students in lessons to the work set, to working with their peers, or listening to the teacher are mostly satisfactory. On the few occasions where these qualities are not as evident, class teachers do not manage the situation as effectively as they should and, as a consequence, students' progress slows considerably.

A large majority of students say that they feel safe in school and that they enjoy their learning. The students are confident in their manner and are generally polite to other students and the adults who work in the school. The impact of the school's specialism in sport is having a beneficial effect on the students' regular involvement in physical activity, and together with a keen focus on healthy eating, means that there is good overall support for promoting the general well-being of all students.

Although overall attendance is showing some improvement, it is below average and there remain too many students who are persistent absentees from school. The procedures and processes for tackling this problem are good, but overall improvements from year to year are slow.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	3
Pupils' behaviour	3
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

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?

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Although there are no significant inadequacies in the teaching of particular subjects, some teaching is less effective in dealing with the challenging behaviour of a few students and, in some lessons, the over-directed nature of the teaching and unchallenging work for some students slows the pace of their learning. Recent initiatives to address these and other areas are beginning to help bring about improvements. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge, which in the best lessons adds much to the levels of interest shown by the students and the increased pace of their learning. The outcome of very effective teaching, which is seen in the school's specialist area of physical education and sport, results in motivated and engaged students who are able to show a level of independence and confidence that contributes a great deal to their enjoyment of school. The teachers are confident in asking questions, which supports the students' learning. However, too many teachers only used a closed style of questioning, demanding only a limited amount of independent and creative thinking on the part of the students. As a result, the students' learning can be too passive, which slows their overall rate of progress.

The school's regular collection of student performance data is good. Good use is made of this information to target students in Year 11 who are on the cusp of the C/D boundary in one or more of their GCSEs. However, more generally across the school, this information is not used sufficiently well by teachers to help inform their lesson planning, or to target

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work that is more appropriate to the range of abilities in lessons. The marking of students' work is regular, but there are too few references to the overall quality of the work produced, or comments on how it can be improved in order to reach a standard that is more commensurate with the learning target that has been set.

The curriculum satisfactorily meets the needs of the students. Recent changes at Key Stage 4 are beginning to result in improved outcomes for the students. Detailed planning is at an advanced stage to develop further the curricular provision in the sixth form and at Key Stage 3, with the latter linking more closely with the provision in the two trust middle schools. The good range of extra-curricular activities adds much to the learning opportunities of the students.

The school has satisfactory arrangements for the care, guidance and support of its students. The role of the tutor is valued within the school and students comment positively on the effective support provided, especially as it means there is an adult they can confide in if they have a problem. The school liaises effectively with a wide range of outside agencies to provide appropriate specialist support for those students most in need. There are effective transition arrangements between the schools within the trust to help the students settle quickly into the high school, a positive feature recognised by the parents.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

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

How effective are leadership and management?

Leadership and management of the school are satisfactory and improving as the trust governing body and management structure begins to take greater account of the specific needs of the school. Senior leaders and managers have a focused view of what improvements are needed to bring about better quality provision and improved levels of student attainment. Although staff understand the need for rapid improvements in key areas, there are a number who are not yet actively engaged in this process. The current school improvement plan indicates that much of the strategic work of the school is at a relatively early stage of implementation, although the operational, day-to-day issues are being progressed satisfactorily. For example, there is now a developing awareness of the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning, and through lesson observations, these are being shared with staff to support their developing professional and personal needs.

The governing body discharges its responsibilities satisfactorily, which includes evaluating the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding procedures. Together with the focused work of staff, the school's work in safeguarding its students is good. Governors and senior managers are aware of the need to achieve the best they can in every financial

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transaction made and this, therefore, ensures that the school achieves satisfactory value for money. There are detailed equalities policies in place, which embrace the principle of valuing each student and their contribution to life at school. However, although inspectors saw teachers and students working well together in lessons, a significant number of the students responding in the inspection questionnaire indicated that they felt their views were not considered seriously enough by the staff.

The school is very aware of its place within the local community, and it has made good progress in developing links with the other trust schools to the benefit of the students and their parents or carers. The school's achievement of the 'International School Award' is recognition of its increasing awareness of the need to develop the students' appreciation of life outside of the immediate local and regional areas. Together with an increasing number of international trips, the students are satisfactorily developing their appreciation of other cultures. However, despite this work going on with enthusiasm from staff and students, the impact of these initiatives has not been evaluated sufficiently to know how cohesive the school really is within all areas of its external work.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

Sixth form

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form provision is satisfactory and improving. The students' attainment is broadly average and the progress they make in their sixth form learning is also satisfactory. The curriculum meets the needs of the students, with planned extensions to other courses suitably flexible enough to encourage more students to stay at the school for their post-16 education. There is some good quality teaching, but most is of a satisfactory standard. Although working relationships between the teachers and students are very good, teachers are missing opportunities to use student assessment information to focus future work in lessons more accurately on identified learning needs and

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capabilities. Leadership and management of the sixth form are developing well, and although the current manager has only been in post for just over a term, there is a sense of energy and determination to make the necessary improvements, which will raise levels of attainment across all subjects. A particular strength of this work is the focus on each student's personal and academic development.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

Views of parents and carers

The overall response rate to the inspection questionnaire was very low compared to the number of students on roll. With the exception of the information about students' progress and the extent to which the school encourages a healthy lifestyle, both of which brought about small negative responses, the parents and carers who responded are overwhelmingly supportive of what the school is doing for their children. Inspectors found no evidence during the inspection that supported the concerns expressed about these two areas. A few parents and carers took the opportunity to write on the questionnaire that they were concerned about the behaviour of some students. Inspectors did find that there is a small minority of students who present challenging behaviour that affects their own and others' learning. The school has been informed of these inspection findings.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashington Community High 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 79 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1042 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	24	30	50	63	3	4	2	3
The school keeps my child safe	25	32	52	66	0	0	1	1
My school informs me about my child's progress	26	33	41	52	7	9	2	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	25	51	65	4	5	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	20	25	48	61	7	9	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	21	27	46	58	6	8	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	18	51	65	7	9	1	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)	24	30	46	58	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	21	27	50	63	1	1	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	23	47	59	6	8	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	12	15	49	62	5	6	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	20	25	49	62	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	26	33	46	58	4	5	1	1

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

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	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.



22 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashington High School, Ashington, NE63 8DH

I write to you, on behalf of the inspection team, to thank you for the welcome you gave us during our recent visit to your school. We were grateful for the way that the overwhelming majority of you behaved when we were in school. A very small minority, however, behaved in a way that was lower than the standard we saw in almost every other aspect of the school's work.

I am sure you and your parents would want to know what judgements the inspectors made about your school. I hope you find the following helpful.

- The school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education.
- Your levels of attainment are low, especially in English and mathematics. As a result of this, the inspection team is asking the school to raise attainment in English and mathematics as a matter of immediate urgency.
- Last year's examination results showed some signs of improvement, which means that you are now making at least satisfactory progress in your learning. This was due, in part, to the assertive mentoring programme for Year 11 students, but the inspection team would like to see this initiative used more widely across the whole school.
- Attendance is below average and needs to improve quickly. Those students with poor attendance records need to attend school more regularly. We are asking that the school works with external partners to improve this aspect.
- The vast majority of teaching is of a satisfactory standard, although there is some good and better quality, especially in the school's specialist areas. Where the teaching fails to promote satisfactory learning it is because the work is not sufficiently challenging for the full range of abilities in the class. However, there are also occasions when the poor behaviour of a small minority also affects the learning and progress in the lesson. We are asking the teachers to manage this aspect of their work more effectively.
- Senior leaders and managers share a common vision for future improvements, although some of these plans are at an early stage of thinking or implementation.

All of you and your parents and carers have an important role to play in supporting the school to get better. You should attend school regularly, and all of you must work hard to improve your key skills in English and mathematics. If you do not improve in these areas, your chances of achieving high levels of personal success will be very limited, which will also affect your future work chances.

The inspection team wishes all you the best in your future endeavours.

Yours sincerely

Mr Brian Blake

Her Majesty's Inspector

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