

# Ashton Sixth Form College

## Inspection report

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**Unique reference number:** 130518

**Name of lead inspector:** Patrick Geraghty HMI

**Last day of inspection:** 30 September 2011

**Type of provider:** Sixth form college

**Address:** Darnton Road  
Ashton-under-Lyne  
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## Information about the provider

1. Ashton Sixth Form College has over 2,000 students aged 16 to 18, most of whom are full-time, and around 800 adults enrolled in full- and part-time provision, including higher education (HE). The bulk of the college’s provision comprises full-time advanced-level courses. In addition to over 40 subjects offered at GCE AS- and A-level, a number of BTEC extended diploma courses are available. These diplomas are offered in performing arts and music technology, the National Health Service (NHS) cadetship, and a national vocational qualification (NVQ) is available in coaching. Provision at intermediate level is significant and includes GCSE mathematics, English and science and a range of vocational options.
  
2. The college is situated in the borough of Tameside, approximately eight miles to the east of Manchester. The borough has a population of over 200,000 and consists of seven towns. The largest towns are Ashton-under-Lyne and Hyde. Unemployment in Tameside is lower than the national average. The proportion of residents from minority ethnic groups is below the national average at around 5%. Other economic indicators show that Tameside residents have some of the lowest rates of pay in the Greater Manchester sub-region and almost a third of households do not have access to a car. Over a third of residents have no qualifications at all. In 2009/10 over 55% of students aged 16 to 18 studying at the college were in receipt of the educational maintenance allowance (EMA). The college is ranked in the top 25% of the most deprived sixth form colleges nationally when taking into account the student cohort.
  
3. The inspection took into account all the provision at the college. Science and mathematics; art, media and performing arts; English and modern foreign languages; and business, administration and law were inspected in depth.

<b>Type of provision</b>	<b>Number of learners enrolled in 2010/11</b>
<b>Provision for young learners:</b> 14 to 16 Further education (16 to 18)	42 learners 2,026 full-time learners 33 part-time learners
<b>Provision for adult learners:</b> Further education (19+)	22 full-time learners 330 part-time learners
<b>Informal adult learning</b>	361 learners

## Summary report

Grades: 1 is outstanding; 2 is good; 3 is satisfactory; 4 is inadequate

<b>Overall effectiveness of provision</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>
	<b>Grade</b>
Outcomes for learners	2
Quality of provision	2
Leadership and management	2
Safeguarding	1
Equality and diversity	2
<b>Subject Areas</b>	<b>Grade</b>
Science and mathematics	3
Art, media and performing arts	1
English and modern foreign languages	2
Business, administration and law	2

## Overall effectiveness

4. This is a good college. Outcomes for learners are good and have improved since the last inspection. Most recent evidence and data indicate that increases in success rates are accelerating in response to focused improvement strategies. Standards observed by inspectors in lessons were good. However, variability and inconsistency in achievements and progress within and between some courses remain, especially at advanced level. Progress to HE is high against a background of low local participation. The college is a harmonious, vibrant, welcoming and safe learning community.
5. Good teaching was observed by inspectors. Much outstanding teaching was observed in art, media and performing arts. The best lessons were characterised by good pace, sustained high levels of creative thinking and reflection, high expectations and challenge. In a minority of lessons students were insufficiently challenged to develop their analytical and evaluative skills. The curriculum successfully meets the needs and interests of students. Partnerships are excellent and they enable the college to make a highly positive contribution to its local communities. Partnerships have a positive impact on

improving student provision and outcomes. Care, guidance and support are good. Transition arrangements are well developed. Additional learning support is highly effective.

6. Leadership and management are good. A clear strategic direction and vision of excellence are promoted by the Principal. Staff and students embrace the strong focus on ambition and aspirations. Governance is good. Systems to monitor performance are effective. However, actions to tackle areas of underperformance are not always sufficiently swift or effective in driving consistent and sustainable improvement because key messages arising from data are sometimes missed. Students make an excellent contribution to the college through peer mentoring, as ambassadors and in other representative groups. The promotion of equality and diversity is good and safeguarding is outstanding. Finances are very well managed.

## Main findings

- Success rates are improving and are now at the high national average for GCE A level. Strategies to accelerate improvements are beginning to have an impact. GCE AS-level success rates are at national averages, with the majority of intermediate courses above, and with a pattern of year-on-year improvement. Success rates for advanced vocational courses are high. Some variability in success rates remains on a minority of courses at advanced level. Too many subjects have a low proportion of high grades.
- Students, many with low attainment on entry, make good progress and some make exceptional progress. Differences in the achievement of different groups have narrowed. On a minority of courses students make variable progress. Standards of students' work are good.
- The college is a harmonious and highly supportive community. Students feel exceptionally safe and there is good promotion of health and well-being. Students make a very strong contribution to the local community. Partnerships enhance their economic well-being. Rates of progression to HE are high in an area with traditionally low rates of progression.
- The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well paced. In the best lessons students are challenged and engaged. The range of resources is very good and of high quality, including information and learning technology (ILT). In a minority of lessons students are insufficiently challenged because opportunities are missed to develop their analytical and evaluative skills.
- Assessment practices are effective. Marked work is promptly returned with informative comments to aid improvement. Peer and self-assessment are well developed. Too many student files are poorly organised. Monitoring of students' marks and attendance is well developed. There is much good initial screening assessment with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills.
- While the lesson observation system has been strengthened, the college is over-generous in its assessment of the quality of teaching. Systems to promote the sharing of good practice are good.

- The college offers a broad range of courses, especially at advanced level, to meet the needs and interests of students. The range of subject enrichment is excellent.
- The college works very effectively with its local communities. Excellent partnerships enhance student opportunities and progress. The college is a valued partner and has played a key role in the development of the local 14 to 19 curriculum. The college is a leading partner in initiatives to raise the aspirations of disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and adults.
- Care, guidance and support are good. Transition arrangements are effective. Good tutorial arrangements support ongoing advice and very good careers education. There is highly effective support for students who wish to apply for university. The college provides very effective additional learning support although students declining support are not systematically followed up. Support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very good. The student mentor system is highly effective and valued by students.
- Leadership and management are good. A clear strategic agenda and vision of excellence are shared by managers, governors and staff. Continuous professional development activities are effective. Governance is good although there is insufficient challenge to senior managers on consistent and sustained improvement in outcomes for students.
- Quality assurance arrangements are effective in monitoring performance and the quality of provision. Many subject areas have improved since the last inspection. However, variability and some inconsistency remain in a few areas. Actions to tackle these areas of underperformance have not always been sufficiently swift or effective in driving consistent and sustainable improvement. While the college has identified many of its strengths and weaknesses correctly through self-assessment, the grading is over-generous.
- Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. Policies are comprehensive and the college very effectively embraces a culture of safeguarding and safety. Students feel very safe in college.
- The college is a diverse and harmonious community. There is good exploration of equality and diversity themes in lessons. The performance of different groups is analysed although this does not always lead to direct action.
- Engagement with students is outstanding. Systems to involve students in the college community and decision-making are very effective. The peer mentoring and student ambassador systems are highly valued by students. Students consider themselves to be an active part of the college decision-making process.
- Financial management is excellent. The estate is very well managed. Spending is planned and managed to best meet the needs of students. The college is well resourced.

## **What does Ashton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?**

- Embed and accelerate year-on-year improvement in success rates so that variability and inconsistency are tackled in all courses. Ensure the sharp and precise use of data to evaluate students' progress and enable swift and effective action for improvement.
- Increase the proportion of higher grades in advanced-level subjects by providing greater challenge and improving the analytical and evaluative skills of students. To embed this further, ensure the effective organisation of student files by regular checks to enable them to be used for reflection and revision.
- Increase the rigour of the lesson observation system so that the college has an accurate view of the quality of teaching. Evaluate the effectiveness of strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Improve quality assurance systems so that actions to tackle areas of underperformance are sufficiently swift and effective in driving consistent and sustainable improvement in all areas.

### **Summary of the views of users as confirmed by inspectors**

#### **What learners like:**

- being valued at college
- teaching that is encouraging and supportive
- the flexible and broad curriculum offer
- the care and support from tutors and subject staff who are always there to help them
- the peer mentoring system
- being well prepared for HE and applying to university
- good learning resources available across the college
- extensive opportunities to enrich their studies
- supplementary subject sessions that provide additional help
- the inclusive nature of the college
- feeling safe at college
- the excellent support for adult learners.

#### **What learners would like to see improved:**

- more challenging targets to stretch them further
- greater availability of computers
- more seating around the college and shelters outside
- more social spaces for students
- earlier opening hours for the college café

- more sports opportunities for non-physical education (PE) students.

## Main inspection report

### Capacity to make and sustain improvement

**Grade 2**

7. Management structures are clear. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities and are accountable through performance monitoring. Managers and teachers are supported in their roles through regular professional development, which is valued by staff. The college has very effective arrangements both to listen and respond to students. Financial management is excellent and the college has invested well in its estate. The processes for monitoring the performance and progress of actions against targets are improving and leading to increases in students' outcomes in many areas. However, the college is aware that these need to be refined further and data analysed more rigorously in order to deliver the college's vision of excellence. The college acknowledges some over-grading in self-assessment and is implementing strategies to strengthen evaluation and validation systems. Since the last inspection success rates have improved as has the quality of teaching and learning. The college has effectively addressed the effectiveness of group tutorials and the take-up of additional learning support identified as areas for improvement in the last inspection.

### Outcomes for learners

**Grade 2**

8. Success rates at AS level have risen to the national average and are satisfactory. At A level, success rates have improved more rapidly in 2010/11 to the high national average, which represents good achievement. Many courses demonstrate year-on-year improvement. However, in a minority, improvement trends are variable and are not sustained over a period of time. Too many subjects have too few high grades. Success rates on vocational courses are high and improving. Success rates on most intermediate courses have improved in 2010/11 and are generally high. However, pass rates remain low in GCSE mathematics.
9. Students make good progress from below average attainment on entry, although the progress that some students make between and within subjects is variable. The gap between the retention and achievement rates for different groups of students is narrowing because of effective intervention strategies and the provision of additional learning support. In the large majority of lessons observed by inspectors students made good progress. The college is making good progress in promoting high rates of progression to HE in an area with traditionally low rates.
10. The standards of students' work seen by inspectors are good with some outstanding examples seen in art, media and performing arts. However, many student files are poorly organised and do not facilitate the opportunity for students to reflect on work done and to plan effective strategies for revision.
11. The college is a harmonious and highly supportive environment. Students say they feel exceptionally safe and they use safe working practices. The college promotes health and well-being effectively across its subject areas and within



group tutorials. Students are well informed of the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse and about the importance of healthy eating. Initiatives to improve mental health are very good. A range of sports and fitness activities are on offer but they are not fully promoted and there has not been an analysis of participation rates in order to identify and target the areas in which uptake is low.

12. Students contribute very well to the college community. Many students act as ambassadors at open evenings and other college events and others are involved in helping new students make their transition to college. Over 40 peer mentors have been trained to work with vulnerable students. Students are very active fundraisers and support local, national and international charities.

## **The quality of provision**

## **Grade 2**

13. Teaching in most lessons is good, with pockets of outstanding practice and very little weak teaching. Lessons are carefully planned with a good blend of activities to interest and motivate students. Lessons move at a good pace. A very good range of high-quality resources, including ILT, enhance the learning experience. In a minority of lessons, however, questioning is insufficiently probing and opportunities are missed to develop students' ability to analyse and evaluate.
14. Assessment arrangements are sound and marked work is returned promptly. Assignment deadlines are carefully staged to spread students' workload. Peer- and self-assessment are well developed in many areas. Insufficient attention is being given to ensuring that students' work files are systematically organised in some subjects.
15. The online system that records students' marks and attendance is highly valued by both staff and students and it enables much closer and more effective monitoring. The college has an innovative approach to initial assessment that students find helpful and relevant. Subject areas have developed effective initial screening assessments with help and training from literacy and numeracy specialists.
16. The college has strengthened the lesson observation system and the quality of teaching has improved. College observers are well trained. The college system allows teachers to negotiate the lessons to be observed and gives them advance notice. In part this has led to the college having an overly positive view of the quality of teaching. Effective systems are in place to enable teachers to share best practice and many say their teaching has improved as a result.
17. The college offers a very wide and inclusive range of provision which is highly responsive to local needs and national priorities. Education and social inclusion are excellent. The student population is a rich mix of cultural diversity. Vocational courses have been developed as has a growing provision for adults,

including HE. The college is making an effective contribution to reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training.

18. Students' experience and enjoyment is enhanced through an excellent range of subject enrichment. The evaluation of college enrichment is insufficiently thorough. A growing number of students benefit from planned work experience with an employer. Parents are actively involved in their children's education and this is strongly encouraged by the college. Students of all faiths or no faith are helped to understand each others' beliefs through a very effective multi-faith chaplaincy.
19. Strong involvement in strategic partnerships has helped the college shape area-wide provision and play a key role in the development of the 14 to 19 curriculum. For example, working with its partner schools the college has devised strategies to improve GCSE A\* to C attainment, including English and mathematics, and these have brought about above-average improvements.
20. Transition arrangements with secondary schools are well developed. Very good partnership working with several universities is helping the transition of students to HE. The college is a lead partner in a number of initiatives to raise the aspirations of disadvantaged young people and unemployed adults. Good links with local employers are helping them develop workforce skills through NVQs delivered in the workplace. These links also enable more full-time students to gain work experience.
21. Information, advice and guidance ensure students are recruited onto the correct course. Welcome events and taster days enable prospective students to sample their choices and make informed decisions. Ongoing advice and guidance are effectively incorporated through group tutorials. Careers education and guidance are very good. An excellent range of electronic and paper-based resources help students to plan their future. Students receive very good support in completing their university applications and those seeking employment are equally well supported.
22. Counselling services are available and effective links with external services ensure that students can access specialist support. Highly innovative initial assessment has a clear subject focus with an emphasis on literacy and numeracy. Additional learning support is highly effective. The take up of support is good but students declining support are not systematically followed up. Very good support is provided for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and many make good progress and achieve well. Students at risk of dropping out or underachieving are effectively identified and supported. Student peer mentors provide highly effective support.

## **Leadership and management**

## **Grade 2**

23. A vision of excellence, skilfully communicated by the Principal and senior management team, is shared by all staff and governors. Management structures are clear and staff understand their roles and responsibilities.

Processes for the development of the strategic plan are inclusive and the plan articulates a clear direction. A whole college culture of accountability has developed since the last inspection. Staff feel that the Principal and senior management team are very accessible and meeting structures and communication channels are good.

24. Staff are fully supported through a range of continuous professional development activities. The focus on sharing good practice in teaching and learning is strong. Arrangements for appraisal are clear and provide a detailed review of performance although follow-up of actions for improvements sometimes lack rigour. Staff development is effectively linked to appraisal for both academic and support staff. Induction for new staff is well developed.
25. Governance is good. An appropriate committee structure is in place and this is annually reviewed for effectiveness. Governors fulfil their statutory duty in relation to safeguarding, and equality and diversity. Regular audits ensure that the governors have a range of skills and experience, including strong financial expertise. New governors have an effective induction. Financial performance is monitored closely. The performance of the curriculum is regularly reviewed but challenge to the senior management team on the effectiveness of actions taken to bring consistent and sustained improvement, particularly in outcomes for students, is insufficient.
26. Safeguarding arrangements are outstanding. A comprehensive safeguarding policy is in place. Site security and the identification of staff, students and visitors when on college premises is a key part of the policy. There is a strong and very clear focus on, and identification of, the different needs of students in relation to keeping them safe. For example, the college identifies students who are at risk of stress due to examination pressure and all tutors are trained in mental health first aid, equipping them to deal with the initial stages of an emotional crisis. Arrangements for the selection, vetting and training of staff are very thorough and well-trained designated staff are in place to deal with safeguarding issues. The college has excellent links with relevant external referral agencies.
27. The college is a diverse and harmonious community. When incidents of a racist or bullying nature do occur, they are dealt with quickly. All staff have completed training in equality and diversity. A single equality scheme and action plan, developed with appropriate consultation, are in place. The performance of different groups of students is analysed by equality and diversity strands. However, such analysis does not lead to direct action to tackle identified differences. Policies, procedures and changes to the estate are impact-assessed in detail and adjustments are made to ensure there is no detrimental impact on any student. Equality and diversity themes are explored in many lessons.
28. Arrangements for involving students in the college community and decision-making are very effective. In addition to an elected student council, other carefully trained student representatives, such as peer mentors and student ambassadors, feel very well supported in fulfilling their role. The framework for

collecting and acting on students' views is clear and effective and students are happy with the actions taken as a result. Students feel very much an active part of the college decision-making process. Formal complaints are received and responded to in a timely manner and these are analysed for equality and diversity themes. Designs and project plans for the estate reflect the outcomes of consultation with students.

29. Quality assurance arrangements are effective in monitoring performance. The quality of provision in many subject areas has significantly improved since the last inspection. However, this has not been consistent across the college. The self-assessment report accurately identifies the areas for improvement. However, actions to tackle areas of underperformance are not always sufficiently swift or effective in driving improvements consistently and sustainably across all areas of provision. There is some variability across a minority of courses in the sharp and precise use of data to evaluate student progress. While the college has identified many of its strengths and areas for improvement accurately through self-assessment, the grading is over-generous.
30. Financial performance is closely monitored by the senior management team and the governors. Spending is planned and managed carefully to best meet the needs of students. The estate is well maintained. Estate priorities are clear and the college is investing well in its buildings to provide a vibrant, welcoming and secure learning environment. Value for money is good. Clear value for money performance indicators have been developed and progress towards these is monitored regularly. Control and monitoring of a range of risks are managed carefully.

## Subject areas

### Science and mathematics

### Grade 3

#### Context

31. The department offers courses in GCE AS- and A-level mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology, GCSE mathematics and science, and advanced vocational courses in forensic science and medical science. Just over 850 students are enrolled on GCE AS- and A-level courses, and 273 on GCSE courses. Around 60 students follow a vocational course in forensic science. Almost all students are aged 16 to 18.

#### Key findings

- Outcomes for students are satisfactory. Success rates are high for GCE A-level courses and satisfactory for AS-level courses. College data indicate that the proportion of students achieving high grades in 2010/11 was below the previous year's national average on most advanced courses. The A\* to C pass rate is in line with the national average in GCSE science. However, pass rates, attendance and punctuality are low in GCSE mathematics.
- Students make satisfactory progress on GCE AS- and A-level courses and on the advanced vocational science course compared with their prior attainment. The number of students progressing from AS to A level is satisfactory, but the college is aware that this rate has declined recently and is taking action.
- Attendance and punctuality are good and improving on A-level courses. Monitoring and support procedures are effective in identifying and dealing with issues at an early stage. Students feel very safe at the college and relationships between staff and students are very good. There is a very positive culture of respect and tolerance.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are satisfactory overall. The majority of teaching is good, but a small proportion is inadequate. In the best lessons, students work collaboratively on a wide range of suitably challenging activities. The best lessons also have good pace and good assessment of learning. In the weaker lessons, the pace of learning is slow and there is insufficient or ineffective checking of learning. These lessons are characterised by a lack of sufficiently challenging activities and too few opportunities for students to share and discuss their ideas.
- Students are tested frequently in science courses. The use of summative assessments in mathematics courses is insufficient. Many student files are disorganised and this is hindering the reviewing of work and examination revision. Learning resources are good on advanced courses. High-quality learning packs have been produced by teaching teams for each main topic at A level. Learning resources are less well developed in GCSE mathematics.
- Lessons are taught in a dedicated suite of suitably furnished and pleasantly decorated classrooms and laboratories. Good use is made of exemplary student work in displays in classrooms and corridors. All rooms have good ILT facilities.

- Care, guidance and support for students are good. Students value highly the additional out-of-class support that is available from subject teachers and peer mentors. Students also value the general support and guidance they receive from the dedicated team of full-time personal tutors.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some cross-college quality improvement strategies have resulted in improvements. For example, an increased emphasis on, and monitoring of, students' progress has resulted in improved attendance levels on many science and mathematics courses.
- Analysis of equality and diversity data is good and is used to inform strategies to close gaps in recruitment or performance. The response to student feedback in science and mathematics is good. Comments and suggestions made by students in focus groups and in the annual satisfaction survey are used to improve courses. "You said, we did" posters are evident in most classrooms and corridors.
- Subject quality improvement plans are highly detailed and often result in clear action plans for improvement. However, the impact of these action plans is variable. On A-level courses, most success rates have improved and are good. On a few AS courses and in GCSE mathematics, actions are insufficiently focused and improvement is too slow.

### **What does Ashton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?**

- Implement strategies to bring about sustained improvements in student progress, high grades and progression from AS onto GCE A-level courses.
- Ensure the implementation of strategies to improve attendance and the quality of learning resources in GCSE mathematics. Further develop more effective methods of providing feedback via marking and the use of summative assessments across mathematics courses.
- Be more rigorous across all science and mathematics courses in helping students to organise their files so that they can be used more effectively for reviewing their work and for revision.
- Help all teachers to develop more effective question and answer techniques.

## Art, media and performing arts

## Grade 1

### Context

32. Courses offered include GCE AS- and A-level subjects in art and design, performing arts and digital and creative arts. Vocational qualifications are offered in art and design, performing arts, creative media production and music technology. Around 927 students aged 16 to 18 are enrolled and just over three-quarters of them are on AS- and A-level courses.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for students are outstanding. On the majority of GCE AS- and A-level courses success rates are high with a pattern of year-on-year improvement. A high proportion of students progress to HE. Attendance rates are high. Students make good progress across many courses. The area acknowledges the need to increase the proportion of students achieving high grades across all courses.
- Students produce very high standards of work. They are encouraged to develop a wide range of skills and techniques resulting in much creative and imaginative work. Students demonstrate enthusiasm and enjoyment by contributing to performances and exhibitions to showcase their work. They gain confidence and develop their experience. They also participate in open evenings and take part in national competitions and make many positive contributions to both the college and local community.
- Teaching and learning are outstanding. All teaching observed was at least good with much that was outstanding. Teachers plan lessons skilfully to meet the needs of all students. The very best lessons were characterised by excellent pace, sustained high levels of creative thinking and reflection, high expectations and exhilarating and challenging teaching. Lessons are interesting and promote inclusive and wide-ranging activities.
- Peer assessment in performing arts is highly effective. Formal assessment feedback is satisfactory on AS- and A-level courses but it does not always let students know how to improve their work. Teachers on vocational programmes provide detailed assessment feedback which acknowledges achievement and provides the opportunity for improved performance. The online monitoring system records students' progress effectively and is accessible both to students and parents.
- The needs and interests of users are met very well. Teachers arrange interesting and inspirational educational visits and projects, including visiting speakers to enrich the curriculum and student experience. Educational visits to local and national art galleries, museums and theatre companies are numerous. Enrichment activities within the arts are available to all college students and they have a good take-up. Enrichment activities are also offered to feeder schools.
- Links with HE, to promote well-informed guidance and advice on future courses and progression paths, are very good. Links with a host of local and national

organisations are excellent and impact positively on the student experience, outcomes and future aspirations. A dedicated industry links' adviser within the area helps to ensure excellent links with creative and digital arts firms and organisations.

- Support for students is good. Students complete a subject-specific initial assessment at an early stage and support is provided promptly to meet students' individual needs. Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff work together closely to provide good learning and pastoral support. Students are fully aware of the support that is available and how to access it. Students meet with the tutorial staff on a regular basis to review their progress and plan required improvement strategies.
- Leadership and management are highly effective. Managers within the area meet on a regular basis with the teaching staff and the curriculum group manager. Lines of responsibility are clearly defined. Managers plan effective provision and are responsive to local needs and the views of others. They focus clearly on self-assessment and quality improvement. All staff make a positive contribution to the self-assessment process and feel that their comments are valued.
- Accommodation has been renewed over the last few years with purpose-built facilities and industry-specific equipment. The range of specialist resources and dedicated equipment is excellent. Promotion of safe working practice and safeguarding is good. All workshops have risk assessments and students receive an induction to specialist workshops. The use of student feedback is excellent and helps to shape improvements. All students feel safe and feel free from bullying, harassment and discrimination.

### **What does Ashton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the proportion of students achieving high grades through a greater focus on improving the evaluative and analytical skills of students on some courses.
- Provide more specific feedback on assignments to help students improve their work and achieve or exceed their target grades.



## English and modern foreign languages

## Grade 2

### Context

33. Courses offered include GCSE English and GCE AS- and A-level English language, English literature, French, German and Spanish. Adult literacy and functional skills courses are offered at foundation and intermediate levels. GCSE English is also offered as an adult evening class. Currently, 763 students are enrolled on English and modern foreign languages courses. The large majority are following GCE AS-level and A-level English courses and are aged 16 to 18.

### Key findings

- Outcomes for students are good. Retention rates at A level are consistently high and success rates are outstanding in A-level English literature, French, German and Spanish. However, high grades at A level have declined and are now below the national average. Retention at AS level is satisfactory. Success rates and high grades at AS level are at the national average.
- The progress of AS- and A-level students in relation to their prior achievement is good, but there is variability between several subjects. Achievement of A\* to C passes in GCSE English is a clear strength and is consistently well above the national average.
- Students develop good skills in English and modern foreign languages. In English, students confidently discuss and analyse literary and language techniques and linguistic terminology. In modern foreign languages vocabulary, grammatical structures and key terms are reinforced through discussion, games, peer testing and role-play. A high percentage of students progress to HE with a substantial number choosing English courses.
- Students make a significant contribution to the college and local community. Peer mentors, A-level buddies and student ambassadors volunteer at college events and in schools and at exhibitions in the local community.
- Teaching and learning are good. In the better lessons, good class management and a wide variety of stimulating and challenging tasks engage students and stretch those of different abilities. Effective questioning in English elicits sophisticated analysis. In the few less effective lessons students do not have sufficient opportunities to take an active role in their learning.
- Assessment is very good. Effective initial diagnostic assessment ensures that those in need of additional support are identified early and extensive and successful support is provided. Frequent and effective monitoring of students' progress is used to inform teaching. Students are encouraged to assess their learning and set themselves targets to improve their performance. Most marking is detailed and supportive, giving clear and specific individual guidance on how to improve work.
- Resources are very good and are used effectively to promote learning. Attractive and informative course handbooks and worksheets are produced

in-house. Very good use is made of ILT and the virtual learning environment to enhance and assess learning.

- The needs and interests of students are central to course planning and delivery. Flexible GCSE provision improves access for different users. Modern foreign language booklets are used to help to bridge the gap between the demands of GCSE and advanced level. Enrichment is wide ranging. University taster days, study days, theatre and cinema visits all contribute to and enhance learning. Foreign visits and exchanges help modern foreign language students to develop speaking and listening skills. English students participate in creative writing workshops.
- Partnerships are good. Student ambassadors, peer mentors and A-level buddies make positive contributions at Year 9 open days, European languages days and local events. Students attend university conferences and taster days. Collaboration with the college link governor is further improving the already good links and sharing of expertise with local schools.
- Care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. All subject staff are passionately committed to enabling students to achieve their potential. It is central to the teaching ethos. Students find staff friendly and approachable and value highly the generous support offered by subject teachers in and out of the classroom.
- Curriculum management is good and particularly effective in English. Staff work together to provide a high-quality experience for all students. All staff participate in course planning. In response to students' views and progress, courses are regularly reviewed, re-structured and developed. Topics and texts are chosen and changed to meet student needs and interests better. Students feel safe. All staff have had safeguarding and equality and diversity training. Promotion of safeguarding and equality and diversity is integral to all courses in the texts and topics studied.
- Self-assessment is effective. Reports are generally thorough and accurate in identifying areas for improvement. Strategies are implemented to improve the quality of provision and there is much impact of these in most subjects. However, the report is over-generous in a few areas.

### **What does Ashton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?**

- Increase the percentage of higher grades achieved at AS and A level through increased challenge and more stretching activities for all students.
- Improve the progress of AS- and A-level students in a few subjects, in relation to their prior achievement, so that all students make consistently good or better progress.

## Business, administration and law

## Grade 2

### Context

34. Courses are offered in GCE AS- and A-level accounting, business, and law. Currently, just under 70 students are enrolled on GCE AS- and A-level accounting, 166 on GCE AS- and A-level business and 239 on GCE AS- and A-level law. Around 140 students follow vocational and other qualifications including BTEC national diplomas in business and law, first diploma in business, and NVQ programmes in administration. Most students are aged 16 to 18.

### Key findings

- Success rates are high at GCE A level and are at the high national average. Success rates and high grades on AS-level business have improved significantly over three years and are now above national rates. Vocational programmes have high success rates. On a number of courses the proportion of high grades is low.
- Students on advanced vocational programmes make good, and sometimes very good, progress. Most students on AS- and A-level courses achieve the grades predicted by their prior attainment at GCSE. Progression to HE is good. Most students on the BTEC first diploma in business progress to BTEC national programmes.
- Students acquire good knowledge and understanding of business practices and develop good research skills. Students' critical and analytical skills are satisfactory at advanced level. A minority of students fail to organise their files methodically. Most students enjoy their college studies; their attendance and punctuality are good.
- Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well paced, often involving active learning through the use of small group work. In less successful lessons, questioning does not sufficiently extend learning. Teachers on vocational programmes plan an excellent variety of activities and approaches to suit the learning needs of individuals.
- Varied and relevant use of ILT includes visual and sound stimuli to enliven learning, with effective use of short topical videos. Useful case studies and course booklets support learning and course information is accessed easily by students from the college portal. Most classrooms are appropriately equipped and have clear subject identities.
- Assessment of students' work is thorough and regular. Oral and written feedback from teachers is constructive. Monitoring of progress against individual learning targets is kept up-to-date through an online system and the progress of each student is regularly reviewed by personal tutors. Liaison between subject and personal tutors is good.
- A good range of courses, with a varied range of curriculum enrichment, increases students' employability. Vocational courses include work experience and the college is very responsive to work experience requests from students

on AS- and A-level courses. Visits are made to businesses and courts, and learners receive good encouragement to organise events and enter national business competitions.

- Students receive good guidance and support. Enrolment and induction are organised effectively and learners feel the college is very welcoming. They particularly value the personal support they receive throughout the year from subject teachers. The need for specialist support is identified quickly and provided effectively.
- Curriculum managers have an effective and open relationship with teachers and other staff that fosters good communication and sharing of best practice. Flexible team working is a strong feature of the business provision and several recent initiatives have started to impact positively on students' college experiences and success. Resources and accommodation are good.
- Self-assessment is inclusive and thorough. However, on some courses reports lack a sharp and precise focus on the key areas for improvement and appropriate actions to elicit sustained improvement.

### **What does Ashton Sixth Form College need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that more students are enabled to achieve higher grades by providing greater challenge and further refining teaching and learning approaches to improve the analytical and evaluative skills of students. Also ensure that student files are regularly checked to enable them to be used for reflection and revision.
- Ensure greater rigour in the analysis of the performance of some courses so that priorities for improvement are clearly identified and actions monitored for their sustained impact on outcomes.

## Information about the inspection

35. Two of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and six additional inspectors, assisted by the college's deputy principal, as nominee, carried out the inspection. Inspectors also took account of the college's most recent self-assessment report and development plans, comments from the Skills Funding Agency, the previous inspection report, reports from the inspectorate's quality monitoring inspection, and data on students and their achievement over the period since the previous inspection.
36. Inspectors used group and individual interviews, telephone calls and emails to gain the views of students and employers. They also looked at questionnaires students and employers had recently completed for the college. They observed learning sessions, assessments and progress reviews. Inspectors collected evidence from programmes in each of the subject areas the college offers.

**Record of Main Findings (RMF)**  
**Ashton Sixth Form College**

**Learning types: 14 – 16:** Young apprenticeships; Diplomas; **16-18 Learner responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses, Foundation learning tier, including Entry to Employment; **19+ responsive:** FE full- and part-time courses; **Employer responsive:** Train to Gain, apprenticeships

Grades <b>using the 4 point scale</b> 1: Outstanding; 2: Good; 3: Satisfactory; 4: Inadequate	Overall	16-18 Learner responsive	19+ Learner responsive
<b>Approx. number of enrolled learners at the time of inspection</b>	2,048	2,026	22
Full-time learners	363	33	330
Part-time learners			
<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Capacity to improve</b>	2		
<b>A. Outcomes for learners</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
A1. How well do learners achieve and enjoy their learning?	2		
A1.a) How well do learners attain their learning goals?	2		
A1.b) How well do learners progress?	2		
A2. How well do learners improve their economic and social well-being through learning and development?	2		
A3. How safe do learners feel?	1		
A4. <i>Are learners able to make informed choices about their own health and well being?*</i>	2		
A5. <i>How well do learners make a positive contribution to the community?*</i>	1		
<b>B. Quality of provision</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
B1. How effectively do teaching, training and assessment support learning and development?	2		
B2. How effectively does the provision meet the needs and interests of users?	2		
B3. How effectively does the provider use partnerships to develop its provision to meet learners' needs?	1		
B4. How effective are the care, guidance and support learners receive in helping them to attain their learning goals?	2		
<b>C. Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
C1. How effectively do leaders and managers raise expectations and promote ambition throughout the organisation?	2		
<i>C2. How effectively do governors and supervisory bodies provide leadership, direction and challenge?</i>	2		
C3. How effectively does the provider promote the safeguarding of learners?	1		
C4. How effectively does the provider actively promote equality and diversity, tackle discrimination and narrow the achievement gap?	2		
C5. How effectively does the provider engage with users to support and promote improvement?	1		
C6. How effectively does self-assessment improve the quality of the provision and outcomes for learners?	2		
C7. How efficiently and effectively does the provider use its available resources to secure value for money?	2		

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