

Ashington High School Sports College

Green Lane, Ashington Northumberland, NE63 8DH

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers know their subject well, enjoy very good relationships with students, and provide extremely challenging work.
- Students have good attitudes to learning. They behave well in class, concentrate well on the work set, and make good progress.
- Students who have special educational needs are supported effectively and make good progress.
- The school is well led and managed. As a result of leaders' determination to get to grips with some long-standing problems, major changes since the previous inspection have brought about significant and sustained improvements in teaching and students' achievement.
- The sixth form is good. As a result of dynamic leadership, teaching and examination results have improved recently. Much of the teaching is good and many lessons are outstanding.
- Students are well cared for. They behave well in lessons and around the buildings. They feel safe in school. They report that bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively by staff when it occurs.
- As a result of recent innovations by senior leaders, students' attainment is now close to average and they achieve well.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students' attainment is not yet as high as it could be and the progress they make is not as rapid as in some excellent schools. This applies particularly to boys and the most able students.
- Students' attendance, though rapidly improving, is about average.
- Not all teachers are as skilful as the best in the school. Consequently, in some lessons some students do not make enough progress in their understanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons or parts of lessons. These included four joint observations with the Principal and other members of the senior leadership team.
- Inspectors held meetings with four groups of students; with the Chair and vice-chair of the Governing Body and one other governor; and with school staff, including senior and middle managers.
- Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents including the school's self-evaluation summary, development plan and assessment information.
- They analysed 16 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and 51 questionnaires returned by school staff.

Inspection team

Derek Neil, Lead Inspector	Additional Inspector
Patrick Hargreaves	Additional Inspector
Lynne Horton	Additional Inspector
Nigel Drew	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashington High School Sports College is a school of average size.
- Almost all students are White British.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is broadly average.
- The numbers of students supported through school action, and of those who are supported through school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs are above average.
- The school has specialist status in sport and leadership development and holds a number of awards, including Healthy School status and the International School Gold Award.
- It is one of the lead schools for the Northumbria University physical education school-centred initial teacher training course.
- The school uses three off-site providers to support a small number of students with their behaviour and curriculum needs: Atkinson House, Buzz Learning, and the local Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) provider.
- Since 2007 the school, in partnership with two first and two middle schools, has been part of a 'hard federation trust', known as the Ashington Learning Partnership. The trust has a Director of Strategy and Standards and each school has its own Principal. There is one governing body, but each of the five schools has a small group of governors who work directly with it on behalf of the full governing body. Three of the other partnership schools were inspected at the same time as this inspection took place.
- Since the previous inspection there have been some changes in the senior leadership of the school including a new Director of Strategy and Standards, who took up post in September 2012.
- The school meets the Government's current floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise attainment and improve achievement in all subjects by:
 - focusing more closely on the progress made by the most able and by boys
 - pressing ahead with plans to work with partner middle schools on a coherent three-year curriculum and common assessment arrangements for Key Stage 3
 - maintaining the current balance of high expectation of teachers alongside effective support for their development.
- Increase the number of lessons that are good or outstanding by:
 - improving teachers' skills in monitoring students' learning during lessons and in judging how to intervene to improve their understanding
 - ensuring that teachers provide helpful feedback on students' work and that students respond to that guidance
 - developing teachers' and students' skills in independent learning.
- Improve the attendance of the small minority of students who are persistently absent by working more closely with their families.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Substantial changes to the way the school is managed and the way lessons are taught have brought about a huge improvement in the rate at which students make progress. The 2012 unvalidated GCSE results show that attainment, though still below average, is much higher than previously. Most students made progress at the expected rate. The school's own data and the work of the students currently in school indicate that further improvements are in the pipeline for future year groups.
- The sixth form has been reduced in size. This policy of more stringent entry requirements and a narrower range of subjects has resulted in improved examination results and a higher retention rate.
- Students with special educational needs make good progress. They receive well-targeted support to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. In a mathematics lesson, for example, one group rapidly developed their understanding of rounding up and down because of the effective way the teacher and assistant worked together using real-life situations.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning. They show pride in their work, which is often reflected in how well it is presented. They concentrate and persevere with some demanding tasks. In one lesson they searched the internet to discover the meaning of 'higher order thinking skills,' doggedly sticking with the task even though the texts they found were very difficult to understand.
- The school staff work with middle school partners to develop a common curriculum for Key Stage 3 and to assess students' attainment on transfer. However, much remains to be done as attainment on entry is below the county average and time is lost at the start of Year 9 reassessing students' skills and identifying their needs. As a result, progress in Key Stage 3 is not as rapid as it could be.
- The progress of boys and the most able students, though improving, is not yet as rapid as it could be.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Students enjoy lessons. They appreciate their variety and the way teachers make learning interesting.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They understand the requirements of the examinations and can steer their classes towards good grades.
- Relationships in class are very good. Teachers use humour, praise and encouragement to get the best out of students. They manage behaviour effectively. Students report, and inspectors observed, very little disruptive behaviour.
- In good lessons teachers use pair and group work effectively. They provide an appropriate level of challenge at all times. They support weaker students and extend able students with well-judged questions and explanations. Discussions are well led. In one outstanding English lesson, for example, the teacher's well-judged questions, based on a thorough knowledge of students' needs, enabled everyone to further their understanding of a text.
- A small minority of lessons require improvement. In some, the teacher does not monitor students' learning closely and so does not provide the challenge and support individuals need. In others, discussions are not well managed. For example, group work does not always result in productive speaking by the students.
- Students develop skills in independent learning more effectively in some lessons than in others. Whereas some staff have a good understanding of independent learning, others are over-directive or confuse independent learning with working alone and unsupported.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly but some do not provide clear guidance on how to improve it. Students seldom respond to such advice when they get it.
- Teaching in the sixth form is good; many lessons are outstanding. Key strengths of the best lessons are the way students are actively involved throughout and the skilful way the teacher prompts them to extend their knowledge and understanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Strenuous changes to the way behaviour is dealt with have transformed the behaviour and attitudes of many students. So too have improvements to the curriculum and to teaching. Exclusions from school and removals from class are far less frequent; leaders have set challenging targets to reduce them still further.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. Students are polite and courteous with adults, socialise in a mature way with their peers and treat the buildings and other people with respect.
- Key to the school's success in this area is the effective work of its two in-house units. One, which deals with longer-term, more severe difficulties, is a beacon of excellence in helping students adapt to learning. It is to be used as an exemplar for other schools. The three off-site providers also provide much-valued support.
- Bullying is rare. Students are confident that staff deal with it effectively when it occurs. They understand name-calling is wrong. They appreciate, for example, that using homophobic terms can be hurtful. Students feel safe in the school and their good behaviour contributes to this.
- Attendance has been low in the past. Improvements to the curriculum and to teaching have encouraged students to attend more regularly. Staff's diligent checking of absentees throughout the day has greatly reduced truancy. Attendance figures are rapidly closing on the national average. There remains, however, a stubborn rump of poor attenders who have not responded to enticements such as additional football coaching and whose persistent absences result in poor progress.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Students' achievement, behaviour and attendance are much better. Teaching is now good. The sixth form goes from strength to strength.
- Leaders have an accurate and thorough knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their perceptive observations of lessons provide valuable information about how to improve teaching. Robust systems for assessing students' progress provide regular, detailed information about the school's performance.
- Leaders at all levels have a good understanding of their role and of how they are to contribute to continuing improvement. Strategic plans set out an ambitious vision for the future. However, the quality of subject plans is variable, reflecting the variable effectiveness of subject leaders.
- A new management structure and a more rigorous approach to managing teachers' performance have produced a culture in which teachers are more accountable for the school's performance. Staff are almost unanimous in their support for these changes and in their appreciation of students' improved behaviour and progress.
- The school promotes equal opportunities effectively. For example, its use of the pupil premium has resulted in better progress and attendance by that group of students.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets students' needs. The school recognises the need to work further with middle schools to ensure the curriculum and assessment at Key Stage 3 secure higher attainment and more rapid progress.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students' experience is enriched by initiatives such as the school's link with a Ugandan choir, members of which worked alongside students and performed in a concert during the inspection. A strong emphasis on developing students' moral understanding has contributed to better behaviour. One student in a removal unit, for example, accepted it was morally wrong for him to film a fight outside school.
- The sports specialism greatly enhances the school's effectiveness. It contributes a range of enrichment activities. The outstanding practice of the physical education department has led to better teaching in other subjects. This is recognised by students. One was pleased that 'we get more PE-type teaching in other lessons now'.
- The federation's influence on achievement and teaching is less obvious. A period of staffing

difficulties and uncertainty about operational structures meant that governors and leaders were not wholly effective in tackling some of the school's underlying problems. Greater stability and clarity of purpose have contributed to suitable plans for improvement across the trust.

- The local authority has provided light-touch support by brokering a link with another school, which has contributed to recent improvements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- After an uncertain start to the federation the governing body has developed a *modus operandi*, enabling it to provide an appropriate balance of support and challenge to the school.
- Training in the use of data has helped governors interpret examination results and ask pertinent questions of senior leaders.
- Governors contribute valuable professional experience to the role. For example, they have assisted in the development of the arrangements for managing the performance of staff.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	122355
Local authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	406087

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	13–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	963
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	168
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Chris Smith
Headteacher	Rob Kitching
Date of previous school inspection	20 October 2010
Telephone number	01670 812166
Fax number	01670 844930
Email address	admin@ashingtonhigh.northumberland.sch.uk

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