

Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College

Abbs Cross Lane, Hornchurch, RM12 4YB

Inspection dates

15–16 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	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.

- An above-average proportion of students, including those eligible for free school meals, attained five GCSEs including English and mathematics in 2012.
- Over four out of five students passed GCSE mathematics and science in 2012.
- Performing arts subjects generate high GCSE pass rates. They also give all students much enjoyment and confidence, experience of teamwork and professional-style productions. The range of subjects and activities offered is outstanding.
- Care and support for students are outstanding. This helps them to feel safe and enjoy school life.
- Teaching is predominantly good and getting better. Teachers willingly share good practice and receive helpful training.
- The headteacher, senior leaders, managers and the governing body have all contributed to the school's development plan. It highlights the right actions to develop teaching further and to raise students' achievement.
- Senior leaders, several of whom are very experienced, are hard-working and loyal. Their teamwork is increasingly effective.
- Students are polite, considerate and behave well. They regularly contribute their views, in a mature and constructive way, on how the school should develop in the future.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- A minority of students, particularly higher attainers, do not make as much progress as they could.
- Girls achieved better than boys in 2012. The gap between their achievement was greater than that seen nationally.
- In several subjects, the proportion of GCSE A*/A grades is not high enough.
- Not all teachers mark students' work regularly or in the most helpful way. They do not always plan work that is at the right level for students' different abilities.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 half lessons (a few with members of the senior leadership team). They attended tutor group sessions.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, members of the senior leadership team, some heads of department, other members of staff with whole-school responsibilities, the Chair, Vice-Chair and one other member of the Governing Body, a representative of the local authority and several groups of students.
- The documents inspectors examined included ones related to attendance, behaviour incidents, development plans, lesson observations, data on standards and progress, monitoring procedures and extra-curricular activities.
- Inspectors took into account 91 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and two emails from parents. Inspectors also considered the views of 21 staff who completed a questionnaire.

Inspection team

Clare Gillies, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Howard Dodd	Additional inspector
Rosemarie McCarthy	Additional inspector
Jenny Usher	Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College converted to become an academy on 1 April 2011. When its predecessor school, Abbs Cross School and Arts College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- A new headteacher was appointed in January 2012.
- The school is slightly smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- The school continues to promote its specialism in the performing arts (dance, drama and music).
- Most students are of White British heritage. Other students represent several minority ethnic groups, Black African being the largest single group.
- Only a small proportion of students speak English as an additional language, most of them fluently.
- A below-average proportion of students are eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is a little below average. The proportion of students supported through school action plus or with a statement of educational needs is average. The most common need relates to behaviour, emotional and social difficulties.
- The school has a well-equipped sports centre with a swimming pool which, after school hours, is run as a commercial club. This is used extensively by the community and feeder primary schools.
- The school's catering staff run a breakfast club.
- The school exceeds the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards and achieve more GCSE A*/A grades by:
 - challenging teachers to aim for the highest levels and grades in all years, regardless of students' starting points
 - setting ambitious targets for students at the beginning of Year 10 and regularly checking that they are all making at least the expected progress
 - introducing ways to inspire boys to learn as well as girls.
- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - marking students' work regularly and writing detailed comments which tell them what they need to do to improve their work
 - giving students time to discuss and reflect on the comments written in their books
 - preparing work which matches students' different levels and abilities.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students' attainment on entry ranges from average to above average, although their reading ages vary considerably. An intensive programme in Years 7 and 8 has dramatically improved weak readers' reading ages, the best being by one year in six weeks. The school realises that a few students in other years would benefit from similar support to improve their reading and writing so that they can tackle examinations confidently. Nevertheless, the focus on getting students reading is working. The number of books students take out of the library has increased significantly in recent months.
- The percentage of students attaining five GCSE A*-C grades including English and mathematics is typically well above average. With focused, effective support, students eligible for free school meals did better than others in 2012, as have Black African students for several years. Realising that several students found some of the science courses difficult in 2011, more were encouraged to take alternatives and standards rose in 2012, as they did in mathematics.
- The percentage of GCSE A*/A grades is below average in English, mathematics and several other subjects. A minority of higher attainers underachieve; the headteacher has put effective plans into action to address this.
- Students take one unit in GCSE English literature in Year 10 and GCSE mathematics in the autumn term of Year 11. When necessary, students sit the examination/s again; early entry does not prevent them from achieving their target grades.
- Disabled students and those with special educational needs make similar, and sometimes better, progress than others. In English and mathematics in 2012, students eligible for free school meals made more progress than that seen nationally for these students.
- On the school's website, the headteacher refers to the motto 'not for school but for life do we learn'. This reflects the school's well-established tradition of involving students in discussions about teaching and learning or behaviour, for example. By leading on whole-school initiatives and community projects, and taking on positions of responsibility, students develop their social skills very well. They achieve confidence in leadership, working independently and in teams, and learn about the world of work.

The quality of teaching is good

- While there is more consistently good teaching than a few years ago, the number of outstanding lessons is not that high, contributing to some higher attainers not making rapid progress. Features that teachers display in the best lessons include:
 - conveying their enjoyment and deep knowledge of their subjects
 - enthusing students, for example to want to read more work by an author in English or complete as much work as possible in art
 - asking deep, thought-provoking questions and urging students to extend their responses
 - knowing exactly what individual students need to make the best progress, such as guidance on how to start paragraphs for lower attainers in geography
 - giving students time to work independently or in groups
 - structuring learning in careful stages and checking understanding during lessons.
- Many teachers made a point of highlighting subject-specific vocabulary to support students' reading and understanding of key words. However, they sometimes miss chances to relate words, and subject content, to everyday use or topical issues. Teachers encourage students to read out loud when possible.
- Some students reported that they have more homework on some nights than others and that they would like a more even spread. Parents' and carers' questionnaire responses did not suggest they had any similar concerns.

- However, the lack of regular, consistently good marking is an area for improvement. Most students have a reasonable idea of how well they are doing but detailed comments on written work are rare. Ones such as 'Write more detail' do not really help students to know how to improve their written work or challenge higher attainers with specific actions.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students, especially those on the student voice executive, express their views clearly when describing the many elements of school life that they value and enjoy. The vertical tutor groups work well and add to the very good relationships students have with each other and with teachers.
- Every fortnight, tutors spend time with small groups and individual students discussing any problems and checking on how their work is going. In addition, the few looked after children, disabled students and those with special educational needs or who sometimes find school life difficult receive outstanding personal and academic support to keep them focused and happy. Those with emotional or behaviour difficulties benefit from sensitive help in performing arts lessons.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is practically always good and can be excellent. Just occasionally, acknowledged by students, their behaviour can be a little boisterous in narrow corridors, or they do not concentrate fully in lessons. Students mention being more distracted in practical lessons but, generally, they are very keen to learn. Their above-average attendance reflects this.
- Bullying and racist incidents are extremely rare and dealt with rapidly. Students are fully aware of the different types of bullying, for example cyber or homophobic, but acknowledge that the word 'gay' is sometimes heard outside lessons.
- Students feel very safe and know that any concerns they have are investigated. Students have contributed to police work to highlight places in the local area where they do not feel secure. Their empathy for those less fortunate than themselves is reflected in their generous fund-raising for charities.
- Students often watch and discuss the news in tutor sessions. This, and religious education lessons and assemblies, stimulates their awareness of moral and cultural issues. In addition, a well-planned programme educates students about a wide range of topics relevant to their personal development and future lives. Topics discussed in a Year 9 psychology club last year included 'Are criminals born or made?'

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher quickly gained the respect and support of the school community. His passion for the school to be the best it can, combined with his pride and support for the students and staff, dominates his actions. High staff morale and support by parents and carers are reflected in their very positive responses to questionnaires. Students appreciate having a headteacher who is often seen around the school and who enjoys talking to them.
- The headteacher has skilfully steered the leadership team forward by complementing dedicated and experienced senior leaders with new appointments. The recently appointed special educational needs coordinator is strengthening the record keeping to improve the already effective provision for these students.
- The areas for development in teaching have been correctly identified through lesson observations. These, combined with information generated by performance management, have moved teachers' professional development into a higher gear. The leadership of teaching and learning is strong. The impact of teachers' enthusiasm to receive training and to share good practice is beginning to have an impact in the classroom.
- Subject leaders carry out their roles with enthusiasm and determination. They realise that they have not raised the proportion of high GCSE grades and checked students' progress sharply

enough in the past. The school's development plan shows that senior leaders have now given this a high profile.

- Pupil premium money is used effectively to subsidise support for eligible students to learn musical instruments and to participate in theatre visits and other trips. Eligible students have also benefited from having two learning support assistants to support them in the library and experienced learning support assistants to work within every faculty. All these actions reflect the school's successful determination to foster equality, tackle discrimination and to promote inclusion for all.
- The subjects offered are reviewed regularly to reflect students' interests and needs. Construction and catering in Years 10 and 11, and Russian and Italian from Year 9, have been introduced in recent years. The balance between academic and vocational courses is excellent. Combined with the exciting dance, drama, music, art and a huge number of sports, interesting clubs, trips and visits (the whole school has an annual West End theatre trip), students have many wonderful experiences during their five years at the school. The headteacher holding an Olympic torch as he presented the 2012 sports day trophy was a memorable experience for the whole school.
- The school maintains a strong link with the local authority. Its representative has a sharp understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development, and is involved in steering it to its full potential.

■ **The governance of the school:**

The governing body knows that there needs to be more outstanding teaching and learning and that observations must be accurate. It welcomes the actions the headteacher has taken to strengthen teaching and raise standards. It fully supports sharper performance management and uses the outcomes to determine whether teachers are promoted and/or have a salary increase. Governors do not have a deep enough understanding of how to consider whether enough pupils attain the highest possible grades. Training is in hand to address this. Nevertheless, they are aware that boys are not doing as well as girls and are determined to explore the reasons for this. They not only ensure that statutory duties such as safeguarding and child protection procedures are met, but have made sure that they have significantly improved in the last year and are now very secure. They also ensure that all financial resources, including the pupil premium, are managed effectively and they approve of how the pupil premium money is spent.

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	102352
Local authority	Havering
Inspection number	395704
Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	840
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Graham Burchell
Headteacher	Steven Hughes
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
Telephone number	01708 440304
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