

Ashcroft High School

Crawley Green Road, Luton, Bedfordshire, LU2 9AG

Inspection dates 24–25 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Achievement is good and standards are rising at GCSE. Students of all abilities make good progress from typically low starting points on entry to the school.
- Students make outstanding progress in English and GCSE pass rates are above average.
- Standards in mathematics are improving well: the proportion of higher-grade passes has increased and progress is now good.
- The school offers excellent support for disabled students and those who have special educational needs, who make good and sometimes outstanding progress.
- Students' standards of speaking and listening are developed well throughout the school.
- Students behave well, are very attentive in lessons and say they feel safe in school and enjoy coming to school.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership through high expectations for achievement and behaviour, a clear vision for school development and highly effective arrangements for developing teaching.
- The school uses information on students' progress very effectively to identify areas for improvement and to target individual support.
- Subject leaders use a wide range of evidence to monitor standards and use it very well to plan further actions.
- Governors offer a good level of challenge to school leaders, check progress with school plans carefully and are very actively involved in the life of the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Achievement in mathematics is not as high as in English, especially for students supported by the pupil premium.
- Teachers do not match the work well enough to students' previous learning in some science lessons.
- Teachers do not always correct written work quickly and make sure that students think about how to do better in the future.
- Some teachers do not explain in enough detail what they expect of the most able students in their groups.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 41 lessons, including eight joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to other lessons, tutor periods and assemblies, and looked at samples of students' work.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, the headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, heads of subject departments, teachers, members of the governing body, and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised a variety of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, school development plans, behaviour records, safeguarding records, governing body documents, and documents relating to the management of teachers' performance.
- Inspectors also considered the views expressed in 47 questionnaires returned by school staff, together with the 39 responses submitted by parents to the online Parent View survey.

Inspection team

Roger Waddingham, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Stephen Hume	Additional Inspector
Helen Booth	Additional Inspector
Sa'ad Khaldi	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashcroft High School is an average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for support through the pupil premium is above average. This is additional funding allocated by the government for groups of pupils, including those looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The number of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is much higher than in most schools of this size, and the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is also well above average.
- The proportion of students receiving extra support through school action, school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of students by the end of Year 11.
- The headteacher supports two local schools by working as a mentor to their headteachers.
- The school offers work-related training on construction for three groups of Key Stage 4 students through its partnership with Stopsley High School.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - marking students' work and returning it to them quickly so that their responses to any comments are timely and thoughtful
 - ensuring all teachers explain clearly to students what high-quality work should look like.
- Further raise achievement by:
 - improving progress in mathematics, especially for students supported by the pupil premium
 - always matching work carefully to students' previous learning in science lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Achievement is good and improving at GCSE. The proportion of students achieving five good passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen over the past three years and is now above the 2012 national average. This represents good progress because these students' starting points were much lower than average on entry to the school.
- Attainment in English has been in line with or above the national averages for three years. The proportion of higher-grade passes has improved well, and as a result of highly effective teaching and well-targeted individual support the majority of students make outstanding progress.
- Students make good progress in mathematics overall. More-able students in particular did very well in 2013 after a departmental focus on improving the number of high-grade passes in the subject. Early entry to GCSE has been used well to ensure students achieve challenging targets and to extend the course so that students may study the subject to A-level standards in some cases.
- Results in the three separate sciences are consistently high. Although there was a recent dip in results for the core and additional science examinations, the school has taken effective steps to remedy this and the progress seen in lessons was good.
- Students supported by the pupil premium now make good progress in English because of the well-planned individual help they have received, and the gap in attainment between them and their classmates decreased to two thirds of a GCSE grade in 2013. In mathematics the gap remained at one GCSE grade in 2013, but with the increased support now available in class, current pupils were seen to be making good progress.
- The progress of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is good. Many pupils who speak English as an additional language make progress that is well above average, and they appreciate the help that the school gives them.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress overall, and many make outstanding progress as a result of carefully managed support, particularly in literacy. The leader responsible for these students reviews their progress very frequently and ensures students have tasks that are well planned to match their needs in lessons.
- Students develop their literacy skills well across a good range of subjects. They benefit from frequent opportunities to develop their confidence in speaking in class, a clear focus on key vocabulary and effective support for weaker readers when they enter the school.
- Year 7 students who have fallen behind make good progress because the 'catch-up' funding to support them has been used very well. Trained staff run individual mathematics sessions, extra groups for literacy and numeracy and after-school support groups for personal and social development. Further reading resources are provided so that Year 11 students work very effectively with these Year 7 students by hearing them read.
- Students who are educated off-site for part of the week show good motivation and attendance and achieve well.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is consistently good overall, and outstanding in an increasing number of lessons. The school has worked well on improving teaching since the last inspection and staff now use questioning in lessons very effectively so that students contribute readily and confidently to discussion work.
- Staff use their strong subject knowledge well to plan activities that interest and challenge students. They emphasise key words carefully and make sure that students understand them by asking for explanations in careful detail.
- Teachers use the school's guidance to plan lessons well, identifying clear aims for the tasks set and including a good range of types of activity. Visual and practical resources are used to support class discussion and independent tasks very effectively. Homework tasks have good variety, with highly effective use of information technology to support activities in English, mathematics and science.
- In the best-taught lessons seen students understood well what was expected of them before they started to work independently, because the teacher had explained the expected standards linked to the national curriculum or the examination syllabus. Occasionally staff did not make clear enough what high-quality work should look like.
- In one physical education lesson students made outstanding progress because they used their knowledge of the required standards well to assess each other's performances. In an English lesson, progress was outstanding because the students understood the importance of asking progressively higher-level questions as they developed their analysis of a text.
- The school behaviour policy is used consistently by staff. Few examples of poor behaviour were seen in lessons and students worked at a good pace, showing high levels of motivation and concentrating well on their learning. Teaching assistants are used very well to build students' confidence and help them with individual difficulties.
- Teachers show that they have high expectations for achievement, setting challenging targets and giving students good support through questioning to find out if they have understood. Just occasionally, work is not planned well enough to maximise students' achievement by building on their previous learning in science lessons.
- The school marking policy has recently been revised so that staff give detailed written guidance in response to particular pieces of students' work. Students say that this is effective when it happens frequently, but in some classes work in their exercise books is not reviewed in enough detail and students are not always given timely advice that enables them to correct mistakes and think about what they need to improve.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Behaviour throughout the school is good, both in lessons and at other times of the school day. Students move throughout the buildings in a calm and orderly manner, treating the new facilities with a good degree of care and showing good consideration for others.
- In most lessons, behaviour is also good and in many it is outstanding. Students concentrate well on their tasks and often work at a high pace over sustained periods of time. They arrive at lessons promptly, settling to their work with little time wasted. They contribute with confidence

to discussions when working in small groups or with the whole class. They listen carefully to others.

- Both students and staff report that students enjoy being at the school. They feel well supported through the house system and the mixed-age tutor groups where older students offer helpful advice to their younger classmates.
- Students say that incidents of bullying are rare, and are confident that they are dealt with effectively. They feel safe in the school, with students of all backgrounds working well together.
- Attendance is improving and the school reports current figures in line with the national averages. The school has worked successfully to reduce the levels of persistent absence through regular monitoring and following up of cases of concern. Exclusions are low and the school offers good support to pupils who have behavioural difficulties.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, senior leaders and the governors share the same commitment to securing high standards in the school. They set very challenging academic targets for all students and provide very well-managed personal support through the house system, so all students have the confidence to try to achieve their best.
- The high quality of the support for students' welfare and personal development is a strength of the school. The importance of this to the academic vision is emphasised by the recent building developments and new senior management appointments, which have further enhanced the impact of the pastoral team.
- The school has highly effective systems for evaluating its own work. Staff often compare their evaluations with those of external reviewers to ensure they maintain high expectations and have an accurate understanding of their performance as well as that of the students. Regular senior management reviews of departmental effectiveness and good opportunities given to subject leaders to gather their own monitoring evidence mean that any areas for improvement are identified quickly and accurately and are acted on promptly.
- For example, staffing difficulties in English and mathematics were recognised in the past year and management support was highly successful in promoting students' improved progress in English in particular. In mathematics, further staff turnover means that although the planned actions have already led to improvements, continuing development work is needed.
- Teaching is monitored and developed very carefully, and the expectations for outstanding teaching are understood well by leaders and managers at all levels, with a positive impact on classroom practice. The actions planned after the last inspection have been very successful in bringing about improvements and staff feel that the school's arrangements for developing their skills are very well managed, meeting their needs well. This view is supported by the number of examples of strong teaching seen, in which key strengths related to areas where staff reported they had recently received training.
- The school's system for target setting is well established and understood by all staff, and reflects very high expectations. Excellent collection and use of tracking information mean that all staff feel accountable for students' performance, taking personal responsibility for analysing progress and planning necessary improvements in their classes. Subject leaders show good initiative in using this information to monitor standards and teaching in their own departments.

- The school provides opportunities for high-quality outcomes in a wide range of academic, work-related and sporting subjects, which are well matched to the needs and aspirations of the students. There are excellent opportunities planned for students to develop their literacy skills in many subjects. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted strongly, and this results in highly positive outcomes for their safety, welfare and confidence. Students receive very good guidance on the next stages in their education, both from the school and from outside agencies.
- The way disabled students and those who have special educational needs are catered for is excellent. Students receive support from well-trained and well-qualified specialist staff that is carefully matched to their needs and they make very good progress as a result. The progress of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is good, because the school has provided extra staffing in class and extra lessons to support them, and this is markedly raising their achievement.
- The school makes good use of support from the local authority, so that staff benefit from a good range of expertise from other professional colleagues.
- The arrangements for safeguarding meet all national requirements, and the management of training and record keeping is exemplary.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is well organised. Governors are experienced; they use their good skills in monitoring and the analysis of data to provide good support and challenge to school leaders.
 - They are aware of the strengths and development areas for the school, making regular visits to monitor progress with school development priorities and holding staff to account over students' progress and teaching standards.
 - Governors know about the quality of teaching and receive regular reports on what the school is doing to develop teaching and to tackle any underperformance. One governor has received specific training on the targets that are set for the management of teachers' performance, and on overseeing the arrangements for teachers' pay rises and promotion.
 - The way the pupil premium is spent for eligible students is monitored regularly at meetings and governors know how well these students achieve.
 - Governors take an active part in the life of the school, attending parents' meetings and working with students on improving their literacy and expanding their career aspirations. They attend training regularly to add to their own wide-ranging professional expertise.

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	109707
Local authority	Luton
Inspection number	429532

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	956
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Barbara Campbell
Headteacher	Monica Austin
Date of previous school inspection	22–23 March 2011
Telephone number	01582 436100
Fax number	01582 436118
Email address	admin.as@campusluton.org.uk

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