

The Ashcombe School

Ashcombe Road, Dorking, RH4 1LY

Inspection dates 28 – 29 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The vast majority of students make good progress and a good proportion make better than expected progress.
- The attainment of students is consistently good at GCSE and A level. Results in English and mathematics for a large majority of students compare well with national averages.
- The school cares extremely well for the students, keeps them safe and supports effectively those who face challenges.
- Students in the sixth form generally do well and leave school suitably prepared for university life or work. Some do exceptionally well and go on to study at top universities.
- The headteacher of the school leads with calm, quiet authority. The governors say that this sets the tone for the school. Leaders at all levels follow the example set by the headteacher. All leaders contribute to school improvement.
- The school has developed its own unique system for checking students' progress. It has been able to apply this system to the new National Curriculum.
- The curriculum of the school is appropriate for the large majority of its students. A few students study for vocational qualifications at other local colleges.
- Mathematics is a strength of the school. Teaching is also consistently good in English. Many teachers possess good subject knowledge and communicate it well.
- Students are proud of the school, take pride in their uniform, behave well and treat staff respectfully.
- Pastoral care is exceptional. Each member of the community is valued and their well-being matters to everyone.
- The school makes an impressive contribution to students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. It provides many opportunities for students to take part in sporting, musical, artistic, charitable and voluntary activities.
- The vast majority of parents are fully supportive of the school. They feel fortunate to have such a school locally.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is inspirational or challenging, especially for the most-able students in Key Stage 3.
- Not all teachers routinely give students helpful written feedback on their work or show them how it could be improved.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 52 lessons, 11 of which were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors analysed a range of students' work.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, school leaders and teachers. Two meetings were held with a total of five governors.
- Inspectors met with five groups of students. They observed students' behaviour around the site and talked to many informally. Inspectors also heard four Year 7 students read.
- A range of the school's documentation was checked carefully, including information about students' achievement, the school's own checks on its performance, the headteacher's reports to the governing body, a wide range of policies and the school's arrangements to keep students safe.
- Inspectors analysed 319 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors also met with a group of six parents and took account of two letters from parents.
- Ninety-six responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey were analysed.

Inspection team

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Full report

Information about this school

- The Ashcombe School is a larger-than-average secondary school.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is well below average.
- The proportion of students who are eligible for pupil premium funding (additional funding provided to help meet their needs) is well below average.
- The large majority of students are White British.
- A few students study at Reigate Valley College and a small minority study for a day a week at East Surrey College.
- The school has 'leadership partner' status. The headteacher supports a wide range of schools across the country. He specialises in helping others understand information about students' progress.
- The school meets the current government floor standards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is challenging and inspirational so that all students consistently make substantial and sustained progress by:
 - setting harder work for the most-able students in Key Stage 3
 - encouraging teachers to share more of the excellent practice that already exists
 - encouraging subject leaders to develop teachers' expertise in their teams.
- Improve the quality of written feedback students receive by:
 - reviewing and re-setting clear, school-wide expectations about the frequency and quality of marking
 - applying consistently marking policies in all departments
 - challenging any teacher's performance that does not meet expectations.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is ambitious for every student in the school. His leadership is characterised by calm, quiet authority. He is a national expert on the information that schools hold about students' attainment and progress. This knowledge is used to good effect in ensuring that each student does as well as they can.
- The headteacher is visible around the school setting the tone he wants. He is often seen collecting litter and encouraging students to do the same. This is a good example to staff and students alike. He appears to have time for anyone who requests it.
- Senior leaders support well the strategic intents of the school. This is a clear statement about The Ashcombe School's values and ethos. One of the strategic intents is that the school 'is a safe, warm and welcoming place'. Inspectors found this to be so.
- The leadership of the pastoral system is efficient and effective. Detailed records are kept of students' behaviour and attendance so that any patterns or trends can be identified early and quickly. The heads of lower and upper school manage heads of year who lead effective teams of tutors. Tutors manage well the day-to-day needs of students. They help with ensuring that students receive meaningful rewards for the things they do well as well as appropriate sanctions when things go wrong. The school's arrangements for safeguarding students are secure.
- The vast majority of middle leaders contribute well to the leadership of subject departments. The heads of English, mathematics and science ensure that these core subjects are delivered in ways that help students broadly achieve the results they need. All subject leaders are responsible for checking that marking occurs regularly and to good effect. Not enough work has been done to ensure that this is always the case.
- The school has a traditional academic curriculum which leads mainly to GCSEs at the end of Key Stage 4. A few students appropriately study for vocational qualifications at either of its educational partners: Reigate Valley College or East Surrey College. The school developed expertise in the teaching of languages when it was designated as a specialist language college. Consequently all students study French and German at KS3 and at least one at KS4 and can opt to study for qualifications in Italian, Spanish or Mandarin from Year 8 onwards..
- Students develop good cultural understanding through the wide variety of language courses. This is further enhanced by a range of extra-curricular activities such as language exchanges, trips to the theatre and concerts. The strong moral purpose of the school assists students' moral development and they know clearly the difference between right and wrong. Assemblies contribute well to students' spiritual development as does teaching in religious studies and history. In a religious studies lesson students were observed explaining attitudes to racism in a range of religions. In a form time students were caused to respond to a video about the holocaust and they did so reflectively and with respect.
- The school prepares students well for life in modern Britain. Posters on doors advertise debates about freedom of speech, for example. Students practise democratic processes by participating in the year and school councils. Older students mentor more junior students in subjects where they are less secure. Some practise leadership by following junior sports leadership awards. A large majority of Year 10 students study for the Duke of Edinburgh's bronze award and some work their way through to achieving the gold award when they are in the sixth form.
- The school is designated as an 'overview' school by the local authority. This means it receives three helpful visits a year to assist with analysing accurately its examination results and to check the quality of teaching.
- Students and parents say that the academic, careers advice and guidance students receive are useful in making the right choices. In a few cases, students in the sixth form find themselves on the wrong courses and are helped to make alternative decisions. The information provided is independent so that students are aware of courses and qualifications away from the The Ashcombe School.

The governance of the school:

- Governors know the school well. They are very proud of it. They depend on detailed reports from the headteacher, especially his analysis of students' examination attainment. They ask appropriate questions about all matters relating to the school and are growing in understanding about its strengths and relatively few weaknesses. Governors oversee the school's use of the pupil premium and have supported a detailed analysis of its effectiveness. They are less clear about the details of the school's approach to managing the performance of staff. They are supportive of the headteacher's approach to rewarding good performance and are aware of how underperformance is managed. He presents them

regularly with an analysis of his checks on the quality of teaching.

- Governors have a range of professional skills which are helpful to the school including experience in the business, personnel, finance and accounting sectors. Most have visited the school recently and contributed to helpful discussions about the quality of teaching and aspects of the health and safety arrangements in the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good.
- The school is quiet and calm even at breaks and lunchtimes. Students move around the buildings in an orderly manner. They are extremely polite and courteous to visitors. They greet each other and adults warmly.
- Good relationships have been built between many teachers and their students. These have led to a pleasant atmosphere in the very large majority of lessons. Students settle well and learning is rarely disrupted.
- The five minute pause between lessons means that the vast majority of lessons start punctually. The length of the lessons does mean that towards the end of some, concentration begins to wane and some time is lost as 'packing up' begins ahead of the bell.
- The robust systems that have been developed to monitor behaviour ensure that the rare instances of bullying are identified early and dealt with appropriately. Students are clear about what bullying is, what to do if it occurs and certain that it is dealt with firmly but fairly. The school's actions with regard to bullying are in keeping with its restorative approaches to pastoral care overall.
- The school has developed an effective system of rewards and sanctions. Exclusion is used as a last resort and a few students each year are punished in this way for breaking the school's high standards.
- Students' attendance is good though the headline figures are affected negatively by the school's decision to award study leave to those in Year 11 approaching formal examinations.
- Students' behaviour while on alternative placement is also good.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- The checks that the school makes on adults working with students are rigorous and robust.
- Students learn how to keep themselves safe online, in cars, while they are at school and on their way to and from it. They receive good teaching about risky behaviours in form time and personal, social and health education at a point in time when the school judges this to be appropriate.
- New members of staff are trained well about issues of child protection and safeguarding as part of their induction. This training is updated regularly.
- Governors oversee effectively the safeguarding work of the school.
- Students benefiting from alternative placements are also kept safe. Arrangements at these settings are equally robust and are assured by leaders at the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- The large majority of teaching is good and causes good achievement in lessons and over time. There is no inadequate teaching. Weaker teachers receive support through positive coaching or mentoring. Most respond and their teaching improves.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge. They communicate it effectively and well. Students benefit from having subject-specialists in the vast majority of their lessons.
- Teachers plan effective lessons which take account of what students already know, understand and can do. Many make good use of the wide array of information about students' performance that the school has gathered up over time.
- All teachers are expected to mark work in accordance with each department's individual policy. Not all do. The quality of written feedback does not match the often extremely detailed spoken feedback that students receive in lessons. This frequently becomes a helpful dialogue. In one mathematics lessons, the

direction of the class was determined by several students asking the teacher questions to extend their knowledge and understanding of how to solve a complex mathematical problem.

- Not all teachers take the time to correct even basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. This limits students' ability to access the additional marks available in some examinations.
- The most effective teachers question students regularly to check their understanding in lessons. They ask probing questions which help deepen students' knowledge. In a physical education lesson the teacher regularly paused a gymnastic activity to challenge the students to think about how they could enhance their performance.
- Mathematics is taught very well in the school. Students apply mathematical skills adeptly in a range of other subjects. English is also taught well so that students' progress is not slowed by limitations in their literacy. In one lesson students were observed reciting sections from Macbeth and clearly enjoyed doing so: 'This is so much better than primary; we do real English', said one student.
- Teaching is frequently supported by effective teaching assistants. In an 'option support' session, one adult was working carefully with two students to boost their understanding of mathematics. A second teaching assistant was observed skilfully working with a Year 10 student to improve her understanding of the causes of the Second World War.
- Most students stated that they receive an appropriate amount of homework which helps them to progress. The vast majority of parents agree. Online support for students' homework is provided through several software packages and applications.

The achievement of pupils is good

- In 2014, the proportion of students who made expected progress in English was above the national average. The proportion who made expected progress in mathematics was also above the national average.
- In 2014, the proportion of students who made more than expected progress was well above the national averages for English and mathematics. This includes the few disadvantaged students who arrived at the school with very high prior attainment in their primary schools. They did exceptionally well.
- The proportion of students who achieved five or more good passes including English and mathematics was well above the national average. This figure was marginally lower than for the preceding year but reflects the strenuous efforts on the part of the school to ensure students follow courses leading to secure qualifications in all subjects.
- Nearly all students attained a GCSE A* to G grade in every one of their subjects.
- As a result of good teaching over time and careful planning the proportion of students who added value to their learning in their best eight subjects was significantly above the national average in 2014. Year 7 catch-up funding is used well to support those whose reading is behind their classmates. The development of literacy and numeracy skills in English and mathematics also supports students' learning in the wider curriculum.
- The school uses an innovative and unique system for recording and checking students' progress. All teachers are expected to have this information available in their lessons. As a result teachers generally know how well students are doing. Not all students could talk confidently about their progress. In the sixth form a few reported that teachers helpfully compare their attainment to actual A-level grades. This, they said, helped them judge more accurately their current level of performance.
- In physical education, the team has adapted the system to make it even more helpful for checking progress in each of the disciplines. Teachers are then able to assess students' progress accurately lesson by lesson. Many achieve extremely well as a result.
- The school does not enter students early for any of their GCSE examinations.
- The very small group of students who study at alternative placements, at partner colleges, attain the relevant qualifications.
- The very small minority of disabled students and those with special educational needs generally progress as well as their classmates and they attain standards broadly in line with other students nationally. Those with behavioural or emotional difficulties tend to have variable performance.
- The very small minority of disadvantaged students broadly progress as well as their classmates and their attainment compares favourably with other students nationally. This reflects the school's inclusive ethos and its commitment to equal opportunities.
- Over half the students are 'most-able' and enter the school with National Curriculum Level 5s in English and mathematics. Many achieve well and go on to achieve excellent results at A level, securing places at

top universities.

The sixth form provision

is good

- Students in the sixth form benefit from teaching which is never less than good. This means that students make good progress across the two years and achieve good results. A large proportion achieve extremely well.
- The school has a good track record of supporting students to secure places at top universities with a few each year going on to Oxford, Cambridge or others in the Russell Group. Students are prepared for degrees in a full range of subjects including those that are hard to access such as medicine.
- The curriculum in the sixth form is broad, offering around 25 different A-level subjects. The vast majority of students are therefore able to select four AS levels to start out studying in Year 12. Students are also given the opportunity to undertake leadership roles across the school and to access extra-curricular activities. They participate in a good range of local community initiatives; they lead charities week and run an old folks party successfully.
- Students eligible for additional funding do as well as their peers.
- The few students who need to repeat their GCSE examinations in English and mathematics are supported well to do so.
- Retention rates are good though some students find that the courses they embark on in Year 12 are not really suitable. Some start again and some leave. Not all the students who could transfer from Year 11 do. Some choose to take up places in further education or apprenticeships and about 5% every year opt to go straight into work.
- The pastoral nature of the leadership of the sixth form means that all students are cared for and looked after well. It also provides age-appropriate teaching on issues that are of concern to students and advice on how they can keep themselves safe.
- The sixth form leaders, in keeping with the overarching strategic intents of the school, are totally dedicated to ensuring that each student develops personally and well.

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	125264
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	453387

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1427
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	296
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Chair	Mrs Barbara Brigham
Headteacher	Mr David Blow
Date of previous school inspection	10–11 November 2010
Telephone number	01306886312
Fax number	01306742537
Email address	info@ashcombe.surrey.sch.uk

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