

Inspection of a good school: The Ashcombe School

Ashcombe Road, Dorking, Surrey RH4 1LY

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 May 2024

Outcome

The Ashcombe School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Chris Panting. The school is part of the South East Surrey Schools Education Trust, which means that other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The school is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tim Poole. There is also an executive headteacher, David Blow, who is responsible for this school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils are supported to achieve both academically and personally. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), learn an ambitious curriculum and achieve well.

Pupils and staff value how leaders have created a caring school community. Relationships are positive and strong. Pupils are respectful of each other and their teachers. They are proud of their school and feel safe and happy. Sixth-form students are excellent role models for younger pupils, often acting as mentors and coaches. Many pupils develop their leadership and teamwork skills through participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

The school's '6 habits of learning' underpin the sensible behaviour of pupils during lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils' conduct helps to make the school a calm and orderly environment. If bullying happens, which is unusual, pupils have confidence to report it and know that staff will deal with it quickly.

Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular opportunities. There are numerous clubs covering sports and the arts. Pupils are excited to demonstrate their many talents, such as performing in their forthcoming show 'The Addams Family'. The annual activities and charity weeks are popular. Pupils enjoy trips to several destinations in Europe and North America.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has developed an ambitious curriculum that enables most of its pupils to achieve well. In key stage 3, pupils learn across a broad range of subjects providing a strong foundation for later study. In key stage 4, and in the sixth form, pupils can choose from a wide range of courses to pursue their particular interests. The number of pupils taking the English Baccalaureate is high. Students in the sixth form are aspirational because their teachers have high expectations for them.

In each subject, pupils build their knowledge and skills in a logical way. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to set out important concepts clearly. They make sure that learning is revisited so that pupils learn more and remember more. Many teachers use questioning well to test pupils' understanding. However, sometimes teachers do not check carefully enough that pupils have grasped key knowledge before moving on. This can mean pupils have gaps in their understanding which are not always swiftly addressed.

The school accurately identifies where pupils with SEND need extra support. Staff know these pupils and their individual needs well. Appropriate support is put in place such as the additional help given to those who need support to improve their literacy and numeracy. This helps pupils with SEND to progress through the same ambitious curriculum as their peers. Although the school is similarly ambitious for the relatively small proportion of other disadvantaged pupils, it rightly recognises that their achievement is not high enough overall. The school is taking appropriate action to address this issue. Consequently, these pupils' learning is beginning to become more secure.

The importance of reading has a high profile. The school identifies pupils who find reading more difficult as soon as they join the school. These pupils receive additional support to help them become more confident and fluent readers over time. The school actively promotes reading for pleasure by ensuring that pupils can enjoy finding a book to read in the well-stocked library.

Most pupils have high attendance because they enjoy coming to school. The school also has clear and effective systems to respond to pupils' absence. However, some disadvantaged pupils do not attend school regularly enough, meaning they are not always benefiting from the important education the school provides.

The high-quality personal development programme teaches pupils how to stay safe and develops their wider understanding of the world around them. Pupils can express themselves maturely and confidently. They develop strong character traits which enable them to make positive contributions to society. Staff ensure that pupils have a strong understanding of diversity and that the school is an inclusive place where difference is celebrated. High-quality careers advice and guidance prepare pupils well for their next steps. There is a raft of opportunities, such as the annual careers fair and work experience placements, to help pupils make decisions about their futures. Most sixth-form students gain places at their chosen university or on apprenticeship courses, with some going on to prestigious universities.

The headteacher, governors and staff from the trust have a clear vision for the school.

Staff are proud to work here, and there is a great sense of teamwork. Staff at all levels feel supported, including teachers in the early stages of their careers. Leaders take exceptional care of staff well-being and workload, enabling staff to concentrate on continuing to develop the education the school offers.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some teachers do not always check pupils' understanding well enough. This means that gaps in learning and misconceptions are not always addressed. As a result, some pupils do not embed their learning as well as they could. The school should ensure that all teachers systematically check pupils' understanding so that the learning can be adapted to ensure that pupils secure the knowledge they need.
- Some pupils, especially disadvantaged pupils, do not attend school regularly enough. This holds back their progress and achievement. The school should continue its work with families to secure more regular attendance so that pupils' learning is more secure.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, The Ashcombe School, to be good in January 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	143901
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10322029
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,495
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	283
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tim Poole
Headteacher	Chris Panting
Website	www.ashcombe.surrey.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses three registered alternative provisions and one unregistered provision to support the education of a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, staff, pupils, the chair and representatives of the local governing body, and two trustees.
- An inspector held a telephone discussion with a member of staff at two alternative provisions.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, history, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors spoke to staff, including early career teachers, about behaviour and their workload in school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the confidential staff survey. They took account of the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including parents' free-text comments and feedback. Inspectors considered the views of pupils shared in the confidential pupil survey and through discussions held with pupils throughout the school.

Inspection team

Paula Sargent, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Owen McColgan	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Fry	Ofsted Inspector

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