



# Ashton-on-Mersey School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 106374  
**LEA** Trafford  
**Inspection number** 277545  
**Inspection dates** 19 January 2006 to 20 January 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Ms Julie Price Grimshaw HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Cecil Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Foundation		Sale
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16		Cheshire M33 5BP
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	0161 9731179
<b>Number on roll</b>	1283	<b>Fax number</b>	0161 9694954
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Brian Rigby MBE
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 November 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Tarun Kapur

<b>Age group</b> 11 to 16	<b>Inspection dates</b> 19 January 2006 - 20 January 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 277545
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Ashton on Mersey School is a foundation secondary modern school; about a third of children locally are selected for grammar school education. It is a larger than average school with 1283 pupils on roll. The number of pupils claiming free school meals is below the national average. The school's population is largely white British with a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below the national average. The school became a specialist sports college in 1998 and was awarded high performing specialist school status in December 2005. It is also a designated Training School, and was recently awarded vocational specialist college status.

## **Key for inspection grades**

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Ashton on Mersey is an outstanding school, and the school's evaluation of its work recognises the major strengths that contribute to this. Pupils make excellent progress during their time at the school, and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well catered for. Well managed partnerships with outside agencies enhance the work of the school. A strong emphasis on healthy living is evident, and sports college status impacts positively on pupils' overall achievement. Pupils are actively involved in making decisions about the school; the school council, healthy schools group and the sports council gather the views of pupils and meet regularly in order to discuss initiatives and improvements.

The majority of teaching is of good quality, with some excellent practice. Although there is no unsatisfactory teaching, a significant minority of lessons is less than good. An outstanding curriculum and a clear and consistent focus on pupils' individual needs are important factors leading to high achievement. A number of parents of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly appreciative of the care and support provided for their children, which enable them to achieve so well. Although the school periodically seeks the opinions of parents and carers and considers these views when making decisions, a small minority of parents feel that consultation is not sufficiently regular and widespread.

Overall, the school is very well led and managed. Senior managers have successfully promoted an extremely positive ethos amongst staff and pupils. Whole school improvement planning is of good quality, and the school has successfully addressed the issues raised during the previous inspection. Resources are well deployed, and the school provides very good value for money.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Develop effective strategies to ensure that all teaching is of at least good quality.
- Implement systems to seek the views of all parents and carers on a regular basis.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 1

Learners join the school with below average results from their primary schools. They make good progress during Years 7 to 9 and then progress at a very fast rate during years 10 and 11. This is due to the school's very good use of assessment data to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy in Years 7 to 9, and to the thorough monitoring and targeting mechanisms used at every level of the school's work. The school works very hard to meet the needs of all of its pupils; for example, through providing tailored mentoring and extra help in lessons outside the school day. A significant number of pupils are entered early for General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in Years 9 and 10 in order to boost confidence and increase the range of subjects they can study in Years 10 and 11. In some cases, pupils move on to AS

level work in Year 11. Pupils are fully involved in their learning and have a very good understanding of how to improve. The results at the end of Year 9 are close to the national average and at the end of Year 11 are above average.

There has been sustained year on year improvement in Year 9 test results in English, mathematics and science, and in GCSE results over the last 4 years. Results are far higher than at the time of the previous inspection.

The staff set challenging targets, linked to high expectations. Rigorous data analysis and action taken has led to the school exceeding its targets over the last four years. Learners of all backgrounds and prior attainment thrive. The achievement of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly good.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 1**

Pupils enjoy being at the school and they develop exceptionally well within a calm and purposeful atmosphere. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now in line with the national average. Punctuality is very good, and almost all pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. Exclusion levels are low and there have been no permanent exclusions in recent years.

Pupils are very positive about their school and they appreciate the rich variety of opportunities they are given. They show genuine care for each other and involve themselves in effective anti-bullying and peer mentoring programmes. Those in wheelchairs are fully integrated and speak powerfully about their sense of acceptance and achievement. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good and is enhanced by a wide range of events and activities that build self-esteem, leadership skills and compassion. An excellent example of this is the effective partnership with a local premiership football team, which motivates pupils and has led to the development of an innovative pupil leadership course. The school council, healthy schools group and the sports council all work well in bringing about improvements for pupils.

Suitable sex education and guidance about drugs and alcohol are provided within an effective Personal Health and Social Education (PSHE) programme. Pupils adopt safe practices and gain an appropriate awareness of risks. The promotion of healthy living is a strength of this specialist sports college, which is at the leading edge of learning through sport and advocating fitness and well-being. Healthy meals have been added to school menus, and pupils are rewarded for choosing healthy options. They are encouraged to make a very positive contribution to the community through a range of charity events. The school ensures that pupils experience the world of work and equips them well to become confident young people who demonstrate a generosity of spirit and a respect for others.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, with examples of outstanding practice. In the best lessons, teachers have the highest expectations of what their pupils can achieve and skilled questioning encourages them to think deeply about the subject-matter. In an excellent Year 10 graphics session on typography, for example, pupils responded positively to rapid pace, relentless challenge and a wide range of opportunities for them to learn by doing. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and support assistants; mutual respect abounds, and most teachers consider individual pupils' preferred learning styles when planning and delivering lessons. In many lessons, information and communication technology (ICT) is used very well to enhance teaching and learning. However, the school recognises that, in a minority of lessons, a lack of engagement and too many teacher-directed activities sometimes inhibit pupils from taking sufficient responsibility for their own learning.

Assessment systems are excellent. Not only does the school audit the learning styles of each pupil, it also rigorously tracks the progress made by individuals and gives them detailed information on how they may improve their work. Pupils in all years are fully aware of their targets in each subject and have a keen understanding of which skills need to be reinforced if they are to meet and, in many cases, exceed them.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

The school is concerned to meet the needs of each individual pupil and to offer the widest choice of courses it can. As a result, the curriculum is outstanding and is always under review. Sports college status has a positive effect on learning and achievement throughout the school. The Primary Project in Year 7 is a model of excellent practice; it is very effective in raising the achievement, standards and self-esteem of pupils with emotional, behavioural and physical problems who are new to the school. In addition, the opportunities for pupils to enter for GCSE in Year 9 allow pupils to take more advantage of the wide range of curriculum pathways open to them in Years 10 and 11. The school is rightly proud of its wide range of vocational courses, which is extended each year, but places equal emphasis on offering its pupils an increasing variety of academic subjects as well as an alternative programme to formal examinations.

The enrichment programme is extensive; there is a wide range of well-attended extra-curricular activities at the end of the day. One pupil in Year 11 said, 'there are so many things we can do, places we can visit and interests we can follow, I don't ever want to leave our school'.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support for learners is outstanding. There is a genuine commitment to inclusion and raising achievement. A culture of praise and encouragement empowers and inspires pupils. Staff promote health and safety and show care and commitment. Assemblies are used very effectively to promote values and positive attitudes. Child protection arrangements are robust and reviewed regularly.

There is an effective rewards system; parents are informed on a weekly basis of high quality work produced by their children. Guidance on choices and progression is very effective and pupils are equipped to make informed choices. High quality displays around the school reinforce core values and pastoral themes. The school works well with parents but effective partnership with a minority needs further development. Pastoral staff work well with a range of individuals and agencies to provide mentoring and counselling for pupils.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 1

Members of the senior leadership team share a corporate vision for the future of the school. Roles and responsibilities of team members are clearly defined and understood. The separate strands of the school's work, such as sports college, training school and vocational college, are well managed and outcomes from monitoring programmes are drawn together to inform whole-school development planning. Senior staff monitor the quality of teaching and learning through lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work and learners' evaluations of teaching; as a result, the school has an accurate understanding of strengths and weaknesses across its provision. The quality of the school's self evaluation is good. School managers have established a positive ethos, which is evident amongst staff and pupils. Staff feel valued and supported, and pupils are motivated by the rewards system.

Although accommodation is a little cramped in some areas of the school - most notably the corridors - provision has been made for pupils to spend breaks and lunchtimes in designated areas where they can feel safe. Resources are well deployed throughout the school.

The school governors are extremely committed to the school; as well as carrying out all statutory responsibilities, members of the governing body are actively involved in many aspects of school life, such as visiting lessons, invigilating examinations and participating in pupils' efforts to raise funds for charity. Governors assist school leaders by discussing issues in much detail, and above all, ensuring that any action taken is ultimately for the benefit of learners.

The school formally gathers the views of parents and carers on occasions, for example, at parents' evenings. However, a small minority of parents feel that they are not consulted regularly enough, and that their views are not always taken into consideration.

The school has addressed all points for improvement outlined in the last inspection report, and clearly demonstrates the capacity to make further improvements.



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## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	1	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	2	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	1	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	1	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Following our visit to your school we would like to thank you for making us feel so welcome and for sharing your views with us. We would like to tell you what we found out about your school.

We think that Ashton on Mersey is an outstanding school. You told us that many of your lessons are lively and interesting, and we agree. The lessons you enjoy most are those where you are actively involved in a variety of activities, and many of your teachers think very carefully about how you, as individuals, will learn best. You also told us that there are a few lessons where you are asked to do less interesting tasks, or where you are not actively involved, and that you don't find these lessons as enjoyable or helpful. We think that most of the teaching in your school is good and some is excellent, but we have asked the staff to think about how they can make further improvements so that all lessons are at least good.

Many of you make excellent progress during your time at the school, especially in Year 10 and 11. The staff assess your work very carefully and set challenging targets for you all. You respond very well to this, and many of you go on to do even better than expected - so well done! There is a very wide range of subjects and courses available for you, which also helps you achieve well. We believe that the staff care about your personal development, and we were impressed that so many of you show care and consideration for each other.

Sports college status has helped to make your school a success. We are pleased that the school has started to provide healthy meal options for you. The school council, healthy schools group and the sports council are keen to gather your ideas and help to improve things for you, so please don't hesitate to pass your views on to them!

Mr Kapur, Mrs Beer and all the staff work hard to help you get the very best from your time at Ashton on Mersey. We are very pleased that so many of you are proud of your school, and hope that you will continue to work hard to raise standards even further and achieve your full potential.