



Ashcroft High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 109707
LEA LUTON LEA
Inspection number 282917
Inspection dates 15 November 2005 to 16 November 2005
Reporting inspector Sean Harford HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Crawley Green Road
School category	Foundation		LU2 9AG
Age range of pupils	11 to 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01582436100
Number on roll	1008	Fax number	01582436118
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Michael Cook
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Ms Monica Austin

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11 to 16	15 November 2005 - 16 November 2005	282917

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashcroft High is an average sized comprehensive school that serves a residential area to the east of Luton town centre. Its pupils come from a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds and are drawn mainly from five local primary schools. At 19.8%, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The school has a reasonably diverse pupil population including 72% White British, 10% Asian or Asian British pupils from Bangladeshi, Indian or Pakistani backgrounds. There are nearly 7% Black or Black British pupils from Caribbean or African backgrounds. Of the 149 pupils who speak English as an additional language, 90 are at the early stages of doing so, a number that is high for a school of its size. At just over 21%, the proportion of the pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities is high, although only 1.9% have a Statement of Special Educational Need, a figure that is broadly similar to the national average. The pupils attainment in English, mathematics and science when they start at the school varies from year to year, but is broadly average. When the school was inspected in October 2003, it was judged to require special measures.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. At the time of its last inspection in October 2003, the quality of teaching and learning, the pupils behaviour, and the effectiveness of leadership and management were poor. Additionally, the pupils attitudes to learning and their progress were unsatisfactory. When she joined the school four terms ago, the headteacher set out thoughtful plans for improvement and a clear vision for its future. Through her good leadership, determination for the school to provide a better education for its pupils, and the hard work and support of the other senior leaders and teachers, Ashcroft High has improved significantly. As a result of rigorous evaluation and effective support for staff, the quality of teaching has improved to a satisfactory standard. However, the school has more to do in ensuring that work is planned to suit the pupils different capabilities and that the provision for pupils who have learning difficulties is effective across the school. The pupils are generally interested in their learning and behave well in lessons. Their progress in the last year has been good in Key Stage 3, although it has been slower in Key Stage 4 where standards remain too low. The school has good systems for tracking the progress of the pupils. They are kept well informed about their current performance and what is expected of them in the future. However, while the marking of the pupils work is generally thorough, too little of it gives clear and incisive guidance to the pupils on how to improve to the next level. The school has developed accurate methods for identifying the things it does well and where it needs to do better. It has good means to make further improvements. Significant overspends over time compared to the actual level of funding mean that the school is giving inadequate value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards in Key Stage 4 by continuing to enhance the quality of teaching and learning.
- Plan work that matches better the different needs of all pupils.
- Develop an effective, whole-school approach to the provision for pupils who have learning difficulties.
- Improve marking to ensure that the pupils know how to make their work better.
- Ensure that an effective plan is implemented to resolve the schools unsatisfactory financial position.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Standards remain too low overall, although they have risen well in the last year. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2005, standards were broadly satisfactory and significantly higher than in 2004 when they were well below average. The pupils performance in English and mathematics was better than in science. Standards in Key Stage 4 remain too low, although the pupils overall performance in the national examinations in 2005 was much better than in 2004, and arrested the decline seen

over the last five years. In addition to the significantly better performance in vocational information and communication technology (ICT), standards rose well in nearly all subjects, including English, mathematics and science. The pupils attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year. It is generally a little below average, but not significantly so. Considering their starting points, the pupils achievement in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2005 was reasonable. However, up until last year, the legacy of weak provision in the school caused many of the pupils to underachieve. Since then, the pupils have made good progress because of the improvements in the quality of teaching, and their better behaviour and attitudes to learning. In Key Stage 4, the pupils have made reasonable progress in the last 12 months. This is demonstrated by the higher standards achieved in the national examinations and the gains made in lessons. Achievement is satisfactory overall.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

The pupils personal development and well-being are satisfactory. The school has continued to make good progress in addressing the weaknesses in the pupils attitudes, behaviour and other personal qualities since the last inspection. The pupils rate of attendance has improved well over the last year and is close to the national average. The pupils are generally punctual in the mornings and to lessons. The school has developed good procedures to monitor their absence and lateness. Pupils generally enjoy their learning and are motivated by the teachers efforts to celebrate their achievements. Most pupils work hard and listen attentively to their teachers, although some do not concentrate well and are too easily distracted. The pupils behaviour is satisfactory and the schools system of rewards and sanctions is well understood. Although a few pupils say that behaviour between lessons, and at break and lunchtimes is sometimes overly boisterous, they feel safe and many comment that behaviour in lessons has improved dramatically over the last year. This view is supported by the reduction in the number of exclusions and the significant decrease in bullying. Many pupils have played a strong part in addressing bullying through their involvement as peer mentors, a role that is appreciated by the pupils, especially those in Year 7. This is complemented well by the teachers and learning mentors in whom the pupils have confidence that when bullying occurs, they respond to it swiftly and sensitively. The pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Through religious education (RE) and the schools citizenship programme, the pupils develop a sound understanding of different cultures and beliefs. Assemblies are used effectively to promote the pupils spirituality and awareness of their place in the community. They often link well with citizenship lessons, for example this term, in developing enterprise skills in fundraising. A reasonable number of pupils get involved in assemblies and school productions, such as *Oliver!*; they enjoy the opportunities to develop their public speaking and performance skills. The pupils mix well and enjoy each others company. They are aware of the dangers posed by the abuse of drugs and respond reasonably well to the schools efforts to promote healthy eating and regular exercise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Lessons are generally well planned and include introductory activities that set the scene for learning well; they engage pupils interests so that they get working quickly. However, some lessons are not planned well enough to ensure that the needs of all pupils are fully met, particularly those of the least and most able. Questioning is generally used well to probe understanding and make pupils think harder. Conversely, in some lessons where teaching is otherwise satisfactory, questioning does not promote extended answers or meaningful thinking and the pupils respond accordingly. The pupils are kept on track through successful management of their behaviour. There has been a marked improvement in the pupils learning since the last inspection. Many pupils are able to get on with their work individually, although a few still find it difficult to work without help and support from teachers. They are more confident about making oral contributions and presentations in lessons. A key difference between good and satisfactory lessons is the clearer focus on the pupils skills in speaking and listening in the better lessons. In good lessons, group tasks are well structured, stimulate ideas and promote lively discussion. In a drama lesson, for example, small groups of pupils used props to generate ideas for a production. One pupil commented that the objects help us to be more imaginative. However, in the lessons where teaching and learning were satisfactory, too little use was made of discussion in pairs to rehearse ideas and answers. As a result, some pupils remained silent during whole-class discussions. The school is developing the use of assessment to support learning, but it is not embedded firmly in lessons. Whilst there are some good examples of marking that explain clearly to pupils how they can make their work better and a number of teachers give clear oral feedback on work, it is not consistent across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory and provides a broad and balanced programme of opportunities for learning. It has been enhanced in Key Stage 4 by offering a greater range of vocational courses through a collaborative project with other schools and the local authority. These courses, for example in catering and hairdressing provide flexibility to meet the pupils interests, needs and aspirations. They have led to greater choice and higher standards, especially in ICT. In Key Stage 3, satisfactory emphasis is placed on improving skills in literacy and numeracy, and extension of the more capable pupils in mathematics through an accelerated programme of study has begun. However, whilst the Golden Curriculum provides well for the small proportion of pupils who have Statements of Special Educational Need and those requiring high levels of support, pupils who have other learning difficulties are too often inadequately catered for in lessons. Citizenship and personal, health and social education cover a broad range of topics in line with national recommendations; opportunities to link with events

like Enterprise Week are taken up well. Careers guidance is adequate and work experience placements for the pupils are well established, especially for those who benefit from the Golden Curriculum. The Young Enterprise project for a small number of pupils in Year 10 motivates them and raises their aspirations while preparing them for changing patterns of future employment. The good range of clubs, sports, arts and drama activities are well supported by pupils and enrich their learning. They help pupils to catch up and improve basic skills as well as promoting self-confidence and fitness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The care, guidance and support provided for pupils are satisfactory overall. Child protection procedures meet requirements and suitable arrangements for ensuring the health and safety of staff and pupils are well established. There is good provision for the care of pupils. The care for those who are vulnerable is effective and sensitively provided. They know that there is always someone to whom they can turn for help. The arrangements for transfer from primary school ensure that pupils settle quickly into their new surroundings. The school works hard with its partner primary schools to identify pupils who need extra support, especially those who have behavioural difficulties. Most pupils know how well they are doing in their work, but fewer know precisely what they need to do to improve to reach their target levels. Older pupils appreciate the advice they are given when choosing their courses and those in Year 9 eagerly anticipate the vocational courses on offer to them in Key Stage 4. Homework is not set to a timetable and this causes some pupils difficulty in managing their own time. Additionally, disproportionately larger amounts of homework are given to the more capable pupils; the expectations of less capable pupils are too low in this respect. Support and guidance for pupils who have learning difficulties is satisfactory overall. Those pupils who have the greatest need are provided with good, well focused support that enables them to make adequate progress. However, some pupils who struggle in lessons are not well supported by work that is ill matched to their needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall, with some good features. Since her arrival in summer 2004, the headteacher has set high aspirations for the school, grounded in her belief that all pupils can achieve well. Through her commitment, hard work and clear thinking, she has helped the school to develop systems that have enabled it to form an accurate picture of its strengths and weaknesses, whilst taking into account the views of the pupils and their parents. This has led to actions that have improved considerably the quality of teaching and learning, the pupils attitudes and behaviour, and their progress. The other senior leaders have supported her well. They have risen to the challenges facing the school and to the headteachers high expectations. Over the last year, the senior leadership team has demonstrated that it has the means to keep on improving the school. The quality of subject leadership is

satisfactory overall. The thoughtful pairing of more and less effective subject leaders has led to better performance by all. They are more accountable for their departments outcomes than at the time of the last inspection. They have become increasingly effective in ensuring that the schools aspirations for the quality of teaching and learning are met more consistently within their areas. The leaders of English, mathematics, science and ICT are well focused on raising standards. However, the co-ordination of provision for pupils who have special educational needs has been ineffective in providing support for all pupils who have learning difficulties. Governance is satisfactory. The governors have improved their effectiveness through good training and establishing strong links between themselves and subject departments. The financial controls for the school were inadequate and the size of the deficit was unknown until earlier this term. The school and local authority are working in partnership to develop a plan to resolve the deficit, but as a result, the school provides unsatisfactory value for money.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	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

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	NA

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	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	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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

Thank you for being welcoming and helpful when we came to inspect your school recently. We very much enjoyed talking with you, watching you working with your teachers and speaking with them about your progress at school. As you know, we have been visiting your school regularly because when it was inspected two years ago, it wasn't giving you the kind of education you needed. Since then, your teachers have concentrated on improving the important things to help your learning. They've worked really hard and since your headteacher joined the school, things have got much better. We no longer need to visit your school every term to check how things are going. You are learning more in lessons and behaving much better, although some of you told us that you could still show more consideration for each other around the school. You are achieving higher levels and grades, but the school's results in GCSE exams should be better still. We were glad to hear that many of you take part in the opportunities the school gives you to do things outside your normal lessons, like Oliver! and sports clubs. To keep making things better in your school, we've asked your teachers to do these things: - Help you to do even better in your exams by keep on improving your lessons. - Plan the work you are set a bit more carefully, especially if you are finding it too difficult or too easy. - Give you some more advice on how to make your work better. Good luck for the future.