



# Acton High School and Centre for Media Arts

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 101932  
**Local Authority** Ealing  
**Inspection number** 286228  
**Inspection dates** 25–26 September 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Janet Mercer HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary	<b>School address</b>	Gunnersbury Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community		Acton
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16		London W3 8EY
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	02083543200
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	1008	<b>Fax number</b>	02089937236
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Mr Guy Fiegehen
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Lesley Hall
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	29 April 2002		

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<b>Age group</b>	<b>Inspection dates</b>	<b>Inspection number</b>
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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

Acton High school is a medium sized 11-16 mixed comprehensive. The school has specialist status for media arts and is also a full service extended school.

The students come from a diverse range of socio-economic and ethnic communities. Over half are eligible for free school meals and a similarly high proportion has English as an additional language. A significant number of students receive additional support for learning difficulties or disabilities. A high proportion of students join the school at times other than the usual starting points.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 1

Acton High school is an outstanding school which enables its students to make excellent progress, through a highly effective combination of good teaching, an outstanding curriculum which is very well matched to students' needs and excellent care, guidance and support for all students.

Leadership and management are outstanding in all aspects. The headteacher, senior and middle managers and governors share a very clear direction for school, based on a creative approach to education and developing each individual to achieve as much as they can. All children are given the opportunities to achieve their best. The promotion of equality in every area of the school's work is a key feature. Students are very positive about their school, saying how much they enjoy lessons and other activities. A strong culture of mutual respect means that they behave well in lessons and around the school, and create a harmonious and inclusive environment.

The head teacher with the support of governors, senior and middle managers provides cohesive, yet challenging, leadership which has resulted in significant improvements in achievement and standards. Rigorous and comprehensive self evaluation means that the school has a very clear understanding of the quality of its provision and areas for improvement. The school has made significant improvements in areas identified as weaknesses in the last inspection and managers demonstrate outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Close monitoring of student performance leads to early identification of any students at risk of underachieving, and intervention strategies to support students are very effective in raising standards and improving progress. Many students join the school with much lower prior attainment than is usually seen in secondary schools. A very high proportion of students have English as an additional language and levels of literacy on entry are well below those seen nationally. Students make good progress in reading but slower progress in developing writing skills. Those who join the school with little or no English quickly develop good language skills. Many students join the school at times other than the usual starting points and the school provides excellent support to enable them to settle in and catch up with their work.

Pass rates in national tests in Year 9 and GCSE examinations have improved over the last 3 years, particularly at GCSE, but remain below the national average. Standards are sufficiently high given students' starting points. Almost all students make better than average progress and for many groups, progress is exceptionally good. Those with learning difficulties or disabilities and those with English as an additional language, make outstanding progress. The achievement of some lower ability groups is also significantly above what might be expected. The school is successful in raising students' aspirations and progression rates to further education, training or employment are very high.

There is much good teaching, though the school acknowledges that it is not yet consistently good in all lessons. Not all teachers make the best use of assessment data to plan lessons to meet the range of individual needs. The school has made a significant

investment in staff development, and has made improvements in teaching, for example, in science, where weaknesses were identified at the last inspection.

The specialist status in media arts and the full extended school service enhance the curriculum and increase the opportunities available to students. Extensive and productive partnership working across a range of external agencies, local schools and colleges provides excellent support for students and contributes to raising standards. Communications and relationships with parents and carers are very good.

The outstanding curriculum is effective in meeting the different needs of students and is responsive to local community needs. In Years 7 to 9, all statutory requirements are met and in Years 10 and 11 students have an excellent choice of different pathways, including vocational courses in the school and at a local college. The different pathways cater well for the needs of all students, including those new to the school or are new to the school and not yet able to access the curriculum. A modified curriculum is in place for those students who are disaffected with the mainstream curriculum. Many students take part in, and enjoy, extra curricular activities including after school clubs and Saturday schools. The school provides excellent opportunities and support for students of all abilities, including a very good programme for gifted and talented students.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Members of staff work very hard to ensure the safety and care of students. Students say they feel very safe in school. The school is justifiably proud of the fact that in the recent London Challenge survey the school scored very highly on such issues as how well the school deals with bullying. The school's provision for students with special educational needs is a model of good practice. The careful monitoring of students' academic and personal development means that learners in need of support are identified quickly and support is provided promptly. Students with English as an additional language are exceptionally well provided for. A very good induction course is provided for all new arrivals and a wide variety of support staff is used to ensure that students feel secure and cared for.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Improve students' writing skills to raise standards further
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning in all subjects by ensuring all teachers use assessment data well to plan lessons to meet individual needs

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 1**

Standards reached in national tests and examinations are satisfactory and show clear improvement, particularly in GCSE examinations, where the proportion of students achieving five or more passes at A\*-C grades has increased by almost 20 per cent over four years. Given that most students' prior attainment is well below average when they join the school, they make exceptional progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where progress in English is very good and outstanding in mathematics.

Assessment data is used well to identify individual students at risk of underachieving, and intervention strategies have been successful in raising standards. The school makes a detailed analysis of its results and clearly identifies subjects where results are not as good as they could be. Curriculum area reviews are very thorough and result in clear actions to improve performance. Results of national tests in Year 9 show that students are making better progress in reading than in writing, and writing skills need to be improved to enable students to achieve well in all subjects.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Most students enjoy their lessons, demonstrate respect for each other and have very positive attitudes to learning. Effective actions taken to improve behaviour means students behave well in lessons and around the school. Students' involvement in the many and varied activities provided through the extended day programme is very good. As one student said, 'We could sit here all day talking about it'.

The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme, religious education and assemblies are effective in helping students to explore spiritual and moral themes such as social harmony and diversity in religious experience. This can clearly be seen in the recently introduced media arts studies (MAS) programme that has been introduced in Years 7 and 8. Consequently students show respect for others and the school community is harmonious and inclusive. The development of strong home-school links and increased curriculum choice has improved attendance which is now above average.

Students respond well to the encouragement they are given to adopt healthy life styles through subjects such as food technology and physical education and positive guidance on healthy food choices. The school achieved Healthy Schools status in 2004.

Elected student ambassadors, together with an active school council, run jointly with the community, enable students to become involved in important aspects of school life. Many become mentors and help out in a large number of school and community events developing very good personal qualities that enable them to make an effective contribution to the community.

Students are well prepared for life after school. They receive excellent careers information and guidance to help them make well informed choices about curriculum pathways and work experience placements. They elect school council members and participate well in the special themed days that the school runs. A number of subjects include learning about business enterprise which contributes well to the students' economic well being.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and positive relationships encourage students to contribute well in lessons. Teachers plan lessons well and use a variety of good learning resources, including interactive white boards, to support students' learning. Students are expected to work hard and to think for themselves. Questioning is used well to share the ideas of the class, to stimulate discussion and to allow further development of thought. Support for students at risk of underachieving enables them to re-focus and engages them in thoughtful discussion allowing them to make progress.

In the best lessons teachers provide opportunities for independent learning and for students to work co-operatively in pairs and groups. They offer good advice on how students can improve their work, set targets for improvement and encourage students to assess their own progress. The quality of teaching is not yet consistent in all lessons. In the less effective lessons teachers do not always make effective use of the data available to ensure their lessons meet the needs of all students. In a few lessons teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities to extend learning.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 1

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. An innovative, broad and balanced curriculum provides outstanding opportunities for students to progress and perform well.

The school's specialist status in media arts places a particular emphasis on developing culture and communications, which permeates all aspects of its work. Extensive staff training is supporting teachers to use the media arts specialism to review and extend their own practice in all subjects. The school has also made excellent use of its specialist expertise to forge strong links with different community groups and extend the work of some local schools. The specialist status also been used effectively to improve the provision in personal and social education through the media arts studies (MAS) programme, which encourages the development of different ways of thinking and independent learning skills.

The exceptional range of option choices at Years 10 and 11, meets the needs of students of all aptitudes, and includes opportunities to take vocational courses and do work experience. Provision for gifted and talented students in areas such as mathematics has allowed early GCSE entry and enabled them to start to study for AS level mathematics during Year 11. Provision for citizenship and religious studies is good and all students take a short GCSE course in these subjects.

There are many opportunities for enrichment activities through the extra curricular programme, especially in music, sport, the breakfast club, drama and chess. The breadth

of extra curricular provision supports students very well and adds considerably to their enjoyment of school.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 1**

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and contribute strongly to students' achievements and their enjoyment at school. A mentoring centre provides excellent support for students of all abilities ensuring that they make positive progress and achieve well. Realistic, but challenging, targets are set for students and their progress towards these is closely monitored.

Incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively and students have great confidence in the school's systems and channels of communication. Safe havens are provided where vulnerable students receive support from both staff and student ambassadors who act as peer mentors.

Effective steps have been taken to reduce the number of exclusions. The school has carefully analysed recurrent problems to seek early solutions. Students who have been excluded are carefully reintroduced back into the school community.

Communication with parents and the community is very good. This is reflected in the high levels of attendance at parents' evenings and the frequent involvement of different community groups in the school.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 1**

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The very rigorous and comprehensive system of self-evaluation and review ensures that, 'No-one takes their foot off the pedal' (chair of governors) and all managers are constantly looking for improved ways of enhancing students' experiences and achievement and moving the school forward.

Managers have an accurate view of the quality of provision, including teaching and learning, which is supported by an effective staff development programme. The value placed on all members of staff has created excellent teamwork and has a major impact on the school's ability to recruit and retain talented staff. Appropriate delegation results in members of staff being able to use their skills effectively.

Governors carry out their role most effectively especially in sharing the ethos of the school and ensuring the prudent management of resources. These are used very effectively to help the school successfully meet its aims. For example, the development of a robust information and communication technology (ICT) network is helping to raise standards by enhancing teaching and learning and promoting the media arts specialism. The deployment of classroom assistants is also highly effective in supporting students to maximise achievement in lessons. Outside agencies and sources of funding are used very productively to enhance provision. Child protection procedures are very



secure and regularly reviewed. Health and safety practices are robust and risk assessments are carefully conducted.

The efficient handling of the building of the replacement school on the current site, with the minimum disruption for students, reflects the high quality of management and organisation. Specialist school and extended school status has been used most effectively to provide additional opportunities that are very specific to the needs of the students and the local community.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</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
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

On behalf of the inspectors who visited your school recently I would like to thank you for making us welcome and helping us with the inspection. We were very impressed by so many aspects of your school. Many of you and your parents told us how much you enjoy school and how good you think your school is. We have taken these views in to account in arriving at our judgement and we are delighted to tell you that your school provides you with an outstanding education.

The main strengths are:

- the excellent progress most of you make in your learning
- the progress those of you who are new to the country make in learning English
- the way you all get on so well together and respect each other
- your good attendance and behaviour in lessons and around school
- the willingness of most of you to work hard in most lessons
- the excellent relationships between you and your teachers
- the commitment of all of your teachers and their well planned lessons
- the impressive range of subjects and courses on offer and all the additional clubs and activities that so many of you attend
- the outstanding personal and academic support and guidance you get according to your individual needs
- the excellent way your progress is monitored and how you are helped to set targets to achieve your very best
- the outstanding leadership and management of your headteacher, senior staff ,subject leaders and governors who work so hard together and with so many people outside the school to provide you with the very best support and opportunities.

We have asked the school to do two things that would help you to achieve even higher standards:

- to raise the quality of teaching in all subjects by ensuring it meets the needs of all students
- help you improve your writing skills in English so that you can achieve even higher grades in all your subjects.

With best wishes for your future in your new school building.

Janet Mercer

Her Majesty's Inspector