

Ashcroft High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109707
Local Authority	LUTON LA
Inspection number	310073
Inspection dates	21–22 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Dilip Kadodwala HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1027
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr John Baines-Holding
Headteacher	Ms Monica Austin
Date of previous school inspection	15 November 2005
School address	Crawley Green Road Luton Bedfordshire LU2 9AG
Telephone number	01582 436100
Fax number	01582 436118

Age group	11-16
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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

This is an average sized comprehensive. The school has a diverse student population including 67% White British and about 12% Asian or Asian British students from Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Indian backgrounds. There are 9% Black or Black British students from Caribbean or African backgrounds. Ninety students are at an early stage of speaking English as an additional language. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of students identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average, and the number with a statement of special educational need is average for a school of this size.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The school motto states that it is 'a learning community driven by high expectations and respect for all'. This is evident across the school. Staff work hard to promote this vision. Good effort is made to seek and take account of parents' and students' views. The quality of leadership and management is good. Rigorous systems for self-evaluation ensure that the school has an accurate and robust view of its own strengths and areas for development. Students' personal development and well-being are good. Students have a strong sense of belonging to the Ashcroft 'family' and show a genuine desire to look after and serve its members well. Students make a positive contribution to their school and the wider community, particularly through the work of the school council. Notwithstanding concerns about behaviour voiced by a small minority of parents, inspectors found good behaviour both in lessons and throughout the school. The great majority of students attend regularly, behave well and have positive attitudes to learning.

The school experienced a high turnover of staff during 2006. Senior leaders have concentrated on improving and sustaining effective teaching. The result is that the overall quality of teaching is now good. Students' needs are met well because the school provides a good level of care, guidance and support. A recent restructuring of team responsibilities has brought about a sharper use of assessment data to track students' progress and to guide intervention. This is increasingly having a positive impact. Students also benefit from a good curriculum that ensures that they develop the necessary skills for life beyond school. Students' participation in a wide range of extra-curricular activities is good. They particularly enjoy sporting and performing arts activities.

Achievement and standards are good. They are improving rapidly because of the astute leadership shown by the headteacher. Senior leaders have worked with tenacity and determination to tackle longstanding weaknesses and have continued the improvement that took the school out of special measures just over two years ago. This has ensured that students' achievement by the end of Year 9 is consistently good and sustained over recent years. Students attain standards that are in line with national averages. The drive to improve students' progress from Years 7 to 11, though improving rapidly, is not yet fully effective. Standards at the end of Year 11 in English lag behind those attained in mathematics. Progress on improving most of the issues identified in the past inspection has been good. This indicates that capacity for further improvement is good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Sustain and consolidate the progress made by students by the end of Year 11.
- Raise standards further in English to match those attained in mathematics.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement and standards are good. Students start at the school with slightly below average levels of attainment. Students now make good progress across Years 7 to 9 in mathematics and science, and attain standards at the end of Year 9 that are in line with national averages. Achievement in English is at least satisfactory and improving rapidly. Over recent years, the amount of progress that students make from Years 7 to 11 has been unsatisfactory. Progress has improved at a good rate in Years 7 to 9, whereas the rate of improvement in Years 10 and

11 has not been as rapid. However, students' current progress, as seen during inspection, indicates that progress is now good overall.

In 2007, the proportion of students attaining 5 or more A*-C grades was broadly average. The rate of improvement in GCSE results over the last 3 years is good. The gains made by students at the end of Year 9 in mathematics and science are sustained, but there is still some legacy of underachievement in English. The school has set challenging targets for the current Year 11 students which, if met, should see improvement in achievement in English to match that of mathematics and science. Standards attained by students from minority ethnic backgrounds are at least average and some groups attain above average standards. The needs of students who speak English as an additional language are met well so that they make at least satisfactory progress. Students from Asian British backgrounds make good progress and those from Black Caribbean and African backgrounds make satisfactory progress. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported well and they make at least satisfactory progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Students are sensitive to the feelings of others and older students willingly offer their time to help younger ones, for example by acting as peer mentors. Most students have a positive attitude to school, behave well in lessons and around the school and are considerate of others. They are friendly, courteous and cooperative. They enjoy school and participate enthusiastically in all that is offered. Students say that they feel safe. Although there are incidents of bullying, these are managed quickly and effectively. The school has worked hard to improve attendance, which is now broadly in line with the national average.

Students have a strong moral and social conscience. Students of all ethnicities relate well to one another and value diversity. They thrive on the many opportunities provided to take responsibility. This has brought greater cohesion, rigour and purpose to the work of the school. For example, the student behaviour panel monitors and advises on the behaviour of students in lessons. The school council is active and makes a good contribution. Their work has helped to make significant improvement to the school environment. Members are also involved in the appointment and induction of new staff. Students understand the importance of staying safe and of a healthy lifestyle and take part in a wide range of sporting activities. Most students choose to eat healthy food at break and lunchtime. They develop a good range of skills to enable them to contribute to their future economic well-being. Students' literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are generally good. There is a successful integration of work related learning across a wide range of subjects.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. There has been a slight setback in the senior leaders' drive to improve the quality due to a high turnover of staff in 2006. However, the quality of teaching is now improving rapidly. The rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning identifies strengths and areas for further development. Tailored, professional development opportunities contribute to improvement, including the sharing of the best

practice. A student 'learning forum' seeks their views and these opinions help teachers to shape their planning.

Most students have good attitudes to learning and behaviour. Good relationships between staff and students are evident and these help build students' confidence. In the best lessons, good use is made of assessment data in planning. Students are motivated, are actively involved in their learning, tasks have suitable challenge to stretch the more able, and assessment of students' work uses targets effectively to promote learning. Students are aware of their targets. Careful marking ensures that students know how to improve their work. Students' involvement in assessment, including assessing the effectiveness of end of lesson plenary sessions, is also a notable strength. In lessons which have less impact on learning there are missed opportunities for students to develop their thinking skills. Occasionally, lessons are too teacher dominated and do not take full account of students' different learning needs. Although the quality of teaching is improving, it has not yet had a full impact on students' outcomes by the time they leave school in Year 11.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. Since the previous inspection, the school has improved the breadth and balance of the programme in Years 10 and 11 through increasing the range of vocational courses. Some of the most able students can now follow some AS level subjects. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well provided for by suitable placement in groups where the curriculum is adapted to match their needs. Action to broaden the curriculum in Years 8 and 9 is underway to develop students' independent and team working skills further. Provision to improve students' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills is good. With science taking a lead in promoting literacy skills, the school is ensuring that these are developed in lessons across all faculties.

Careers guidance is good and students benefit from work experience, enterprise and life skills programmes. The school actively promotes a healthy lifestyle and has an effective drugs and sex education programme. Students' enjoyment and achievement are enhanced through a wide variety of activities such as clubs, visits, trips and revision programmes. Activities are popular and taken up by students of all abilities. The school also provides a breakfast club, and a range of activity schemes that operate during the school holidays and at weekends. Performing arts provision is strong and many students take up opportunities to participate in several annual musical, drama and dance productions. Students enjoy helping to organize some activities themselves, for example those related to the sports leadership award and the enterprise and sports activities day.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The quality of care, guidance and support is good. The school is rightly proud of its care for the student as an individual. Staff work hard to ensure that all students, including the more vulnerable, achieve well and are happy, safe and well supported. Lunchtime clubs, provided by learning mentors, are available for vulnerable students, and these clubs are successful in raising students' self-esteem. Provision for students who speak English as an additional language includes a student induction programme designed to integrate them well into the school, taking account of their cultural, language, and emotional difficulties. A learning support unit successfully retains students who are at risk of exclusion and enables them to be re-integrated

into mainstream lessons. Fixed term exclusions rates have been high and the school has reduced these successfully. Academic guidance is good, having improved since the last inspection. Increasingly effective use is made of targets to guide students' progress. The school is implementing a comprehensive academic guidance system to ensure students at risk of falling behind are detected early and intervention ensures that they are engaged again in learning. The provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and for those identified as gifted and talented, is good. The required procedures for health and safety and for child protection are in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher provides unwavering leadership and direction. Her high aspirations for the school are increasingly met. Senior leaders work well together as a team. They have a relentless focus on improving students' achievement and raising attainment to ensure that students successfully meet challenging targets. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and informed by a broad range of views, including those expressed by parents and students. Leadership at all levels has a clear grasp of strengths and weaknesses because monitoring is extensive, regular and rigorous. The impact is seen in the improving progress made by most students and the improvements secured in the quality of teaching. The drive to raise standards in Years 10 and 11 is showing positive results and senior leaders are now strengthening action to secure better achievement for students by the time they leave school in Year 11. The subject leaders and directors of learning are rising to the challenge to demonstrate accountability and respond well to delegated management responsibilities. Governance is good. Governors are good ambassadors for the school and have effective mechanisms to be informed about the school's work. This enables them to provide a balance of support and challenge and play an active part in providing strategic direction. Resources are used prudently and the school is making good progress in reducing the budget deficit.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	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

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

¹ 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

23 November 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashcroft High School, Luton, LU2 9AG

Many thanks for helping us with the inspection of your school. We were impressed with your warm welcome, politeness and friendliness. We enjoyed talking with you and the things you shared with us helped us to carry out our job easily. I would like to let you know what we found.

We judged that your school is good and improving. Your personal development and well-being are good. This is the result of many factors, including your own willingness to take up the responsibilities the school offers, such as the work and support of the school council. The great majority of you attend regularly and behave well in lessons and around the school. You told us that when bullying occurs it is dealt with quickly and effectively. We agree with you that this is the case. We were impressed with your care for one another and the respect you show for racial and cultural diversity. Many of you take part in extra-curricular activities that also help to ensure that you live healthily. The school provides good opportunities for you to develop those skills that will help you to study further and prepare you for the world of work.

We found that the quality of teaching and learning has improved and it is now good. Overall, you cooperate well with one another in lessons and show responsibility. You play an active part in assessing learning and willingly act on teachers' advice about how to improve your work. Staff are working hard to keep up the improvements made over the last two years. The headteacher leads the school very well. A good team of managers and governors support her. Together they, and the staff, have ensured that from the time you start at the school you make good progress so that by the end of Year 9 you attain standards that are average. We judged that GCSE results are also improving, but standards in English are not as high as they are in mathematics. We have asked the senior leaders in the school to make these improvements.

With all best wishes for your future.

Dilip Kadodwala

Her Majesty's Inspector