

# Ashby School

## Inspection report

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Unique Reference Number	120303
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	327253
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Gwen Coates HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 under pilot arrangements; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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Boarding provision	School House
Social care URN	SC001838
Social care inspector	Jo Vyas

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	14–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1676
Sixth form	592
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Clive Jones
Headteacher	Mrs Vivien Keller-Garnett
Date of previous school inspection	2–3 November 2005
School address	Nottingham Road Ashby-de-la-Zouch Leicestershire LE65 1DT
Telephone number	01530 413748
Fax number	01530 560665
Email address	headteacher@ashbyschool.org.uk

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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI), four Additional Inspectors and a social care inspector. The inspectors visited 40 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of evidence, including data on attendance, the tracking system to monitor students' progress, students' work and the 74 questionnaires completed by parents/carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the quality of learning and how well this is contributing to students' achievement
- the quality of the curriculum and how well it meets the needs of all students
- the extent to which all groups of students feel fully included and well supported within the school community
- the extent to which leaders at every level set clear direction.

## Information about the school

Ashby School is a very large upper school based on two sites. It includes a boys' boarding house with 49 students aged 11 to 18, many of whom are students from other countries. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Approximately 6% of students are from minority ethnic groups, the largest groups being Chinese and Indian. The percentage of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well below the national average. The school gained specialist technology college status in 1998 and added specialist modern foreign language college status in 2006.

## Inspection judgements

Grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Overall effectiveness

2

Capacity for sustained improvement

2

## Main findings

Ashby School is a good school with some outstanding features. The outstanding features are the result of the exceptional impact of its specialist status as a technology and modern foreign language college on, for example, the curriculum and its work in developing partnerships with local primary schools, high schools, colleges and the community. In addition to this, its boarding provision for a small number of mainly international students is also outstanding.

Students' outcomes are good and in some cases outstanding, particularly in relation to students feeling safe and in their exemplary behaviour. The extent to which students achieve and enjoy their learning is good and is the result of their excellent behaviour and good teaching. However, teaching does not always take account of the wide range of abilities in classes. Students' moral and social development is judged to be outstanding but their spiritual and cultural awareness is not as good. The extent to which students are developing their workplace and other skills in preparation for their future economic well-being is, in many respects, outstanding but attendance of students overall is only average.

The school has good capacity to improve. This is indicated by the good progress that has been made since the last inspection, as a result of which, assessment for learning in lessons is a common feature, and a very good tracking system to monitor students' academic progress, their attendance, behaviour and attitudes to learning is now in place. The relentless focus on, and drive for, improvement is evident in the consistently rising levels of attainment over the last three years, with 61% of students attaining five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C, including English and mathematics, in 2008. The quality of self-evaluation is good, although there are some inconsistencies at middle leader level between departments. However, the school has an effective system in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and the performance of departments to ensure all are focused on raising achievement and outcomes for students.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the achievement of students at both key stages by ensuring that teaching strategies are well matched to students' abilities so that all students are thoroughly challenged.

- Improve the attendance of students overall by targeting improvement strategies at those groups that have been identified as having the poorest attendance.
- Ensure that curriculum provision is having an effective impact in developing students' spiritual and cultural awareness.

## How good is the overall outcome for individuals and groups of pupils?

2

Students' attainment on entry to Year 10 is broadly average. As a result of the good progress they make in Years 10 and 11, their attainment at GCSE is above the national average. No individual groups of students are underperforming. Students from minority ethnic groups make good progress and students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress. Evidence from lesson observations of students in Years 10 and 11 indicates that learning and progress are good and occasionally outstanding.

Other key features of students' outcomes:

- Students feel very safe in school and take the safety of others very seriously.
- Rare cases of bullying are quickly and effectively dealt with.
- Students behave exceptionally well both in and out of lessons.
- Students are well informed about healthy lifestyles: they keep fit by taking plenty of exercise – physical education lessons are very popular and girls' participation is high.
- Students readily accept responsibilities as, for example, prefects and house captains and all take part in raising money for a range of charities.
- Students have very well developed work-related skills. However, attendance is average when compared to the equivalent national data for Years 10 and 11 and hence limits the potential judgement about preparation for their future economic well-being.
- Students have a clear understanding of right and wrong and recognise that with freedom and independence comes responsibility. However, students have relatively little opportunity to reflect on spiritual and moral issues and their understanding and awareness of cultural diversity is less well developed.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and their progress	1
How well do pupils achieve and enjoy their learning?	2

<sup>1</sup> Grades for attainment are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; 4 is low

To what extent do pupils feel safe?	1
How well do pupils behave?	1
To what extent do pupils adopt healthy lifestyles?	2
To what extent do pupils contribute to the school and wider community?	2
Pupils' attendance	3
How well do pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being?	2
What is the extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development?	2

## The quality of the school's work

Teaching is generally good and sometimes outstanding. Students enjoy lessons, have excellent attitudes to learning and make good progress. Teachers demonstrate very secure subject specialist knowledge and expertise. Learning is outstanding when teachers use a wide range of teaching styles, providing opportunities for students to work independently, to discuss and demonstrate their understanding and when questioned, encouraging students to justify their arguments. In many lessons teaching assistants are used really effectively to support students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They do this by prompting students and helping to sustain their engagement in, and contribution to, lessons. Peer and self-assessment is a good feature of lessons and helps to really consolidate how well students achieve.

While assessment is used accurately to plan lessons, it is not always sharp enough to match work to the specific needs of students. So, occasionally, higher attainers are not challenged enough and on rare occasions low attainers are actually deterred from engaging in subjects because they do not understand. Targets for students are clear and most have a good awareness of their 'now' and 'target' grades and are well informed about the quality of responses required for different grades/levels. However, they are not always clear on what they, as individuals, need to do in order to improve on their current work, and marked work does not always make this clear.

The curriculum is outstanding overall. The contribution of specialist technology and modern foreign language college status has been significant in widening the curriculum and extending it into local high schools, primary schools and the community. Examples of the extended curriculum include a CISCO IT Network course and the opportunity for parents to join in the extra-curricular Mandarin classes that take place in the school. The range of international projects confirms the school's developing provision in support of community cohesion and the development of students' cultural awareness. This excellent collaborative working ensures that there is a real coherence in the curriculum offered from Key Stage 3 through to Key Stage 5. For example, there are fast track routes towards GCSE in Year 9 in the feeder high schools and this is complemented by opportunities to begin AS courses in Year 11. The academic and work related range of courses meets the needs and interests of students very well. For example, a 14–16 diploma in engineering was introduced in September 2008 and progression routes in the local college are clearly mapped out. The curriculum offers excellent support and many opportunities for students with

learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for those who find the mainstream school curriculum difficult to engage with. The range of extra-curricular activities is extensive and ensures that students of all abilities, and with a wide range of interests, are catered for.

The house system and vertical tutor groups are real strengths of the school, encouraging a sense of belonging and the opportunity for students to mix with age groups other than their own. This is particularly effective in providing younger students with opportunities to learn from older students. Very good arrangements exist to ease the transition of Year 9 students from the feeder high schools to Year 10 at Ashby School. Most students have very well targeted support and multi-agency work is very good. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make outstanding progress because the very good support they receive enables them to access the curriculum more effectively. Very good additional support is also provided for more able students. The small number of minority ethnic students and those who are boarders feel that the school is welcoming and are very positive about the provision and the support they receive. A great deal of activity is directed at improving attendance and this has had a positive impact, although attendance is still only average overall.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

High quality teaching and purposeful learning	2
Effective assessment	2
An appropriate curriculum which meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, provision through partnership with other organisations	1
Support, guidance and care	2

## How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides very strong leadership and, with the help of the senior leadership team, ensures there is a clear process in place to monitor and evaluate what the school does and to set clear direction. Middle leaders are well supported and are accountable for the performance of their faculties, departments and curriculum areas. The school improvement plan is reviewed regularly and users' views, via student exit and parental questionnaires, are beginning to contribute to whole-school and departmental self-evaluation.

Equality of opportunity is a reality of the school and all students confirm this. There is much emphasis on developing students' tolerance and understanding of humanity. This is evident in the way students behave and the way they care for each other and the fact that no groups are underperforming. In relation to community cohesion the school understands very well its context both in relation to the school community and its wider local, national and international context. It is developing effective strategies to enhance its provision in this area and this is being built upon in its very effective specialist college provision in modern foreign languages.

At the time of the inspection, safeguarding procedures were outstanding. In this large split-site school with many access points, CCTV cameras monitor vital areas

and the school is engaged in ongoing consideration of site security to ensure that all students are safe at all times. The governing body is a highly skilled group that contributes well to the school and ensures that it provides outstanding value for money. Governors are attached to each house and to each department of the school which enables them to develop a good knowledge of all aspects of this large school and to provide very good support. They are very proud of the success of the school.

Collaboration with partner institutions is an outstanding feature of the school. Specialist college status is promoting excellent partnerships with local high schools and colleges. This is evident in the excellent curriculum provision, resources and professional development for staff across the partnership. In the case of the latter, the focus is on sustainability, with staff at Ashby School providing comprehensive training and support for teachers in the feeder high schools. The school successfully meets all of its specialist college targets in relation to uptake of subjects, provision and community.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

Communicating ambition and driving improvement	2
Promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination	2
Ensuring that safeguarding procedures are effective	1
Ensuring that the governing body provides effective challenge and support so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities are met	2
Promoting the school's relationship with parents and carers, including their involvement in decision-making about matters relating to learning and well-being	2
Developing partnerships with other providers, organisations and services	1
Ensuring the school contributes to community cohesion	2
Deploying resources to achieve value for money	1

## Sixth form

Most sixth form students make good progress and achieve their challenging targets. Retention rates and pass rates are generally above average and the number of students reaching higher grades is now just above average. Students' preparation for their future is excellent. They respond very well to the comprehensive range of opportunities provided. This is supported by recent improvements in their attendance, which is now good. This readiness to take advantage of opportunities ensures that student progression into higher education and training is successful. Some students feel that there is less emphasis on ensuring that those not seeking university places receive sufficient guidance. Students make an outstanding contribution to the leadership of a range of activities, including leading assemblies, raising money for international causes, sports coaching and supporting younger students, and are very positive role models for younger students.

The quality of provision in the sixth form is good, leading to good outcomes for students. Teaching is good and supports learning well. The subject knowledge of



teachers is good and they are conversant with examination requirements. In most areas students feel that they receive appropriate guidance to help them move forward but there are some inconsistencies. In lessons seen during the inspection there was little evidence of teaching and resources being well matched to the wide range of abilities in many classes. Although only offering level three courses, very effective planning with other institutions ensures that the sixth form curriculum provides coherence and progression for all students. There is an excellent programme of additional activity which supports examination studies and also provides opportunities to develop other personal skills and pursue interests. Support for students is excellent and there are very strong relationships between staff and students. Feedback on work and guidance on how to improve are largely good but inconsistent in some subjects.

In the sixth form, there is an accurate assessment of strengths and weaknesses which is leading to improvement, although in a few subjects improvement has not been rapid enough. The recent development to the building and changes to leadership are setting clear direction for the future of the sixth form.

Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2

## Boarding provision

The quality of the boarding at this school is outstanding. All but one of the key National Minimum Standards are met, with a significant number exceeded. The school has worked hard over this last year and has taken appropriate action to address all the recommendations contained in the previous report. These included improvements to recruitment safety checks for staff, windows accessible to boarders and sleeping accommodation.

The boarding house ethos and underpinning philosophy are strong throughout, ensuring boarders live in a supportive and caring multicultural community within which boarders feel valued and safe. They develop close relationships with each other and with staff. Boarders are happy to be living at the school and said, 'It's like a second family' and 'It's like you've got 50 brothers'.

Staff are focused and committed to ensuring a high quality provision of health care for all boarders, ensuring they address boarders' emotional and physical well-being. They are suitably trained in first aid and provide appropriate care when boarders are ill or injured. There are clear procedures for the safe handling of medication. However, medication is not currently securely stored. The leadership team said it would address this immediately. There are many opportunities for boarders to participate in physical activities, including regular use of the school swimming pool. The school provides a varied and healthy diet which is of a high standard and which is greatly appreciated by the boarders. Cultural preferences and specialist diets are catered for.

The safety and rights of both staff and boarders are protected. Staff are competent in their knowledge of the school's safeguarding procedures and have close links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Boarders said that if they are unhappy there are plenty of people they can talk to. Staff always listen and take them seriously. The privacy of boarders is respected. The school's recruitment procedures are robust, ensuring all safety checks are carried out and boarders are protected. Contractors on the site also have safety checks carried out by the local authority. Both boarders and staff agreed that bullying rarely occurs and that staff are proactive and responsive to all bullying behaviour. The vigilance and working practices adopted by the boarding house reduce opportunities for bullying to occur. For example, staff work with boarders to develop their understanding of the diversity of their community and the importance of tolerance of others. Discussion with boarders supported that this work takes place.

Staff view the boarders positively and there is a relaxed, family atmosphere in the house. Boarders' behaviour is exemplary. They are polite, helpful and respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. Boarders feel valued. Staff are able to provide a high level of care for boarders and meet their individual needs with the knowledge and understanding they have of them. A strong aspect of boarding is how the ethos of the house ensures that all staff and boarders are respectful and appreciative of each other's culture and background. A boarder said that the best thing about the house is 'making new friends around the world'.

Boarders' views and opinions are valued. They are well informed about events within the house and future plans. A boarder said, 'Our opinions really count.' New boarders feel well supported by both the staff and other boarders. A boarder said, 'The Head Boy is good at his job. He helped me out when I was really home sick.' Boarders all agreed that they can talk to their families in private.

The overall standard of boarding accommodation at the school is good. Boarders' rooms and the facilities provided afford appropriate levels of privacy and are well maintained. Boarders describe feeling safe in the boarding house and say they like their dormitories. Although the sixth form annexe is small and cramped, boarders enjoy living in this building. Throughout the boarding house there are examples of cultural choices. Boarders said their possessions are safe: 'No-one steals in this house'. Pocket money is requested and signed for by the boarders and diligent records are kept and forwarded to parents. The school has comprehensive risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds, including fire. Both staff and boarders are familiar with the fire procedures and all appropriate checks are carried out routinely. Health and safety procedures are also carried out appropriately. All visitors sign into the school and must show identification.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Evidence supports a high level of commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Boarders receive an individual service, which is designed to meet their personal needs. All staff have a good knowledge of the boarders they are working with, ensuring their needs are consistently met. Staff work in partnership with parents to ensure a high quality service where the ethos is centred on meeting the individual needs and aspirations of boarders. Equality and diversity are an intrinsic part of the principles and practice

within the boarding house. A boarder said that one of the best things about being in this boarding house is being with people from other cultures.

The Statement of Boarding Principles is comprehensive. Information for boarders and parents is in-depth, ensuring that parents from around the world have the opportunity to make informed choices about boarding at this school. Boarders are supervised by competent, highly qualified and caring staff, who, in turn, are supported by a leadership team that is knowledgeable and experienced.

National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

- Ensure that all medication is kept securely (NMS 15.10).

How effective is the boarding provision in meeting the needs of boarders?	1
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## Views of parents and carers

Relationships with parents are good and responses to the parental questionnaires, and to the school's own commissioned questionnaire, indicate that the majority are very supportive of the school and agree with the judgements made by inspectors. Less than 5% of parental questionnaires were returned and of these, some parents had reservations about staffing issues, about the quality of teaching in some subjects and about the quality of communications. The school is aware of these concerns and is dealing with them appropriately.

## What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. In 2007–8, 15% of schools were judged to be outstanding.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. In 2007–8, 49% of schools were judged good.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. In 2007–8, 32% of schools were judged satisfactory.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. In 2007–8, 5% of schools were judged inadequate.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Achievement:	an overall measure of the pupils' success in their academic learning. The term combines attainment and progress. Pupils might make good progress, for example, but if their attainment remains low, inspectors may judge that their achievement is only satisfactory.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.



13 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashby School, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, LE65 1DT

Many thanks for the time so many of you gave to meeting inspectors when we visited your school recently.

We judged Ashby School to be a good school with some outstanding features. The outstanding features include the boarding provision at School House, the curriculum and the partnerships with other schools and colleges. Many of you spoke about how you valued the independence you are given and the fact that you are treated as adults. We judged your behaviour to be outstanding. Teaching is good and this enables you to do well.

We have asked the school to focus on the following areas to bring about further improvement:

- ensure the work you do and the support you get in lessons are well matched to the range of abilities in your classes so that all of you can achieve as well as you are able
- improve attendance overall by ensuring that help is given to those groups that have the poorest attendance
- ensure that your spiritual and cultural awareness is developed so that it is as good as your moral and social understanding.

You can help by attending regularly because good attendance will improve your progress. You can also help by taking an interest in spiritual and cultural issues and in relation to the latter, considering the huge diversity of cultures within Britain today.

Best wishes for those of you taking examinations this summer. We hope that you all reach your target grades and feel sure that, with the support you will get from the school and your own hard work, you will be successful.

Yours sincerely

Gwen Coates HMI

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