

# Ashfield Comprehensive School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	122827
<b>Local Authority</b>	Nottinghamshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	327805
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26–27 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Victoria Godley 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>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	2618
Sixth form	595
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Gordon Wilson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Richard Vasey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 February 2006
<b>School address</b>	Sutton Road Kirkby-in-ashfield Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG17 8HP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01623455000
<b>Fax number</b>	01623455001

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Lead Inspector and four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Ashfield Comprehensive is a popular school that is oversubscribed. The school is much larger than most secondary schools. The majority of students are of White British backgrounds. The remaining minority come from a small range of different ethnic backgrounds. Students' attainment on entry is broadly average. The percentage of students who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those who have a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. Although there is deprivation locally, the overall socio-economic background is average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals reflects this, and is broadly in line with the national average. The school gained specialist technology school status in 1998, to which it added languages and vocational specialisms in December 2006. It received designation as a Training School in 2004.

## 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 with some significant strengths. Improvements in key aspects have provided a good climate for learning where every child matters. Standards have shown a gradual increase over the last two years yet remain satisfactory in the whole school and in the sixth form.

Students are now achieving well. Their progress between Key Stages 2 and 4 varies between subjects but is good overall. However, the progress they make in Key Stage 3 is slower and this results in below average standards at the end of Year 9. For standards to rise at a more rapid pace the school must increase the number of students making two levels' progress at Key Stage 3 in the core subjects. The progress made by students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good because of the effective support they receive.

Teaching quality is well supported by the school's specialist status as a Training School. Teaching is good in the main school and the sixth form. However, it has not yet improved students' learning sufficiently to have its full effect on their standards and achievement. For this to improve, the school must increase the proportion of outstanding lessons by ensuring that work provides appropriate challenge for all learners across the school.

Since the 2006 inspection, the school has improved the quality of education provided. In recent times the school has moved through some significant change particularly in terms of building projects and curriculum design. It is now offering students, particularly those in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, an outstanding curriculum which is designed for the twenty-first century; providing an excellent opportunity to learn with work-based experience; and equipping students with essential life skills for their future economic well-being. The multiple specialisms are having a significant impact upon the opportunities to offer a wider range of vocational courses. This is facilitated by the strong relationships with local businesses who work in partnership with the school at the Ashfield Skills Centre, a facility of outstanding quality.

This very large school is a happy and harmonious learning community. Students genuinely enjoy being part of Ashfield Comprehensive School and speak highly about it. Relationships are good. The large majority of students work hard, concentrate in class, behave well and are committed to learning. There is little bullying and very little evidence of racism. The good care, guidance and support that students receive enable them to achieve their potential as learners.

Students understand well the need for healthy and safe lifestyles. A wide range of activities out of school time complements and supports students' good personal development. Provision for careers education and guidance is well organised and effective, and students enthusiastically take part in a variety of enterprise activities.

Community links are good and provide greater opportunities for parents to become involved with the school, for example through improving information and communication technology (ICT) skills, learning a foreign language and improving literacy and numeracy skills. The school is a focal point for events in the local community and students have excellent opportunities to make a positive contribution, presently participating in the national shoebox appeal.

The leadership and management of the school are good. The newly appointed headteacher gives the school exceptionally clear direction towards further improvement. Leaders and managers at all levels have the competence and commitment to take the school further forward. They evaluate performance accurately, identify what needs to improve and make it happen. Governors provide the school with a range of expertise and good challenge. The school provides

good value for money and recent improvements demonstrate that the capacity to improve further is good.

## **Effectiveness of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

Standards in 2007 were below average but show improvement in the unvalidated 2008 data. Recent evidence indicates a further improvement in the current academic year. Considering this, coupled with the successes in Entry Level, Level 1 and Level 2 courses, standards are average overall. The proportion of students achieving the higher grades A/B, while still being below average, has improved significantly and those achieving grades A-E has improved to being closer to the national average. Achievement from students' starting points is good overall although standards vary considerably between subjects.

The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. The use of assessment to track students' progress and raise standards has improved since the last inspection. Teachers have good subject knowledge and clear, high expectations of students, who respond positively to this challenge. Attendance is monitored carefully and is good. The curriculum has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now outstanding. It enables students of all abilities, including those who find learning more difficult, to have access to a curriculum that closely matches their individual needs. Students who otherwise would have been denied access to the sixth form have many opportunities to progress further. Care and guidance are outstanding with regular academic counselling. Students report they are very pleased with the guidance they receive from their teachers and the support the school offers them to make informed decisions about their future. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good.

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

- Increase the number of students making two levels' progress at Key Stage 3 in core subjects.
- Increase the proportion of outstanding lessons by ensuring that work provides appropriate challenge for all learners.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Students enter the school with broadly average standards. The progress they make in Years 7 to 9 is slower than in Years 10 and 11. This results in below average standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and average standards by the end of Key Stage 4. To raise standards further the school must ensure it increases the number of students making two levels' progress at Key Stage 3 in core subjects.

The specialist school subjects overall are beginning to have a positive impact upon standards. For example, all students who embarked on the BTEC science course in Y10 achieved at least pass level. The 2008 unvalidated data shows the proportion of students achieving 5 or more A\*-C was in line with the national average, as was the percentage including English and mathematics.

Students' progress in 2007 was satisfactory. The 2008 unvalidated results and recent Year 11 assessment data indicates that achievement has improved and is good. This was demonstrated in lessons, in the work of the students and in the monitoring data provided by the school. The outcomes of some of the vocational elements of the school curriculum contribute further to their good progress. Students who find learning more difficult achieve as well as other students.

More able students are now catered for more effectively with more students making the progress that is expected of them.

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

### **Grade: 2**

The majority of students at Ashfield School are confident, articulate young people who enjoy coming to school. However, despite the best efforts of the school, student attendance remains broadly average. Students are considerate towards one another, and behave well. Very occasionally bullying and isolated racist incidents have occurred, but students confirm that staff deal with these incidents efficiently and they are resolved quickly ensuring that students feel safe and secure. The House system is long established and the pattern of vertical tutor groups supports good social development. Students are able to discuss their feelings and beliefs easily and the younger students look to the older ones for effective role models. Overall students' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good. They regularly take part in charity and fund raising events. They adopt healthy lifestyles, know what they should eat to be healthy and the majority take advantage of the wide range of sporting and outdoor activities on offer through the extra-curricular programme. Some students are taking sports leaders and referee awards and the Duke of Edinburgh Award is well established in the school. Students take the initiative in organising activities and events and are actively involved in working with pupils from two special schools. Students' key skills are developed at each stage and standards in literacy and numeracy are satisfactory.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

Most lessons are good or better and take place in a calm and well-ordered environment. Teachers know their students very well and are able to provide good individual attention. Students generally show positive attitudes to learning, and most lessons are characterised by constructive and respectful relationships between peers and their teachers. In the most successful lessons, teachers use these relationships to provide opportunities for co-operative work and independent learning. Some lessons are well structured and carefully planned, allowing students' knowledge and skills to build steadily, and teachers to keep a close eye on the progress of individuals. In these lessons students are aware of their targets and the levels at which they are working, and lesson planning reflects this. There are, however, too few excellent lessons to raise standards and achievement sufficiently. The less successful lessons do not have sufficiently precise objectives and do not provide appropriate support and challenge for all groups of learners. Many teachers use probing questioning effectively to prompt deeper thinking and understanding from students and to assess the progress of individuals. This good practice could be spread more widely.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 1**

The degree of personalisation and breadth provided by the 14-19 curriculum, together with the quality of vocational facilities, and an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, are exemplary features of the outstanding curriculum. The recently introduced 14-19 curriculum provides the opportunity for all students to follow appropriate pathways, with a wide range of

choice, including the provision of twilight sessions. One of the key strengths of the vocational provision is the Ashfield Skills Centre, where students are taught by vocational professionals. Partnerships with enterprises such as the RAC and Charnwood Training consultants have been used very effectively to enable a range of good quality provision to match students' needs, interests and aspirations. Although the full impact of the improvements has yet to be seen, school data indicates that the changes are beginning to have a positive effect on achievement. The curriculum at Key Stage 3, although conventionally structured, has opportunities and approaches which broaden the experience of students, and meets the needs of learners very well. Timetable changes have facilitated a more flexible approach to subjects across the whole school, and the school plans to improve this further.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The staff at Ashfield School are fully committed to the care and support of the students and strive to provide the best possible opportunities for them. There are robust procedures to monitor students' progress and problems; concerns are quickly identified, and supporting strategies put into place. The Heads of House play a pivotal role and have a good understanding of the ability and needs of each student in their care. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and the health and safety issues are carefully managed. Effective intervention strategies are closely monitored by the form tutor who liaises with academic staff and parents to ensure good progress is achieved and maintained. Links with outside agencies are effective in promoting good student well-being. Vulnerable students and those with learning difficulties speak very positively about the outstanding care and support they receive which helps them to make good progress both academically and socially. Academic guidance is good overall. A range of positive strategies is in place to develop the skills and opportunities for the more able learners but some parents and students expressed a view that there could be a greater level of challenge for this group. Students overall know their targets and this is helping to improve their achievement. However not all students are always clear about the next steps in their learning and how to achieve them.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leaders effectively promote the achievement and personal development and well-being of learners. The high priority given by the school to the inclusion of all learners is central to the leadership's vision and as a result dismantles barriers to learning. The headteacher provides strong direction and vision for the school. Recent additional appointments have strengthened the leadership team. Senior managers share a common purpose for improvement, and they provide effective leadership. The recently revised school self-evaluation is systematic, rigorous and accurately identifies relevant actions for improvement at both department and school level. In the past targets have not been sufficiently challenging but with the appointment of the new headteacher this has been revised and the school has adopted more challenging and aspirational targets. Governors take a keen interest in the school; as a result they are knowledgeable, supportive and able to act as effective critical friends. They pay good attention to the statutory requirements of their role. Finances and resources are well managed. For example, the recent building of the Ashfield Skills Centre was completed on time and in budget.

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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	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

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

### Achievement and standards

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

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<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.

### Personal development and well-being

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

### The quality of provision

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

### Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

**Annex B**

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

28 November 2008.

Dear Students,

Inspection of Ashfield Comprehensive School, Kirkby in Ashfield, NG17 8HP.

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave us when we visited your school in November. We enjoyed talking to you, looking at your work and watching you learn.

Ashfield Comprehensive School is a good school. It is ambitious for all of you, constantly improving the range of opportunities you have to study and to pursue extra-curricular activities, and helping you to leave school well prepared for the challenges of adult life. The results of exams and tests are satisfactory and you make good progress during your time at school.

In order to further improve we have asked your headteacher and your teachers to:

- increase the number of students making two levels' progress at Key Stage 3 in core subjects
- increase the proportion of outstanding lessons by ensuring that work provides appropriate challenge for all learners.

I am sure you will continue to play your part in making this an even better school by working closely with your teachers to improve your work and achieve as well as you can. I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Godley

Lead inspector