

Ashton Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109278
Local Authority	Bristol City of
Inspection number	337259
Inspection dates	28–29 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Andrew Harrett

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	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1152
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	194
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger White
Headteacher	Christopher Gardner
Date of previous school inspection	29 April 2010
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 44 lessons taught by 43 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of pupils, the chair of the governing body and school staff. Inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including details of safeguarding, school policies, minutes of meetings, results in examinations, the school's self-evaluation and its improvement plan. They analysed completed inspection questionnaires from 327 parents and carers and questionnaires from students and staff.

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

- the achievement of boys, students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and in science and English to determine whether teaching is sufficiently consistent and challenging to raise attainment
- how effectively the school has tackled the passive attitudes to learning noted in the last inspection
- whether there is sufficient improvement in attendance over time
- the quality of provision and the rate of progress in the sixth form.

Information about the school

The school is larger than average. Most students are of White British heritage, but there is an increasing proportion of students from other backgrounds. Extensive building works are taking place on the school campus. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average. The school is a specialist sports college. It became a foundation school on 1 April 2010, forming a cooperative learning trust with three local primary schools.

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

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**2****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****2**

Main findings

This good school has improved significantly since its last inspection. Areas of strength have been consolidated and many aspects of provision and outcomes that were satisfactory are now good. The trend of rising attainment and securely good progress clearly demonstrate that its capacity for further improvement is good.

Teaching is now good. The school has taken effective steps to involve students more in their learning, which was an area for improvement in the last inspection. The broad and flexible curriculum supports this well. Carefully tailored support throughout the students' time in school, with good guidance provided when they start and move between stages, ensures that all can benefit from the good teaching and curriculum. Consequently, attitudes to learning have improved and are good. Staff, students, and parents and carers express high levels of satisfaction and confidence in the school and its leaders. As one student's parents typically wrote, 'We have been delighted with Ashton Park School, both parents and child. There is a very good ethos which promotes the community and the individual.'

An astute blend of rigorous planning for improvement over time and rapid intervention to address identified problems has ensured improvement in academic progress and personal development. Comprehensive strategic planning and regular monitoring are evident throughout the school. In particular, the school works well with partners in education, business and public services, such as local primary and secondary schools, an organisation dedicated to improving education through the innovative use of digital technologies, and local welfare services. The recently established cooperative learning trust adds further impetus and capacity to the school's existing focus on partnership working. Specialist status in sport makes a significant contribution to the school's improvement and its standing in the community.

Attendance is improving and the majority of students attend at least as well as the national average; where the school has targeted resources, there have been some notable successes in reducing absence. However, the low attendance of some students, particularly some girls and some students in Year 9, means that attendance overall is low. There have been some improvements in assessment, with notable strengths in the collection of accurate data and the use of oral feedback to students in lessons. However, its overall quality remains merely satisfactory because assessment data is sometimes not used well in planning lessons to ensure that learning activities are matched precisely to students' individual needs. Moreover, inconsistencies in the regularity and quality of marking, within and across departments, sometimes make it difficult to identify the strengths in attainment and the next steps that should be taken to improve progress.

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The sixth form shares many of the good qualities of the main school. Good leadership has ensured that a broad and flexible curriculum and personalised care, guidance and support are highly valued by the students. However, progress in the sixth form is satisfactory rather than good because of variations between results on different courses, reflecting a greater variation in the quality of teaching than is found in the main school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with those students and their families who have high rates of absence to improve their attendance, particularly some girls and some students in Year 9.
- Reduce the variation in the quality of teaching in the sixth form so that the general standard rises more closely to the very good practice observed in some lessons.
- Improve the quality of assessment so that students and teachers have a better understanding of what needs to be done to accelerate progress by:
 - ensuring that there is a balance between oral and written feedback to students
 - marking work as regularly and with the same focus on what has been achieved and the next steps to be taken to improve work as in the best practice in the school
 - using assessment to plan activities which are more closely matched to the needs of different groups and individuals in lessons.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Attainment on entry is well below average. By the end of Year 11, it is broadly average, with year-on-year improvements in results in GCSE examinations. There have been some significant improvements, for example in the proportion of students gaining a good GCSE pass in English. Progress in science is also improving. The school's own data and results in modules of GCSE examinations indicate that these improvements are being sustained in the current Year 11. Rigorous analysis of examination results and of progress in the school has enabled the school to close or narrow the gaps between the attainment of different groups. For example, although boys do not make such good progress as girls, there is compelling evidence that the gap is closing. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress; it is at least as good as their peers, and sometimes better, because of the quality of the targeted support that they receive.

Students respond well to the increasing proportion of lessons that provide them with opportunities to get involved in their learning. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, the students worked in groups to explore a character in a play they were reading, creating a pictorial symbol to capture the main features of her personality and linking their views clearly to the text. This activity was followed by a lively and reflective discussion, skilfully managed by the teacher, to share and explore their findings. Their written work showed a good understanding of the character and that they were making good progress in developing their skills at working together productively. At the end of

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this lesson, the students left with a real sense of achievement.

Students behave well in lessons and around the school, which is a particularly challenging environment as building work continues. They respond to this with maturity and common sense. They are welcoming and helpful to visitors and have good relationships with the adults in the school. Relationships between students and with adults are harmonious. Students report that they feel safe in school and that rare instances of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Specialist status in sport has a significant impact on the lifestyles of the students, with high proportions participating in sport and physical activity, including those not attracted by team games. Careful monitoring of their involvement and imaginative provision, such as 'welly-whanging' contests, ensure involvement, exercise and fun. As one parent wrote: 'The school does a very good job in motivating our 'non-sporty' child to take exercise.' Strong international links, such as a well-established relationship with a Kenyan school, make a good contribution to cultural understanding, as do the opportunities for involvement in arts events. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Rising attainment, coupled with opportunities to take on responsibilities through such initiatives as the sports leadership programme, make a strong contribution to the students' development of skills for later life. Although attendance is low, the figure is rising and no groups of students underachieve.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	4

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

2

How effective is the provision?

The great majority of the teaching observed during the inspection was good and all was at least satisfactory. Most lessons include a variety of tasks and activities that are planned around clear learning objectives. These lessons are brisk and well paced. Teachers typically monitor and assess the students' progress as the lessons proceed, intervening well to help individuals stay on track. Teaching assistants provide good support in lessons for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The greater focus on active learning motivates and engages students well. Where teaching is satisfactory, lesson planning takes insufficient account of the needs of particular individuals and groups, tending to disadvantage the more and the less able. There is also a tendency to rely too much on oral feedback. Irregular marking and a lack of clear written advice sometimes adversely affect students' understanding of how to improve their work. In the best examples, there was a judicious mixture of oral and written feedback.

Innovative approaches in Years 7 and 8 encourage the students to develop important skills of working independently and collaboratively. The school's own 'Enquiring Minds' programme in Year 8 does much to develop students' skills and understanding in preparation for further study and life after school. This is complemented by close attention to improving students' basic skills. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum offers a wide menu of academic and vocational courses. Specialist status in sports makes an excellent contribution to the opportunities that students have to get involved in activities. There is a wide range of clubs, societies, trip and visits, with high levels of student participation. Students receive well-tailored, personalised support throughout the school. Consequently, the proportion remaining in education, employment or training after school is high. Well-managed support for vulnerable groups has led to improved attitudes, behaviour and achievement.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The whole school community has confidence in leaders and managers. One parent wrote, 'We cannot commend the school and particularly the management team enough.'

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There is a clear focus on teaching and learning; leaders have an accurate and detailed understanding of its quality. The headteacher is tireless in his pursuit of excellence, firmly focusing all initiatives on a commitment to serving the school's community and raising standards of personal and academic development. He is ably supported by a strong senior team. There is some variation in the quality of the planning and monitoring by middle leaders but their impact is good overall.

The school is well supported and challenged by an active governing body that understands its aims and aspirations, has a detailed knowledge of its strengths and areas for development, and plays an important role in ensuring that all aspects of the school's provision are well resourced. Financial management is rigorous and effective. The school is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination. Safeguarding procedures are robust. The school knows its students and their backgrounds well and has developed a comprehensive plan for community cohesion on this knowledge. The analysis of the school's position is rigorous and accurate, showing that local and global provision are at least good, but the provision for exploring the diversity of communities in the United Kingdom is not yet as strong.

The leadership and management of the specialist status in sport are a particular strength. It makes a significant contribution to the community through its work with primary schools. It does much to develop students' skills in leadership and collaboration, as well as improving their confidence and self-esteem.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Sixth form

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

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Attainment in the sixth form is broadly average and is rising steadily over time. In some academic subjects and on vocational courses, students make good progress, but variations across subjects make progress satisfactory overall. This reflects variations in the quality of teaching; although never less than satisfactory with some examples of very good teaching, the quality is not as consistent as in the main school so that in some cases progress is constrained by a more directive style in lessons. In the best practice observed in the sixth form, teaching ensured that students were engaged in their learning by activities that stretched their understanding and involved them in exploratory work. Nevertheless, students' personal development is good.

The innovative and inclusive curriculum does much to motivate students and encourage independent learning on Level 2 and Advanced level courses. Students are positive about the way in which the curriculum enables them to develop independent skills, citing the extended project which is part of the curriculum for some as helping them to develop their skills well. There is a wide range of vocational and academic courses, with flexible arrangements ensuring that students can choose those which suit them best. Care, guidance and support, both for personal and academic development, are good. Good leadership and management have enabled the sixth form to develop well over time.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers are very pleased with the school. In answering the Ofsted questionnaire, the very large majority of responses were positive. Parents and carers think that the school is led well and that good teaching enables their children to make good progress. There was no particular pattern to those responses which were less positive and inspectors agreed with the majority view.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashton Park School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 327 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1152 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	111	34	194	59	19	6	3	1
The school keeps my child safe	114	35	201	61	8	2	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	135	41	179	55	9	3	1	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	117	36	190	58	11	3	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	100	31	213	65	7	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	96	29	194	59	18	6	1	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	81	25	219	67	17	5	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	105	32	192	59	9	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	98	30	202	62	10	3	3	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	96	29	202	62	13	4	5	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	82	25	213	65	15	5	4	1
The school is led and managed effectively	166	51	154	47	3	1	1	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	149	46	169	52	3	1	1	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
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.

Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
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.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



30 April 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashton Park School, Bristol BS3 2JL

Thank you for the help and welcome that you gave us when we recently inspected your school. We were very impressed by your behaviour, attitudes to learning and the pride that you take in your school. We agree with you that Ashton Park is a good school. You make good progress in your learning and reach standards that are broadly the same as students nationally and this is getting better each year. The school is led well. The adults in the school work well to ensure that teaching is good and that you have a good range of subjects to choose from. The school helps you to learn important skills in the first few years of school which are essential for you to do well later. You are well cared for. In your questionnaires, you told us how positive you were about the school, so did your parents and carers and the staff. We were also impressed by how well the school uses the specialist status in sport to help you keep fit, learn about leadership and working together and to make good progress in your learning.

We have asked the school to do some things to help it get even better. The progress made so far shows that the school can do these things successfully. We want the school to:

- make sure that marking is consistent so that it is as regular and as helpful as it was in the best examples that we saw
- make sure that teaching in the sixth form is always as good as the best we saw
- work with students and their families to improve the attendance of those who do not come to school as regularly as they should.

You can help by continuing to take an active part in school life and lessons. If your attendance is not as good as that of others, you need to improve it; there is a clear link between doing well and coming to school.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Harrett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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