

Ashlyns School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117578
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	358163
Inspection dates	8–9 February 2011
Reporting inspector	Philippa Francis HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	13–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	772
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	210
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jaqueline Webby
Headteacher	James Shapland
Date of previous school inspection	16 April 2008
School address	Chesham Road Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire HP4 3AH
Telephone number	01442 863605
Fax number	01442 876292
Email address	admin@ashlyns.herts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
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M2 7LA

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 29 lessons and saw 34 teachers. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at improvement plans, the school's data on current students' progress and policies for child protection and equality of opportunity. Inspectors considered questionnaires from 139 parents and carers, 100 students and 44 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How well do students with special educational needs and/or disabilities learn and make progress?
- How effective is the use of assessment, particularly marking and feedback, for students?
- What progress do sixth form students make?
- How successful is the school's work to improve attendance and reduce exclusions?
- How well do middle managers use assessment data to plan and bring about improvement?

Information about the school

Ashlyns is a smaller than average upper school with a relatively large sixth form. It has held specialist language status since 2003. The percentage of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well-below average as is the percentage of students from minority ethnic groups. Most pupils have English as their first language. The percentage of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The school collaborates with a local secondary school for part of its sixth form provision. It also works in partnership with a local further education college and several local schools to provide Diploma courses. A new community sports facility is based at the school.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Ashlyns is a satisfactory school. Its track record shows a pattern of strong improvement. Students feel safe and are proud of their school. They make an outstanding contribution to school and community life, enhancing its reputation considerably. Students' attainment has improved and is above average, showing how the concerted efforts of staff are bringing about marked improvement. Students' progress has improved considerably and is at least satisfactory overall. The progress made by a minority of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities was below average in 2010, but inspectors confirmed improved and satisfactory progress for this group in the current year.

Students have good attitudes to learning and find most lessons productive and enjoyable. Almost all lessons are at least satisfactory and an increasing number are good or outstanding. Teachers are strongly focused on making sure students learn. However, a few lessons are undemanding and lack pace, make too little use of clearly understood targets and do not engage all students sufficiently. The effectiveness of marking and feedback has improved but a minority of teachers do not use assessment effectively enough.

The curriculum is being developed well to ensure a close match between students' needs and abilities; however, most changes are relatively recent. The provision of extra-curricular activities is excellent. The language specialism has yet to make a substantial impact within the curriculum. Students receive a high level of care. Support at important transition points is very helpful. Because of a much stronger focus by the headteacher and managers on maximising individual academic success, support for learning has become considerably more effective as seen in the improved results. Attendance is satisfactory, with strong signs that it is much improved in the current year. Exclusions are used constructively and students rarely have repeated exclusions.

The new management team, most ably led by the headteacher, is making a considerable number of much needed changes to the school. While many of these changes are relatively new, most are beginning to have an impact, as demonstrated by the school's improved track record of progress, attainment and provision. The self-critical and rigorous self-evaluation report and the sharply focused improvement plans are a considerable strength. These, along with the headteacher's and managers' determination and high aspirations, ensure the school has good capacity to improve. Data on students' attainment and progress are used particularly well by senior managers; middle managers are becoming increasingly proficient and are clear about their accountability for students' performance. The governing body supports the school well but has not monitored the risk assessment process rigorously enough. While most aspects of the school's work are adequately risk assessed, a very few are not. Many safeguarding arrangements are good but the risk assessment process lacks rigour.

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Students in the sixth form develop well as young adults because they make good use of the wide range of opportunities made available to them. Their results in external examinations and their progress compared to their prior attainment are broadly average. Provision in the sixth form is improving but academic support for students is insufficient. Too few regular, individual tutorials using challenging targets take place. Leadership and management of the sixth form have recovered from a period of ineffectiveness because of considerable intervention by the headteacher and senior managers.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of satisfactory lessons to match the good and outstanding practice evident in the school by ensuring that:
 - teachers' expectations of students are high and based on challenging targets that they understand and know how to achieve
 - the pace of learning ensures that students are consistently engaged in the learning activities
 - assessment is helpful to learners and takes place regularly to check on their understanding.
- Establish regular individual tutorials for sixth form students with immediate effect, which include:
 - the use of challenging targets based on estimated grades for each subject, which are regularly reviewed and revised as necessary
 - the use and regular review of short written targets giving precise guidance about what students need to do to fulfil their academic potential.
- Strengthen the risk assessment process by:
 - ensuring that all risks are identified and assessed regularly and thoroughly with appropriate control measures put in place
 - ensuring that the governing body reviews risk assessments annually
 - undertaking a risk assessment of the school's site.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Students' attainment on entry is broadly average. The percentage of students who gain more than five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics has increased each year since the last inspection and was high between 2008 and 2010. Students' results in science are also well above average. Attainment in foreign languages varies. It is above average in French but below in other foreign languages. Most students develop their subject skills well, are articulate and confident. Students, including different groups, make progress in line with their capabilities, as confirmed by inspectors' observations of lessons. In mathematics, students make outstanding progress.

Students show a good awareness of safety. Incidences of bullying are low. Most students work well together and embrace the school's values of respect, trust, honesty and hard

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work. Foreign languages, drama, art and music contribute well to their good cultural development. Their spiritual development is more limited as students do not always spend enough time reflecting on their experiences. They respond well to initiatives such as strict reinforcement of rules about the smarter school uniform. Students behave well, although, particularly when teaching is less effective, a few become passive or engage in low levels of disruption. Their enthusiasm for extra-curricular activities is exceptional with high participation rates in exciting and wide-ranging activities such as Berko's Big Band. The school council is active and Ashlyns' students are well represented on the Berkhamsted Youth Town Council. Inspectors judged that the school's health and well-being education and students' high level of participation in sport and fitness activities are very effective in helping them to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
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	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

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

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' much stronger focus on learning in lessons has helped many more students to make progress in line with their capabilities. Teachers make good use of the high-quality staff development opportunities which motivate them to create a much more purposeful learning environment. In the best lessons, teachers challenge students to concentrate all the time, be creative and think for themselves. However, in less effective lessons, teachers' expectations of students are too low and their strategies do not engage students or promote learning sufficiently. Managers are working determinedly to eliminate the very

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few lessons that are ineffective through providing high-quality support and staff development activities.

The curriculum has a strong focus on GCSE qualifications, including ensuring that every student studies a foreign language. The percentage of students who gain a good grade in a GCSE foreign language is well above average. However, managers have rightly recognised that there is a need to broaden the curriculum to include more vocational courses and increase the range of accreditation to ensure a closer match to students' abilities and needs. For example, psychology and film studies are now available to Year 10, and a modified foreign language curriculum is in place for identified learners. Cross-curricular use of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology provision is satisfactory.

Students, including the most vulnerable, feel well supported. They say there are clear systems in place to help them get back on track if they are not achieving their grades although not all fully understand the targets they are set. Inspectors agreed that this is the case now that teachers use data about students' performance much more effectively and that the level of personalised intervention has increased. Pastoral care and support are of good quality. Learners facing challenging circumstances receive very good support. Attendance is increasing because it is monitored very closely and actions for improvement are proving effective in the current year. Students receive appropriate guidance for their next steps, considerably enhanced by the relatively recent appointments of learning mentors.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
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	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The new headteacher and the restructured senior leadership team have successfully galvanised the enthusiasm of staff and refocused the school's work firmly on ensuring the highest possible success for each and every student. Accountability for this is being rightly devolved to managers at all levels, who are taking up the challenge willingly and increasingly well. Teachers' performance is closely monitored through accurate and rigorous lesson observations. Managers are using the results from observations very effectively to support individual teachers to improve their practice and to share the best practice across subjects. Teaching is improving rapidly as a result. New performance management arrangements ensure that all staff have targets linked to students' success. Middle managers are given good support and individual help to develop their skills, for example, in the use of assessment data. The performance of different groups of students is analysed carefully and the results used effectively.

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Governors have provided good support to the school during the change of leadership. They have made several changes to their committee structure to ensure they provide increasingly effective support to the school. They are focusing on improving communication with parents and carers, rightly recognising that this is an area for further development. However, they have not ensured that the school has reviewed policies for equalities legislation promptly enough or that the risk assessment process is comprehensive and fully effective.

The school has forged good partnerships which are productive and beneficial to students and the community. The BerkoAstro project which culminated in a high- quality Astro turf sports facility is a good example of the school, well supported by governors, and community working together. Community cohesion, based on a good analysis of community needs, is well promoted locally as well as more widely through strong international links.

The school is reducing the financial deficit responsibly, alongside using its finances prudently to make a number of improvements to the learning environment.

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	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	3
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

The number of students in the sixth form is increasing and more stay on between Years 12 and 13. Most students complete their courses and make good use of their studies in moving on to further or higher education or employment. Students' progression to their first choice universities has increased. Students' academic outcomes are average and most make progress in line with their capabilities. Too few, however, achieve their full potential because they have not received enough challenge with targets that are always demanding. Arrangements for academic tutorials have been too informal and infrequent, with the most focus being on those at risk of underachieving rather than ensuring that all

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students reach their full potential. Teaching is satisfactory. Students' contribution to the main school and the community is substantial and highly beneficial to all. Recent curriculum developments, including increased provision of vocational courses, have ensured a better match to students' needs in the current year. Pastoral care is good. Managers are using a sharply focused action plan to bring about the necessary improvements effectively and with increased momentum.

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	3

Views of parents and carers

The number of responses from parents and carers was average. The responses show a high level of satisfaction with most aspects of the school's work. In particular, almost all respondents agreed that the school keeps students safe. Parents' and carers' expressed lower levels of satisfaction with the school's work in promoting a healthy lifestyle and the extent to which they are helped to support their child's learning. Inspectors judged that the school's communication about these two aspects with parents and carers was not consistently effective but inspection evidence supported inspectors' judgements of good in both cases.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashlyns 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 139 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 772 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	56	40	72	52	10	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	55	40	82	59	2	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	43	31	84	60	9	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	42	30	82	59	12	9	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	31	22	98	71	6	4	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	32	23	77	55	20	14	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	17	12	94	68	19	14	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)	45	32	75	54	4	3	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	28	87	63	10	7	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	38	28	81	59	10	7	2	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	22	80	58	12	9	3	2
The school is led and managed effectively	59	42	71	51	2	1	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	55	40	73	53	8	6	1	1

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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



10 February 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashlyns School, Berkhamsted, HP4 3AH

Thank you for your welcome to Ashlyns. We enjoyed meeting and talking to you, as well as seeing you at work.

We judged your school to be satisfactory. There are many improvements taking place and the headteacher knows precisely what needs to be done because he and other managers have evaluated the school's strengths and weaknesses accurately. Improvement can already be seen in your above-average results and increased rate of progress in the main school. Results in the sixth form have yet to make improvement partly because individual guidance and support are not yet strongly focused on high levels of achievement.

Teaching is satisfactory with an increasing number of good or outstanding lessons but a there are a minority where you are not challenged sufficiently or assessed frequently enough. The satisfactory curriculum is beginning to develop well in breadth and matched to your needs. You are well cared for and the level of support to ensure you learn has increased a great deal, meaning more of you are reaching your full potential. You are helped well to develop personally and socially with good attention paid to your cultural and moral development. School is a safe and an enjoyable place but we found that the risk assessment process is not as robust as it should be.

These are the things we have asked managers to do to bring about further improvement.

Make satisfactory lessons more effective by expecting more of you, using targets fully effectively and assessing you more frequently.

Put in place individual academic tutorials in the sixth form that include challenging subject-grade targets.

Improve the procedures for assessing the health and safety risks around the school to make sure that all areas are covered comprehensively.

Finally, inspectors were impressed by the outstanding contribution that you make to school and community life in very many ways enhancing its reputation considerably. Well done.

Yours sincerely

Philippa Francis

Her Majesty's Inspector

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