

Ashlyns School

Chesham Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 3AH

Inspection dates

4–5 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Actions taken by senior leaders, since the last inspection in 2011, have not yet had sufficient impact on improving the quality of teaching or the progress of the students.
- Not enough students make more than expected progress from their above-average starting points.
- Students are not set sufficiently challenging targets in all subjects to make good progress and gain consistently high standards.
- The systems to track students' progress are not always used to identify quickly enough the students who need extra help and to give them the support that they need.
- There are too many classes where teaching is not yet good enough. Teachers do not always fully engage the students, match the work to their ability, encourage them to become more independent learners or use questioning and marking effectively.
- Not all subject leaders are not telling staff clearly enough what needs to be improved, or finding enough opportunities for teachers to share what works well.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher and senior leaders are taking action to tackle underachievement so that the school is on a well planned journey of improvement.
- Governors hold the school to account and take robust action to address weaknesses.
- Standards are improving in many subjects.
- The behaviour of students is good. They feel safe, are polite and show respect to staff and each other.
- Many students are involved in community events, fundraising and out-of-school activities.
- Attendance is above average and reflects students' enjoyment of school.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 38 lessons, of which six were joint observations with senior leaders.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, a local authority representative, senior leaders, staff and groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 143 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire and the 43 responses from the staff questionnaire distributed for the inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of evidence, including the school evaluation form, the school improvement plan, the system to track students' progress, records relating to behaviour and attendance, records of lesson observations by senior staff, performance management information, safeguarding documentation, and a sample of students' work.

Inspection team

Stephen Walker, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Beverley Mabey	Additional Inspector
Neil Stanley	Additional Inspector
Janev Mehmet-Christofides	Additional Inspector
Glen Goddard	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized upper school with a relatively large sixth form.
- The large majority of students are from White British backgrounds. There is a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- A smaller-than-average proportion of the students are known to be eligible for the pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children in local authority care, students from armed services families and students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The proportion of disabled students and those who have special educational needs who are supported through school action, school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs, is below average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The school has been a specialist languages college for over nine years.
- The Berkhamsted Astroturf facility with all weather pitches and changing rooms was completed in 2010 and provides additional sports facilities for the school and local community.
- A small number of Key Stage 4 students take alternative provision at work-based off-site courses with a range of training providers.
- There is presently a high proportion of temporary teachers (supply teachers) in the school due to staff illness and maternity leave.
- The school has collaborative arrangements with Tring School for the organisation of sixth form courses.
- The governing body was restructured and the senior leadership team expanded in September 2012.
- The school will become a full secondary school in September 2013, admitting students in Years 7 and 8.
- The school has received the International School and Sportsmark awards.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all teaching is good or better by making sure that all teachers are:
 - planning and setting work that is at the right level for all students, so that it is not too easy or too hard
 - engaging the interest of all pupils so that they retain concentration
 - finding opportunities for students to work more independently
 - using questioning to check understanding and involve students more in their learning
 - using marking to show students how to improve their work and gain higher grades
- Raise the attainment and progress of students across the school, so that standards in all subjects are well above-average by:
 - ensuring that staff and students are working towards challenging targets which demonstrate good or better progress
 - using the systems for tracking students' progress more effectively so that all teachers can provide additional support for all students at risk of underachieving
 - involving students more in addressing areas for improvement so that they can gain their target grades.
- Develop the effectiveness of leadership and management and its impact on school improvement by:
 - making sure that support is provided in subject areas where the progress of students

could be better

- ensuring that lesson observations by all leaders focus on the impact of teaching on students' progress and provide teachers with clear areas for improvement
 - developing the roles of the subject leaders so that they are fully involved in improving teaching through sharing good practice and coaching
 - making sure that teachers' performance targets are more sharply focused on improving the rate of student progress and the quality of teaching
 - ensuring that consistent systems are in place to support temporary teachers
 - reviewing the number and effectiveness of additional adults who are supporting individual students.
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Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils requires improvement

- Standards are not high enough in all subjects to demonstrate good progress. Students start at the school with above-average attainment but not enough students reach the higher grades at GCSE or A level. Although there has been an improvement over the last two years, attainment in too many subjects remains in line with the national average. Although the majority of students are making the progress they should, teaching is too variable so that too few are making better progress than this.
- The percentage of students who gain five A* to C GCSE grades including English and mathematics is above average but has not increased significantly over the last three years. Progress in English is not yet good enough. Although this is improving, the proportion of students making and exceeding expected progress from their starting points is below that found nationally. Similarly, although standards are improving in business studies, double science, product design and Spanish, more students are capable of gaining higher grades in these subjects.
- Students in the sixth form make progress that is broadly in line with their capabilities although progress is variable and too few gain their full potential in their AS examinations. The school is now more active in advising students to select the most appropriate course in the sixth form. As a result, progress is improving in Year 13 and more students are gaining the higher grades and progressing on to employment, training or higher education.
- The newly developed systems for tracking students' progress, and the support provided for underachieving students, are leading to improved progress for many students. However, some underachieving students are not identified quickly enough by some teachers and some do not get fully effective additional support or guidance.
- Students are given attainment targets in all subjects but these are not always sufficiently demanding to demonstrate good or better progress. Many students are capable of gaining much higher grades in their examinations. Not all teachers are fully involving students in addressing their areas of weakness so that they can gain the higher grades.
- Most disabled students and those who have special educational needs make progress in line with their peers. This is because effective work from other adults helps them take part in lessons with the other students. However, some teachers are not always acknowledging their learning needs or making the necessary adjustments to their planning to help them in lessons.
- Progress in mathematics is outstanding in Key Stage 4 and over half the students make four levels of progress between Key Stages 2 and 4. The school's policy is to enter students early in GCSE mathematics and allow them to spend more time on other subjects or continue to study mathematics at a higher level, if they gain their target grade. Progress is also good in art, textiles, psychology, religious studies and the separate sciences, where most students gain the higher grades at GCSE.
- The school is using additional funding adequately to narrow the gap between the achievement of students eligible for the pupil premium and the other students. Money is allocated for teaching assistants to provide extra support in reading, writing and mathematics. The small numbers of Key Stage 4 students who now take work-related courses off-site benefit from the practical approach to learning, and early indications are that they are making reasonable progress.

The quality of teaching requires improvement

- Teaching is too inconsistent across the school to be good overall and students do not make enough progress in some lessons. Although there is evidence of good or better teaching across most subjects, there are too many lessons where the quality of teaching and learning requires improvement and a small number where the teaching is inadequate.
- Teachers' planning does not always make sure that the activities and instruction are set at the right level for the students. Some students are not challenged enough to gain the higher grades because the work in lessons is sometimes too easy for them. Similarly, some students are unable to progress at a sufficient pace because the work is too hard.
- Students concentrate and learn well when activities are interesting and engage them in the lesson. However, there are some lessons when the work does not capture their attention and they become distracted.
- Not enough teachers encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. In some lessons, students sit listening for too long without being actively involved or encouraged to think about the topic. Some teachers are too ready to do the thinking and give the answers to the students.
- Some teachers are skilled at asking questions to engage the students, check understanding and extend their thinking. However, a number of teachers are not all making enough use of questioning in lessons to support the learning of the students. Some teachers do not check sufficiently whether the students understand the work or are making progress.
- There are some good examples of marking, with clear guidance to students on how to improve their work. However, there is inconsistency in marking across the school. In some lessons marking is weak and does not indicate to students how they can improve their work to gain higher grades. There are few examples of students' work in classrooms to show them what is expected for the higher grades.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are benefiting from the support they receive in and out of classes. However, there are not always enough additional adults and there is sometimes insufficient support for some students in certain classes.
- In lessons where students make good or better progress, there is a very positive atmosphere for learning and students are eager to answer questions and take a full part in the learning. There is a range of well-planned activities which challenge the students and allow them to take some responsibility for their own learning. For example, Year 13 students made rapid progress as they worked in pairs to grade their English essays using the marking guidance. The teacher skilfully used questioning to ensure that all students reflected on their work and knew exactly what was needed to gain better marks.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The majority of students behave well in lessons and around the school, and this contributes to a calm and orderly environment. Parents, carers and senior students confirm that behaviour has improved over the last two years since the appointment of the headteacher. There are now clear

expectations of behaviour and consistent systems to deal with any misbehaviour.

- Students are generally considerate, polite and courteous to staff and each other and this has a positive effect on the learning environment. Sixth formers act as good role models and have opportunities to support the younger students, for example, through the house system. Many students are actively involved in community events, fundraising and out-of-school activities.
- Bullying of any kind is rare in the school and students say that any unkind behaviour such as name-calling is dealt with quickly and effectively. Students are aware of the different forms of possible bullying, such as cyber-bullying and prejudice-based bullying related to sex, gender, race and disability. The school has been particularly active in ensuring that students understand why any form of racist and homophobic bullying will not be tolerated.
- Students generally respond well to teachers' good use of praise and encouragement to promote high standards of behaviour. However, students lose concentration in some lessons when the work does not fully engage them. Students are developing their skills in managing their own behaviour and can be trusted to move around the corridors and socialise at break and lunchtime with only moderate supervision.
- The school makes every effort to ensure students feel safe and secure. Students display a good understanding of the issues relating to safety. They talk confidently about how they would keep themselves safe in a variety of situations, such as using the internet and social networking sites. They confirmed that the school provides them with information on sex education and the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs.
- Attendance is now above average and reflects students' enjoyment of the school. There has been a significant improvement in attendance and reduction in persistent absence.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- The leadership is not yet having enough impact on improving students' progress and the quality of teaching. The school is making sound progress in addressing the key issues from the previous inspection. It is on a well-planned journey of improvement but there is still some way to go to ensure consistently good teaching and good progress in all subjects. However, there are already significant improvements in standards of behaviour and attendance of students.
 - The headteacher and senior leadership team are providing strong leadership and are working closely with governors to address a legacy of underachievement. The headteacher has been successful in balancing the budget and restructuring staffing and leadership teams so that there is now a sound basis for improvement. The school has reduced but not eliminated the amount of inadequate teaching and it has not yet ensured that teaching across the school is mostly good or better.
 - The senior leaders and subject leaders undertake regular lesson observations but their judgements are sometimes overgenerous. Some of the performance targets set for teachers by subject leaders require modification by the headteacher because they are not sharply focused on student progress or the quality of teaching. This ensures that any decisions made about teachers' movements up the salary scale are becoming more accurately based on the quality of their teaching and the progress of their students.
 - The school provides support for subject areas where progress requires improvement.
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Improvements in some subjects are due to staffing changes and targeted training for teachers. The headteacher has challenged underperformance robustly and effected some changes to staffing to address this issue. There are indications of better teaching and student progress in some subjects but support in other subject areas is still not fully effective in improving the quality of teaching. Subject leaders are developing their supporting and monitoring roles but are not sufficiently involved in sharing good practice in teaching or in coaching colleagues.

- There is presently a large amount of supply cover (temporary teaching) in the school due to maternity leave and staff illness. There are inconsistent systems to support these supply teachers, and students do not always make enough progress in these lessons.
 - The school has developed an adequate range of subjects and courses which is relevant to the majority of students' needs. There are some opportunities to take vocational options but few students select them. A wide range of outside visits and out-of-school activities increase students' enjoyment and experience of school. The range of experiences contributes well to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
 - The local authority has worked closely with the headteacher and governors over the last two years to find solutions to previous difficulties, particularly regarding the budget and inadequate teaching.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - The newly formed governing body is well informed about the strengths of the school and areas for improvement. Its members are now fully involved in monitoring progress and in holding leaders and staff to account. They have ensured that the school has taken strong and appropriate action to address its historic budget deficit and tackle inadequate leadership and teaching. They have been active in supporting the agreed transition to a full secondary school and obtaining funding for the Astroturf facility. Although they have employed the correct procedures regarding salary progression, they are not always fully aware of the quality of some of the teaching. Robust procedures for safeguarding meet statutory requirements and governors have fully addressed the issue of risk assessment raised in the previous inspection. There is a strong commitment to promoting equal opportunities and tackling discrimination. Governors are proactive in overseeing the use of the pupil premium funding and ensuring that it is effectively spent to support eligible students. Governors ensure they receive the professional training they need to develop further.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	117578
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	405714

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	814
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	220
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jacqueline Webby
Headteacher	James Shapland
Date of previous school inspection	8 February 2011
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