

# Ashlyns School

Chesham Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 3AH

**Inspection dates** 18–19 September 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Requires improvement	3
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school.

- Leaders at all levels have high expectations of all staff and students. They work well together and with outside agencies to secure improvements at the school.
- School governors use their skills and experience to challenge and support the school.
- School leaders have managed well the school's transition from an upper school, securing improvement in standards, behaviour and teaching.
- Teaching over time is good. Effective teaching, regular assessment and timely interventions result in students' good achievement.
- Attainment at Key Stage 4 is above that found nationally in most subjects, including English, mathematics and science.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress, resulting in attainment at A level which is above what would be found nationally. A\* to B grades at A level have been increasing.
- Students who are disabled and those who have special educational needs are supported well and make good progress.
- Students supported by the pupil premium achieve well and the gaps in attainment between them and other students are closing.
- Teachers form excellent relationships with students, which contribute highly to their positive attitudes to learning and good achievement.
- Students are well behaved and collaborate well. They are very respectful and tolerant of other cultures and religions that exist in modern day Britain.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes well the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Assessments of students' progress are not always used effectively to plan activities and resources to extend students' knowledge and understanding.
- Teachers' questioning does not consistently challenge students in order to move them on quickly from their starting points.
- Not all teachers follow the school's marking policy.
- Teachers do not all apply the school's new behaviour policy in the same way, resulting in occasional low-level disruption.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 39 lessons, of which 12 were jointly observed with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, members of the governing body, a School Improvement Partner representing the local authority, a senior leader supporting the school from a partner school and four groups of students.
- Inspectors took account of the 217 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), with 190 additional comments received by the end of the inspection, as well as three letters from parents.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised information about students' achievement, including that of disadvantaged students and those who are disabled or have special educational needs.
- Inspectors looked at the work in students' books and heard students read.
- Inspectors examined records relating to behaviour, attendance and exclusions, and looked at documents used by leaders and governors to check and evaluate the school's work, to plan school improvement and to keep students safe.
- Inspectors took account of the 63 staff responses to an Ofsted inspection questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Jalil Shaikh, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector
Christopher Christofides	Additional Inspector
Russell Ayling	Additional Inspector
Paul Burton	Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Ashlyns School has gone through significant transformation. It changed from being an upper school to incorporate students and staff from two middle schools to become an 11–18 secondary school in September 2013.
- It is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups and the number of students who speak English as an additional language are much lower than found in other schools nationally.
- The proportions of students supported through school action, school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are all well below the national average.
- The proportion of students who are disadvantaged, and therefore eligible for the pupil premium, is slightly lower than average. (Pupil premium funding is additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.)
- There are currently no students in Key Stages 3 or 4 who are educated offsite.
- The sixth form operates in partnership with Tring School.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectation for students' attainment and progress.

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

- To further improve the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise students' achievement by ensuring that all teachers:
  - challenge all students in class, by making sure that questioning stretches students and deepens their knowledge, and that tasks move students' learning on quickly
  - consistently apply the school's marking policy to give students high-quality feedback on their work, and check that students follow the advice they are given through marking
  - make use of the school's accurate assessment of students' progress and their individual learning needs to plan the activities and resources needed to support the learning of students in lessons, especially in Spanish
  - apply the school's new behaviour policy in the same way to avoid any low-level disruption.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher, senior management team and governing body have successfully managed the transformation from an upper school to a secondary school. They have ensured that teaching and standards have continued to improve despite the increased student roll and difficulties that are sometimes associated with this type of amalgamation. Parents and carers were highly complementary about the improvements made since the change.
- Leaders at all levels, including subject and other leaders, have high expectations of both staff and students. They work well both together, and with external organisations, to secure whole-school improvement. This has resulted in significant improvements to the sixth form, as well as throughout the school.
- Leaders carefully analyse teachers' professional development needs and follow this up with personalised support. Leaders' robust performance management has resulted in teaching staff who traditionally worked in different phases of education now teaching consistently well throughout all year groups at the school. Staff welcome the support they receive from leaders at all levels.
- Senior leaders have ensured good relationships between students and teachers. This is why behaviour and students' attitudes to learning are almost always positive.
- The school promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of its students well. Students show a high level of respect and tolerance of other faiths and cultures and have a good understanding of life in modern Britain.
- The school has effective strategies for the care and guidance of students. For example, students in Year 11 and the sixth form receive high-quality careers guidance which results in them being able to make good decisions about their future career choices. As a result, a large percentage of students continue on to higher education, including to the country's most highly regarded universities.
- The school has used the services of various outside agencies well, including the local authority School Improvement Partner, to help diagnose areas for development and improve the quality of provision and outcomes for its students.
- The school's commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity is demonstrated both by the broad and balanced curriculum offered and by their improved systems for the tracking and monitoring of every aspects of each student's progress. These systems give leaders at all levels an accurate picture of how well students are doing and where improvements are needed.
- The school's self-evaluation highlights clear areas for improvement which are further developed in school improvement plans. Strategies for improvement are regularly monitored to ensure students' achievement is consistently good, although leaders do not specifically analyse any differences that might be evident among particular groups of students.
- **The governance of the school:**
  - The governing body has been substantially reduced in size. This has resulted in well-focused meetings and clear decision-making procedures.
  - Governors have a wide range of skills which benefit the school and they undertake training to equip them to challenge school leaders effectively.
  - Governors understand the strengths and areas of development of the school and provide high levels of challenge to the school in all areas of its work. This has had a significant impact on raising standards at the school.
  - The governors participate in the performance management of all staff, including the headteacher. They reward good teachers and tackle underperformance. This has had a significant impact in raising the

quality of teaching and learning and on the achievement of students.

- The school's budget is managed well. The impact of spending decisions, including the use of the pupil premium and Year 7 'catch up' funding, are carefully checked.
- Governors ensure that the arrangements to safeguard students meet statutory requirements.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils** are good

- The behaviour of students is good. Staff form highly positive relationships with students, which in turn has a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning in the classroom and how they respond to instructions given to them by staff.
- During break and lunchtimes, behaviour is orderly at all times. During the inspection, students received inspectors with wonderful smiles, opened doors, and extended greetings.
- This is a very welcoming school where students collaborate well. Students are polite and friendly. They celebrate diversity.
- Parents, teachers and students are highly positive about the behaviour around the school. The school has good records of behaviour-related incidents, which are relatively low. This allows the school to tackle any undesirable behaviour and build students' confidence.
- The school has a new behaviour policy to challenge and support students who sometimes find good behaviour difficult. However, in a small number of lessons, low-level disruption is not always managed consistently according to the school's behaviour policy. This slows the progress being made by some students. It is why behaviour is not yet outstanding.
- Fixed-term exclusions have been consistently below national averages and, despite increased numbers of students, continues to decrease as a sanction for poor behaviour.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. All students spoken to by inspectors, during formal meetings and around the school, said they feel safe at the school. This was also unanimously supported by responses of parents received during the inspection to the online questionnaire.
- Through the school's effective monitoring and follow up of any absences, attendance has remained above the national average for the past three years. Leaders maintain this position by working closely with parents.
- Bullying and racial incidents are rare. Pupils have a growing awareness of the different types of bullying, such as cyber-bullying, and are fully aware of the systems available in the school to protect them.

### **The quality of teaching** is good

- Effective teaching and timely well-planned support mean that students make good progress in their learning over their time at the school, including in the sixth form.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and great enthusiasm for their subjects. This positivity is transferred to students, who display a genuine love of learning.
- Highly positive relationships between teachers, support staff and students, along with teachers' generally high expectations, mean that students are encouraged to work hard and do well. When given the opportunity, students are able to articulate their ideas well and they make good progress in their learning. Students collaborate and work well together in lessons.
- Lessons are planned well so that students are clear about what they are expected to learn and what they

need to do to make good progress. Homework is set regularly and also contributes to students' good progress.

- The needs of disadvantaged students and those who are disabled or who have special educational needs are planned for and met well. Support staff are used well and have a positive impact on the achievement of these students.
- Although skilled questioning and quality verbal feedback was observed in much of the teaching at the school, some questioning does not stretch or extend students' understanding well. Where this is the case, the progress made by students slows.
- Assessments of students' progress and attainment are carried out regularly and are accurate. Most teachers use this information well in order to identify any gaps in students' learning and to guide teaching in all subjects. However, in a small number of cases, this information is not used effectively to plan activities and resources in lessons sufficiently well to ensure high levels of challenge and engagement. As a result, activities can be too easy for the most-able students and their progress slows.
- Peer assessment is used well, with students checking each others' work. There are also examples of good-quality marking and written feedback from teachers, but this is not yet consistently applied through all key stages, year groups and lessons. In a small number of cases, students' work is not marked often enough for the process to be useful. In other instances, the written comments made do not give students sufficiently helpful advice that will contribute to their continued progress. In some instances, students do not respond to targets or questions set by teachers.

### **The achievement of pupils** is good

- Attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is generally above average. Most students, including the more able, make good progress in their learning throughout all key stages at the school. In 2014, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 was above average in most subjects, including mathematics and science. In English, attainment has been well above average for the past three years.
- More-able students are now making good progress. As a result, the percentage of students attaining the A to A\* grades in GCSE examinations is now above average in most subjects. The school data indicates this percentage has improved as a result of leaders' more rigorous evaluation of the quality of teaching and correct diagnosis of the areas that needed improvement.
- Attainment on entry into the sixth form is average. However, students make good progress, resulting in attainment at A level which is above average. The number of A\* to B grades at A level has increased over the past two years.
- Good systems for tracking and monitoring the progress of students, especially those in Key Stage 4, have allowed the school to accurately identify specific areas of development across all subjects. This has resulted in effective support and improvements to the quality of teaching in most subjects, so that students make good progress.
- The school has made effective use of early entry to GCSE examinations in English literature and mathematics. It has ensured that this does not disadvantage students. For example, more-able students who attain an early C grade in mathematics go on subsequently to attain higher grades.
- Year 7 'catch up' funding is used well for those students who join the school with key skills below those expected for their age. The 'catch up' funding has resulted in students making good progress in their reading and literacy development at Key Stage 3.
- As a result of good-quality support, disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Nevertheless, their attainment is lower than students from other groups in the school. This is because they often have complex needs and much lower starting points.

- The attainment of disadvantaged students supported by the pupil premium was behind other students in the school by about a grade in the 2013 GCSE English examinations and just over half a grade in mathematics. However, compared to other non-disadvantaged students nationally, they were not as far behind: just over half a grade behind in English and just below a third of a grade in mathematics. Disadvantaged students are making good progress and the attainment gap is closing swiftly.
- Although the picture is improving, progress of students in Spanish at Key Stage 4 is not as strong as in other subjects in the school.

### The sixth form provision

is good

- Sixth form leaders have been successful in raising the achievement of students through effective target setting, better monitoring and tracking of students' progress, and improving the quality of teaching, which is now consistently good. As a result, 81% of the students in the sixth form meet the 16-19 interim minimum standards set by the Department for Education and many of them exceed these expectations.
- Attainment at A level has improved rapidly and is now above the national average. A\* to B grades at A level have been increasing over the past two years. At A level, there are no longer any subjects where performance has fallen below the national average, and there are a number of subjects where results are significantly better than found nationally.
- As a result of good well-targeted support, disadvantaged students make exceptional progress and attain better than other students in the sixth form. Gaps in the attainment of disabled students and those who have special educational needs have also narrowed.
- The curriculum is closely linked to students' capabilities and aspirations. It includes a wide range of academic and vocational subjects delivered across a consortium. Tutorials and an enrichment programme prepare students well for life in modern Britain.
- Teaching in the sixth form promotes genuine debate, dialogue and reflection through skilful questioning that deepens students' knowledge and gives opportunities for students to discuss and evaluate their ideas and those of others.
- Students are well behaved and are supported well for life beyond the sixth form through guidance on future study programmes, good-quality careers advice, and talks by visiting speakers. As a result, students are highly articulate and have good personal, social and employability skills. Most continue to higher education, including the country's most highly regarded universities.
- Standards at AS level declined slightly last year and are now broadly average. School leaders have responded swiftly to this dip by improving the support students are given and by stepping up the quality of guidance to students over the selection of courses. The improved guidance to students has also contributed to a notable improvement in the number of students who complete their sixth form courses.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117578
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	449012

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1149
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	197
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Jacqueline Webby
<b>Headteacher</b>	James Shapland
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	4 December 2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01442 863605
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