

Ashmole School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101363
Local Authority	Barnet
Inspection number	276508
Inspection dates	24–25 January 2007
Reporting inspector	Asyia Kazmi HMI

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	1340
6th form	255
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Jeff Kaye
Headteacher	Mr Derrick Brown
Date of previous school inspection	20 March 2000
School address	Cecil Road Southgate London N14 5RJ
Telephone number	020 8361 2703
Fax number	020 8368 0315

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashmole is a larger than average secondary school. The school is popular and over-subscribed. It takes students from the full range of ability but overall the attainment of students when they start the school is above average. Students come from a wide range of minority ethnic heritages and a greater than usual number of students speak English as an additional language. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly average, while the proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average. Student mobility in and out of the school is low.

The school acquired specialist status in science in 2002 and has recently acquired a second specialism in music. The school moved into new buildings in 2004.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Ashmole is an outstanding school. The head teacher's visionary and incisive leadership of the school has resulted in excellent standards. He is ably supported by an effective and enthusiastic leadership team. Exemplary team work and a drive for consistency is delivering high quality education and maximising achievement. The leadership is responsive and always striving to improve. The school's self-evaluation is astute. The rigorous systems for monitoring and evaluation, informed by sophisticated use of data, ensures areas of development are addressed successfully. Hence, the school's capacity to improve further is outstanding.

This is an inclusive school; it values diversity and promotes equality of opportunity. Students are confident, articulate and thoughtful. The school's innovative programme of tutor support ensures students engage with a wide range of issues. As a result their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. In line with the school's aims, students 'develop civic responsibility and community involvement'. This is evidenced through their good behaviour. Students speak enthusiastically about their school play, the choir and the school's international connections and they benefit from a wide range of excellent extra-curricular activities. The library is a valuable resource for students, they speak highly of initiatives to encourage them to read such as shadowing the Carnegie award, awarded to authors for an outstanding book for children and young people.

Students make very good progress, whatever their starting points, and standards are exceptionally high. Staff set consistently high expectations of achievement and students often exceed their targets. Through close monitoring of students' progress, the school knows exactly where achievement could be better and is active in ensuring it is.

The school successfully achieves its aim of providing 'a scientifically rich learning environment'; its specialist status has had a significant and beneficial impact on standards and the curriculum. The school has developed excellent national and international links, as well as providing support to local primary and secondary schools in the area of science education. Building on this success the school has now gained additional specialist status in music.

Students are actively involved in the decisions that affect them through the school council. Inspectors observed articulate, confident and mature discussions between the sixth form school council and members of the senior leadership team. Students feel their views are acted upon. Inspectors agree with the students that relationships in the whole school community are excellent. Students speak highly of the support they are offered by their teachers and feel strongly 'they are always there to help you' and 'there is always someone to talk to'.

Students report teachers 'make lessons fun'. Teaching and learning are good overall. The school has rightly identified the need to ensure that planning meets the needs of all pupils as a key focus to drive improvements further, particularly in challenging the most able. The curriculum is outstanding because it is responsive to the needs of the students.

Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire feel their child enjoys school, is making good progress and is well cared for. A small number of parents did not feel the school took account of their views, the school recognises that more needs to be done to engage with parents.

The school is well resourced, enjoys new accommodation and offers excellent value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

As a result of consistently good teaching, standards in the sixth form are outstanding. The pass rate at A level in 2006 is 100%. The sixth form is large, provision is very good and most class sizes are efficient. The majority of students stay on in the sixth form, they attend regularly and, as a result, retention rates on courses are very high.

Students value the excellent guidance and support they receive from subject teachers and tutors. This very effective partnership of teachers and students working together to achieve their joint vision is at the heart of the high attainment in the sixth form. A more structured tutor period has been a positive development which has been welcomed by students. Tracking of student progress has improved leading to more effective intervention strategies and better communication with parents. Students welcome the many opportunities on offer to play a full part in school life.

What the school should do to improve further

- The school should ensure that work is consistently matched to the needs of all students.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Overall, standards are exceptionally high and achievement is outstanding. Standards have risen considerably since the last inspection and are well above local and national averages. The school consistently exceeds its targets.

When students enter the school their standards are above average, they make very good progress so by time they take their GCSEs they achieve standards well above average. 76% of the students gained five or more GCSEs at the highest grades. Students from all groups share in this success. The sixth form achieved its best ever standards this year. A level students achieved particularly high standards in chemistry, mathematics, French, sociology and drama.

Students with learning difficulties and disabilities make very good progress as a result of the excellent support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school judged itself to be good in this area, however inspectors found students' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Students enjoy their education and cite relationships with teachers and the new school building as factors that contribute to their enjoyment and steadily improving progress. The school is proud of its diversity of language, religion and culture and within this environment relationships are harmonious and productive. Students support each other well and engage in mature dialogue with each other. The good behaviour at lunch and break periods is testament to the students' commitment to being part of a well ordered community.

Tutor periods inspire students to reflect and debate. They develop a thoughtful understanding of right from wrong. Students learn about and enjoy a healthy lifestyle, both through the taught

curriculum and the range of extra curricular activities on offer. Students feel very safe in the school, their community involvement is excellent. Sixth form students work with visiting schools as part of their Sports Leader's Award. Exceptionally good work in basic skills and enterprise education promotes students' effective preparation for their future lives and employment.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. As a result, in most lessons, students enjoy their learning and make good progress. Learning is helped by the good relationships between students and teachers. The best lessons challenge all groups of students in the class and the varied activities engage their interests. Teaching methods allow students to think for themselves and to extend the ways they learn. For example, in a Year 12 science lesson, skilled and challenging questions intertwined with humour ensured all students were fully engaged.

A few lessons lack zest and pace, making it harder for students to focus on their learning. The school is aware of the need to ensure teaching challenges all students, in particular the most able, so that they are set tasks which extend their learning. The majority of teachers manage students' behaviour very effectively.

The school has additional support programmes for students who do not achieve set targets. Teachers have an accurate view of the students' attainment year on year, which is used to inform future teaching. Marking is regular, thorough and formative.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is outstanding; it has a strong academic focus, reflects the school's specialism in science and is responsive to the needs of students. It is inclusive and ensures that all groups of students, including those with learning difficulties, are able to make good progress and develop well. In Years 7 to 9 students are effectively prepared for the next stage of their education; there is a strong work related dimension in Years 10 and 11. The school is responding to the interest in vocational education by introducing additional new courses. Provision for personal, social and health education includes citizenship, which is supported through cross curricular delivery. Inspectors saw an inspiring example of this in the mock Parliamentary debate in which Year 10 students were enthusiastically involved. There is an exceptional variety of enrichment opportunities which students actively participate in, including school clubs, international visits and exchanges.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The care, guidance and support for students throughout the school are outstanding. It has a significant impact on the personal development and wellbeing of the students and consequently on the high standards they achieve.

Students report bullying is rare and when it does occur it is dealt with very seriously. Arrangements to protect their health and safety are rigorous. Statutory requirements for child protection and safeguarding are met for all staff in school. The school supports vulnerable students in a way that is thoroughly coordinated and rigorously followed through.

Links with primary schools are extremely strong and good arrangements for transition ensure that students settle in well. Students receive very good support in making decisions about their next educational choices. This is reflected in the high proportion of school leavers taking up further or higher education. The school gives good academic guidance in all years, helping to lead to students' high achievement. Students know the levels of attainment at which they are working, their targets and how to improve their work. Teachers' thorough feedback to students of their progress, through regular review meetings with their subject teachers and form tutors, allows them to reflect on their progress and plan for their future.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The head teacher provides outstanding leadership of the school. He is ably supported by governors and a very effective and committed senior leadership team who share his vision for excellence. A high priority is given to professional development and performance management ensuring achievement is sustained.

The head teacher has been astute in cultivating the talent of his staff by providing support through mentoring and coaching. This has meant leadership is shared at all levels. Middle leaders are highly effective and knowledgeable, they are rigorous and sophisticated in identifying underachievement and addressing it, they are correct in their assertion 'we know our students well'. The considered and innovative leadership of the school's specialism in science has had a significant impact on standards, the curriculum and students' enjoyment of this subject.

The governors are knowledgeable, highly supportive and very effectively carry out their role of a critical friend. The school leadership, with the support of governors, carried through a successful new build thereby providing excellent accommodation and learning environment for students and staff.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

On behalf of the inspectors and myself who visited your school recently, I would like to thank you for the friendly and helpful way you welcomed us. We valued the discussions that we had with many of you and are grateful for the way you shared your views about the school. In return, I want to tell you our findings.

Your school provides you with an excellent education, you work hard in your lessons and you achieve great success. The teaching in your school is good, you told us you enjoy school and that the school listens to your views. Those of you who need extra help are well supported and make very good progress. We think that the way the school gives you support and guidance is outstanding, you work hard towards the targets teachers set for you. Your behaviour is nearly always very good, we were particularly impressed with the very mature way you discuss important matters with each other and the care you show each other. We were pleased that in the sixth form nearly all students finish their course and achieve outstanding results. You told us you feel safe and secure in school and enjoy the many extra clubs and activities on offer.

The head teacher, senior teachers and governors are determined to ensure that all of you excel in your work and do the very best you can, they are making the right decisions to make sure that this happens. To build on the success even further we have asked that your school makes sure that the work you do matches your needs and ability.

We wish you and your school every success.

Yours sincerely

Asyia Kazmi

Her Majesty's Inspector