

Ashton Community Science College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119707
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	358610
Inspection dates	19–20 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Shirley Gornall HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
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	916
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Mark Gutteridge
Headteacher	Mr Chris Lickiss
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2007
School address	Aldwych Drive Ashton, Preston Lancashire PR2 1SL
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed 42 lessons taught by 42 teachers on the school's two campuses and held meetings with school leaders, groups of students, governors and a representative from the local authority. They observed the school's work, and looked at its plans, self-evaluation, policies and other relevant documents. Inspectors also took account of the 85 questionnaire returns from parents and carers, 48 returns from staff and 140 returns from students.

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

- The extent to which students of all abilities make progress and enjoy their learning.
- The impact of the school's specialist status on the students' experiences and outcomes.
- The extent to which school leaders have ensured consistently high standards in all aspects of work on the school's two campuses and created one inclusive school community.

Information about the school

Ashton Community Science College is an average-sized 11 to 18 secondary school serving the communities of Ashton and Ribblesdale. The school increased in size at the end of 2009 when it incorporated the former City of Preston High School. The school now operates on two sites, situated around five miles apart. A small sixth form opened in 2010. The school has a 20 place special educational resource facility to support deaf students. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average, as is the proportion of students with a statement of special educational needs. The school holds various awards including Sportsmark, Investors in People bronze level, Basic Skills Quality Mark, National Healthy Schools Standard, ICT Mark and Quality in Study Support award. It was recognised by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust as the most improved science college in England in 2010 based upon sustained improvement.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Ashton Community Science College is an outstanding school providing an excellent quality of education and care for its students. Under the inspirational leadership of the Principal and through the dedicated teamwork of all staff, provision and outcomes have improved considerably since the previous inspection. The governors' bold decision to incorporate students, staff and premises of a local school facing closure was well judged and has resulted in a significant improvement in outcomes for the students on Ribbleton campus, where attainment and attendance were exceptionally low. Meanwhile, the strong trajectory of improvement has been maintained on the Ashton campus and there is a palpable ethos of the two sites functioning as one harmonious school. A comment from one student: 'We are proud to be at this school because everyone cares about us and really helps us be the best we can,' typifies the views of many.

Students thrive on the wide variety of challenges presented to them and respond enthusiastically to the school's consistent drive to meet their individual needs and nurture their talents. Students on both campuses make outstanding progress. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very effectively supported and make excellent progress in their learning. Attainment is above the national average on Ashton campus. On the Ribbleton campus, attainment, although below average, has improved dramatically in the year since the schools combined due to sensitive leadership, high quality teaching and an enhanced curriculum.

Attainment is high in science and the school's specialist status as a science college underpins much of its innovative work with regard to curriculum design. Attendance is above average and behaviour is good, characterised by respectful relationships, good humour and the willingness of many students to take on responsibilities in their school community. Students' questionnaire returns and discussions confirm that bullying and racist incidents are extremely rare.

Teaching is mostly good and an increasing amount is outstanding. A minority of lessons are satisfactory. Teachers are passionate about their work and continually strive to use approaches and resources which will engage students. Assessment is sensitively integrated into lessons so that students are clear about the standard of their work and how they should go about improving it. The quality of care, guidance and support provided for students is outstanding because the school is proactive in determining how it can best meet the needs of every individual. An outstanding curriculum has been developed to ensure that all students have opportunities to achieve relevant qualifications and pursue their particular interests. Extra-curricular provision is exemplary. The school's promotion of community cohesion is outstanding, manifested in the positive relationships between students and staff on the two campuses and also in the many creative activities undertaken by the school following its thorough analysis of its own context.

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The school's small sixth form is satisfactory in terms of its provision and outcomes. It opened in September 2010 and its curriculum is currently restricted to courses leading to level 2 qualifications in hairdressing and beauty therapy. The school has well-thought-out and ambitious plans for the future development of the sixth form in order to ensure that it can better meet the needs of a more diverse group of students.

The success of the school is underpinned by the strong moral purpose and driving ambition for excellence shared by governors, leaders and staff. The school has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement supported by insightful staff development opportunities and highly effective management systems. The school deploys its resources imaginatively and has mutually beneficial relationships with wide-ranging partners. It provides excellent value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that teaching improves still further by sharing best practice between teachers.
- Develop provision in the sixth form to better meet students' needs and aspirations by:
 - collaborating with other schools, colleges and businesses to extend the curriculum offer
 - ensuring that all lessons are made relevant to students
 - better supporting students in choosing pathways to help them to realise their aspirations.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students are highly motivated to succeed and enjoy their learning across the range of subjects. They show perseverance when faced with challenging tasks and are extremely supportive of each other when they work in groups. Their very positive attitudes to learning help them to make exceptional progress from starting points which are generally below average. Support is extremely well matched to the needs of students whose circumstances have made them vulnerable and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, enabling these groups to make outstanding progress.

Students' attainment in examinations has improved significantly in the last three years. On the Ashton campus the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE qualifications at A* to C grades is above average, as is the proportion whose qualifications include A* to C grades in English and mathematics. Their attainment in science is now well above average. Students who took their GCSE examinations on the Ribbleson campus in 2010 had been part of Ashton Community Science College for one year. They attained GCSE results which, although below national average, indicated substantial improvement on the results typically obtained by the school prior to its incorporation by Ashton. School data and lesson observations confirm that students make good and often outstanding progress to attain high standards across the whole school.

Students behave well and show maturity in their attitudes to work. They are courteous and good-humoured, arriving punctually to lessons and showing good levels of concentration, which only diminish in the very few satisfactory lessons where pace slows.

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The number of fixed-term exclusions has reduced dramatically over three years because students experiencing difficulties are identified early and supported and monitored extremely effectively.

Many students make an outstanding contribution to the leadership of their school by taking on roles including sports leaders, peer mentors, ambassadors and form captains. Some attend governing body meetings and have influenced decision making directly. Other students lead activities as part of the school's vibrant and extremely well-attended extra-curricular programme. Students have created a sensory garden to stimulate the memories of residents at a local old people's home and have contributed to the wider community by, for example, organising a 'sponsored hush' to raise a substantial amount of money for earthquake victims in Haiti. Students engage in a wide range of sporting activities and many lead healthy lifestyles. They agree that the school keeps them safe and are comfortable that, as one student stated, 'Everyone has someone to turn to if they are worried.' Their moral and social development is particularly good, as evidenced by their ethical awareness. Cultural development is promoted strongly through performing arts subjects which are vigorously enjoyed. Students are well equipped with workplace skills, through first-hand experience of working environments, often linked to science college specialism, and through their acquisition of basic skills and cooperative attitudes. Almost all students progress into further education, employment or training on leaving the school.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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How effective is the provision?

The vast majority of teaching is good, and an ever increasing amount is outstanding. There remains, however, a small proportion which is satisfactory. Strong leadership of teaching has resulted in consistent approaches to planning and assessment based on a firmly held belief that students should enjoy challenge and develop self-esteem as learners. Students show confidence and resilience, exemplified in two outstanding performing arts lessons where they performed individual pieces unselfconsciously as actors and musicians and gave insightful developmental feedback on each other's work. In lessons judged to be satisfactory tasks were not as well matched to students' needs. Assessment is used very effectively at whole-school level to monitor students' performance and ensure that anyone who needs help receives it. Teachers willingly and regularly provide additional guidance outside lessons. Support assistants make a valuable contribution by helping more vulnerable students to become independent learners.

The curriculum is well designed and constantly evolving to take account of students' needs. Personal learning and thinking skills are embedded in the curriculum and equip students to be collaborative, reflective and flexible. They have a wide range of options at Key Stage 4, including opportunities developed through partnerships. There is a strong and appropriate focus on equipping students with basic skills. The school's science specialism has had a major impact on curriculum development by widening opportunities for work-related learning and forging links with partners to raise students' aspirations. The school's extra-curricular programme encompasses a wide range of activities, in response to students' requests. It undoubtedly makes a major contribution to students' holistic learning. As one member of staff commented, 'Ashton gives everyone opportunities and enables them to thrive.' Care, guidance and support are excellent. Students appreciate the highly personalised pastoral and academic support they receive from staff. Multi-agency support is sensitively coordinated for all students who need it.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The Principal, senior leadership team and governors drive a powerful vision for the school, focused on removing barriers, enriching learning and enhancing life chances for all students. Strategic thinking is complemented by effective planning, systematic monitoring and critical evaluation of all aspects of the school's work. Leaders have been conspicuously successful in integrating students and staff from two very different campuses to create one harmonious school, while simultaneously driving up standards. The governing body provides an appropriate balance of challenge and support, taking brave, forward-thinking

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decisions and loyally advocating the school's work. Leaders have developed multiple highly effective partnerships to enhance the quality of education and care for students. Collaboration is at the core of many projects, within and beyond school. Science specialism has a major impact on developing innovative practice at the school itself and in partner schools. Safeguarding procedures are good and rigorously monitored. The school has effective channels for communications with parents, listening to and acting upon their comments, for example with regard to curriculum design. There are numerous family learning opportunities available which are well subscribed. Leaders are fully aware of the school's context and have planned, delivered and evaluated a range of programmes to ensure that it is the vibrant hub of a cohesive community. Leaders promote equal opportunities in all that they do and tackle discrimination of any sort; consequently, students of different abilities and backgrounds on both campuses are making even and exceptional progress.

The school has set and achieved challenging targets and continues to set itself ambitious goals. Succession planning has been ensured through an intelligent process of devolved leadership and professional development. Morale of staff and students is tangibly high. The school has outstanding capacity for sustained improvement.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

The sixth form opened in September 2010 and currently accommodates a small number of students who are studying courses leading to accreditation in hairdressing and beauty therapy. Students are making satisfactory progress in relation to their starting points. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory and sometimes good, such as in mathematics lesson where the nature of the tasks students undertook had clear relevance to their own lives. On occasions teaching is less engaging resulting in a few students losing motivation.

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The school is aware that the curriculum offered by its sixth form is currently limited; however, it has ambitious plans for developing this area of its work further, in collaboration with other local providers.

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 vast majority of parents who returned questionnaires say that they are happy with their children's experience at the school. They are pleased with the quality of teaching and care that their children receive and feel that the school is well led. One parent commented, 'The school is wonderful. My child is very happy and settled. I am also very impressed with all the extra-curricular opportunities. The staff are open and approachable.' Inspection findings uphold their views. A very small minority feel that the school does not deal effectively with unacceptable behaviour. Inspectors took particular note of this view in observing behaviour in lessons, on corridors and in the grounds on both campuses. They found behaviour to be consistently good and its management to be effective.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashton Community Science College 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 85 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 916 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	41	46	54	2	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	42	49	42	49	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	32	38	44	52	7	8	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	30	35	50	59	2	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	32	38	50	59	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	26	55	65	7	8	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	26	55	65	7	8	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)	29	34	50	59	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	32	53	62	4	5	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	29	43	51	9	11	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	20	24	56	66	3	4	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	33	39	48	56	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	36	42	45	53	2	2	0	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 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	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 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. 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 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.



21 October 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashton Community Science College, Preston, PR2 1SL

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to my colleagues and me when we inspected your school recently. We were very impressed by your mature attitude to learning and the range of responsibilities many of you willingly take on in school. We were pleased that so many of you enjoy learning, both during the school day and in the many extra-curricular activities you attend, and sometimes lead. Thank you to those of you who gave up time to speak to us and those who completed the questionnaire. We agree with you that your leaders and teachers really do go 'the extra mile' to support you and we think that you play your part through your good behaviour, high levels of attendance and positive attitudes.

The inspection team consider Ashton Community Science College to be outstanding. It provides you with an exceptionally high standard of education and you make excellent progress. We know that you are rightly proud to be part of this school.

We identified two points for improvement. First, we have asked the school to increase still further the amount of very good and outstanding teaching. You can help with this by letting your teachers know the sorts of activity that really help you to think and learn best. Also, we have asked the school to develop the new sixth form further, in partnership with other schools, colleges and businesses in the area.

Please continue to support your school as strongly as you do. On behalf of the inspectors, I would like to wish you every success in the future.

Congratulations!

Yours sincerely

Shirley Gornall

Her Majesty's Inspector

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