

Ashton-on-Mersey School

Cecil Avenue, Sale, Cheshire, M33 5BP

Inspection dates 24–25 April 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Students achieve outstandingly well.
- Attainment is well above average.
- Given their starting points, nearly all students make the progress expected of them and the proportion of students that make better progress than this is now high in comparison to most schools across the country.
- Students who are disabled or with a statement of special educational needs also achieve outstandingly well.
- The quality of teaching has improved significantly in recent years. It is now never less than good and the majority of teaching in most subjects is outstanding.
- The quality of marking is somewhat inconsistent in providing students with clear guidance on how to improve their work and opportunities to reflect on and respond to their teachers' written comments.
- Students are intensely proud of their school. They feel very safe in school.
- Students' behaviour towards one another and the adults working with them is impeccable. They are unfailingly polite and well-mannered.
- Students have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning and are always keen to do their best. Attendance is well above average.
- Leaders and managers, including an outstanding governing body, know exactly how well the school is doing and where it could do even better. They have created a community that has learning at its heart. The drive to improve the quality of teaching is successful and relentless.
- There is an unrelenting and highly successful drive for improvement to take the school 'beyond outstanding'.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Courses are tailored to meet the needs of students. Students achieve outstandingly well and thoroughly enjoy their time in the sixth form.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 48 lessons across the main school and the sixth form. Joint observations were carried out in four lessons with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, a group of teachers and teaching support assistants, students from the main school and the sixth form, representatives from the governing body and the Chief Executive of the Academy Trust.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation including: data relating to students' achievement; records of the monitoring of teaching; policies and procedures relating to behaviour and safety; the school's self-evaluation summary; the school development plan and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors took account of 111 parental responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) as well as summaries of parental and students' views carried out by the school. They also took account of questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Stephen Wall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Kathleen Harris	Additional Inspector
Bimla Kumari	Additional Inspector
Mary Liptrot	Additional Inspector
Stephen Rowland	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashton on Mersey converted to become an academy on 1 May 2012. When its predecessor school, Ashton on Mersey School, was last inspected by Ofsted it was judged to be outstanding with a good sixth form.
- Ashton on Mersey is much larger than most secondary schools across the country. It is led and managed by an Executive Principal. A Chief Executive Principal has overall leadership and management responsibility for Ashton on Mersey and two other academies in the Dean Trust.
- The proportion of boys in comparison to girls is much higher than average.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children that are looked after.
- The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is below average. Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of students supported through school action is broadly average. However, the proportion of students supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is above average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards that set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- The academy works very closely with a range of other schools, especially with Broadoak Academy. This involves some students attending jointly run courses at both establishments.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement even further by improving the overall quality of marking to provide students with sharper guidance on how to improve their work and more opportunities for them to reflect and act on the advice given by their teachers.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Students join the school with attainment that is broadly average.
- Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 in 2012 was significantly above average. The proportion of students attaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A* to C was above average but below the school's target because attainment in English was lower than predicted. In previous years, the school's targets for English had been extremely accurate.
- School data, confirmed securely by inspection evidence, show that attainment in 2013 at the end of Key Stage 4, is set to be well above average.
- Nearly all students make the progress expected of them. The proportion of students making better than expected progress has improved significantly and is now high in comparison to national figures.
- Standards in literacy and numeracy are well above average. They are promoted very effectively in English and mathematics lessons and in other subjects across the curriculum. Most students read widely, are exceptionally articulate and write with a maturity that often belies their age.
- Students who are disabled or with a statement of special educational needs also make outstanding progress from their individual starting points because of the excellent support they receive.
- In 2012, students known to be eligible for free school meals achieved very well. They attained on average approximately half a GCSE grade lower in English and mathematics than other students in the school. Their attainment was above that of similar students across the country. The gap has closed rapidly in recent years. School data and inspection evidence show that the gap is continuing to close, demonstrating the school's commitment to and success in promoting equality of opportunity.
- Year 7 catch-up funding is used very effectively to support students whose reading skills are weak when they join the school. School data show a rapid rise in reading ages for the targeted students.
- In 2012, boys' attainment was above the national average but about half a grade lower on average than that of girls in the academy. Academy data, again confirmed by inspection evidence, show that the gap is closing rapidly.
- The school has an exceptionally coherent and well-thought-out policy for early entry to GCSE in a number of subjects. Evidence shows that this has no detrimental effect on attainment.
- Students achieve outstandingly well in the sixth form because of the excellence of the teaching they receive.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is never less than good and much is outstanding. Teaching was outstanding in over half of the lessons observed during the inspection. Some was of such simply stunning quality that it enabled students to make hugely impressive gains in their learning and progress.
- Teaching inspires students to want to learn and is responsible for their outstanding achievement over time.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and prepare their lessons exceptionally well.
- Students enjoy learning because teaching makes learning interesting and rewarding. Lessons move along at a fast pace and teachers plan activities that are pitched at the right level of difficulty to meet students' abilities and needs.
- Students enjoy the opportunities that they are given to find things out for themselves. They work very effectively in pairs and in groups where they enjoy contributing their own ideas and listening respectfully to the views of others. In one Key Stage 4 geography lesson, for example, students were skilfully guided by their teacher in a debate about the advantages and

disadvantages of a project to build dams in China. Students showed an excellent grasp of the concepts involved and showed levels of skills in putting forward their ideas that would not have been out of place in a university seminar. The teacher was able to take a back seat, only gently prodding the students in the right direction when necessary.

- The teaching of English and mathematics is outstanding. It results in students who make excellent progress. By the time they leave the school, nearly all students have strong and secure skills in literacy and numeracy that equip them outstandingly well for future study, training or employment.
- Teaching in the sixth form is highly successful in developing students' skills as independent learners. Students say that they feel challenged to give of their best regardless of the subjects or courses that they are following. In one vocational lesson in Year 12 for example, students showed exceptional skills in planning their work and evaluating how well they had done against the targets they had set themselves. By the end of the lesson, each student was intensely proud of what they had achieved and had a crystal clear view of the next steps they needed to take to be even more successful.
- Teaching assistants give very effective support, especially to students who are disabled or with a statement of special educational needs.
- Teachers mark students' work regularly. However, the quality of their comments is inconsistent in showing clearly what students need to do to improve their work further and too few opportunities are given to students to reflect on and follow up teachers' suggestions.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students behave with deep respect for each other and the adults working with them. They are exceptionally well-mannered and courteous. Students manage their own behaviour outstandingly well and this leads to a relaxed and very orderly atmosphere in classrooms and around the school.
- Students approach their lessons with high levels of enthusiasm and extremely positive attitudes. They work very hard and with great enthusiasm. Staff manage behaviour in classrooms exceptionally well. The high quality of their teaching gives students little opportunity or incentive to misbehave.
- Students are exceptionally proud of their school. They enjoy and appreciate all it has to offer. Attendance is consistently above average.
- Pupils say that they feel very safe in school. They talk knowledgeably about potentially dangerous situations and how to avoid or deal with them. They are fully aware of the dangers posed by using the internet inappropriately.
- Students say that bullying of any kind is very rare and that, on the few occasions it happens, it is dealt with very effectively.
- The safety, attendance and progress of students who attend courses off-site are checked on meticulously.
- The vast majority of parents are very happy with behaviour in the school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Senior leaders and managers set the tone of high aspirations and expectations throughout the school. Other leaders and managers are tireless in making sure that the high aims and ambitions are translated into reality successfully.
- At the root of all the school does is a razor sharp focus on improving the quality of teaching and students' achievement. Significantly, the programme of monitoring the quality of teaching has been replaced by a programme for improving the quality of teaching, to make sure that the academy continues to go from strength to strength.

- Staff understand fully that improving their own classroom practice and boosting students' progress towards challenging targets are central to the management of their performance and to their progress up the salary scale.
- The outstanding curriculum in the main school and the sixth form provides a wide range of courses and qualifications to meet students' needs and aspirations. Shared courses with Broadoak Academy add extra dimensions to the range of courses that otherwise could not be offered. An extensive range of enrichment activities in sport and the arts add significantly to students' positive attitudes to school, their outstanding personal development and to the excellence of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The outstanding achievement of all groups of students demonstrates the academy's strong and successful commitment to providing equality of opportunity.
- Parents are strongly supportive of the school. Every one of the parents who recorded their views on Parent View would recommend the school to prospective parents.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding are fully in place and give no cause for concern.
- The academy sponsor provides light touch support for this outstanding academy.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The outstanding governing body keeps its finger on the pulse of the school at all times. It uses information about the school's performance astutely to benchmark accurately its effectiveness against other schools and academies. The governing body holds the academy rigorously to account and does not allow any hint of complacency to creep in. It knows the quality of teaching and fully supports strategies to improve it further. It has a firm grasp on the academy's finances and is clear about the use of performance management and salary progression to hold staff to account. The governing body keeps itself fully trained and up-to-date.

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	138123
Local authority	Trafford
Inspection number	413312

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1456
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	165
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Brian Rigby M.B.E
Teacher in charge	Victoria Beer
Date of previous school inspection	2 December 2008
Telephone number	0161 9731179
Fax number	0161 9695013
Email address	office@aom.trafford.sch.uk

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