

Ashcroft Technology Academy

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	135316
Local Authority	Wandsworth
Inspection number	345495
Inspection dates	3–4 February 2010
Reporting inspector	Peter Gale HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	
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	1117
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	160
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dr Richard Whittcutt
Principal	Mr Marcus C J Barker
Date of previous school inspection	
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors spent the majority of their time looking at learning, and saw 35 different teachers delivering as many lessons. Inspectors met with groups of students, parents and carers, governors, and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at the academy's self-evaluation and planning documents, risk assessments, policy documents, staff questionnaires, students' books, 150 student questionnaires and 123 parental questionnaires.

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

- the progress of all groups of students in the academy towards their targets
- the impact of the academy's care, guidance and support on Every Child Matters outcomes in the academy for all groups of students, including those whose circumstances have made them the most vulnerable
- the quality of assessment practice across the academy
- the capacity of the academy leadership to bring about further improvement
- the work of the academy's sixth form.

Information about the school

Ashcroft Technology Academy's specialism is information, communication and design technology. Around 40% of students are from a White British background and the remainder come from a variety of minority ethnic groups. Around one in four of the students speak English as a second language but few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals is well above average and increasing. Fewer than average have special educational needs and/or disabilities, although the percentage of students with a statement of special educational needs is near the national average. A new performing arts and special needs centre, including the specialist autistic resource centre, opened in 2009 and the new sixth form centre will be open for autumn term 2010.

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

2

Main findings

Ashcroft Technology Academy provides its students with an outstanding education. The academy is firmly focused on getting the best from every individual and has developed an excellent curriculum that is constantly evolving to provide the best individual pathway for each student. Extra-curricular activities are numerous and parents and carers and students alike were keen to share their appreciation of the opportunities available.

All groups of learners make good progress, from slightly above average starting points, which accelerates as they enter Key Stage 4. Those with special educational needs and/or disabilities consistently make outstanding progress due to the excellent individual support they receive. The academy is passionate about each student gaining the very best qualifications, and it tracks their progress assiduously through Key Stage 4. It intervenes, where necessary, to ensure they reach high standards in GCSE examinations. Teaching is good, with several examples of excellent lessons observed during the inspection. However, not all teachers use the assessment data they hold on their classes to plan for the full range of learners. This means that activities in lessons are sometimes too hard or too easy, and progress slows for groups of learners. In many classes, students are provided with very good written feedback on their work and act on it enthusiastically to accelerate their progress. However, this remains inconsistent across the academy.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. The Autistic Resource Centre (ARC) provides high quality support to students, enabling them to develop independence, achieve, mix well and make friends across the academy. Sensitive knowledge of individual circumstances allows academy staff to ensure all students are helped to develop into confident young people who feel very safe and gain excellent skills for their future. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding.

Behaviour is good in the academy. For most of the older students it is excellent, demonstrating their increased maturity and the benefits of exposure to the academy's rigorous discipline systems over time. Students have very good opportunities to contribute to the school community but opportunities in the wider community are more limited. The academy has plans to analyse its place in the local community and contribution to it and recognises this as an opportunity to boost collaboration and engagement for the benefit of students.

The principal and his senior team have a clear understanding of the academy's

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strengths and areas for development that is grounded in a rigorous analysis of its work. They know, for example, that outcomes in the sixth form, while improving rapidly, remain below their aspirations. Departmental development plans are ambitious and very well integrated into the academy plan. From these is derived a shared aim to make Ashcroft the best academy it can be. The academy's progress in developing good teaching and learning and outstanding outcomes since opening demonstrates good capacity to further improve.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Leaders and managers at all levels should deliver a higher proportion of outstanding teaching and learning, particularly in KS3, by ensuring:
 - effective sharing of the excellent practice in planning and delivery of outstanding lessons that exists in the academy
 - that teachers consistently use assessment data to plan for the full range of learners in their classes
 - consistent high quality written feedback is available to students across the curriculum.
- Complete the planned analysis of the context of the academy in its community and use this information to plan effective collaboration and engagement between the academy, its community and other schools.
- Build on recent improvements in provision and student outcomes in the sixth form to move it from good to outstanding.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

In a large majority of lessons observed by inspectors, students' respectful behaviour enhanced enjoyment of and engagement with learning. This was especially true of students in Key Stage 4. In a few Key Stage 3 lessons, a small number of students exhibited off-task behaviour that slowed their own progress and occasionally that of others. Nonetheless, students' achievement is outstanding overall, with good progress leading to high attainment at GCSE. Any potential underachievement is identified quickly and effectively tackled by careful tracking and intervention. Students' relationships with teaching staff are mostly excellent and an atmosphere of trust allows them to respond positively to challenges set. Effective specialist support ensures that students with identified special educational needs and/or disabilities make outstanding progress.

Attendance and punctuality have been a focus for the academy and have both improved significantly. Attendance is now above the national average. Students gain excellent skills for their life beyond the academy as a result of high standards in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), good careers guidance and excellent work-related programmes. Students adopt very safe ways of working in practical subjects and inspectors agree with the views expressed by almost all parents and carers, who consider that the academy keeps their child

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safe.

The wide range of extra-curricular activities gives all students significant opportunities to contribute to the academy. Many students, through sport and the performing arts, accept these. Opportunities to work with the wider community are more limited but extensive charity fundraising fosters social and moral awareness. Students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds get on well in a harmonious, well ordered environment.

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	1
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of most lessons is good. Common features of most lessons are good subject knowledge, high expectations of students and a good awareness of their ability. Good relationships mean most students rise to these expectations. Teachers structure their lessons well and generally maintain a good pace. They generally ask well targeted questions, based on ability, that make students think hard, check their progress and ensure consistent engagement in lessons. In outstanding lessons, teachers carefully plan for the range of abilities in their class so that students' learning is accelerated. However, in some satisfactory lessons the same task was set for the whole group which meant it was too hard or too easy for some. In these lessons, assessment is not used well enough to plan suitably demanding work for everyone and progress slows for some groups of learners. Marking is of variable quality. Excellent examples involved students acting on suggestions for improvement and demonstrating a positive impact on learning. However, this is not consistent

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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practice across the academy.

The broad Key Stage 4 curriculum meets students' needs very well. It offers a wide choice of academic subjects and an excellent and increasing range of curriculum pathways based on individual need. The academy is working hard to personalise learning. Accelerated routes are available for higher attainers, including early GCSEs and A levels in the main academy. The Key Stage 3 curriculum has been reduced to two years to allow for this greater flexibility. The academy's design and technology specialism has driven a business-oriented approach to technology. It has also broadened the range of vocational BTEC qualifications, to include engineering, and bolstered ICT in the curriculum. Extensive enrichment opportunities are much enjoyed by students.

A group of vulnerable students, including students who are looked after, spoke highly of the very good relationships they enjoy with their teachers and the exceptionally caring ethos within the academy. Students say that staff, including learning mentors, ensure there are opportunities for them to catch up if they fall behind or miss work. A multi-agency approach to supporting identified students is very well planned and effective. Transitions are carefully planned and appreciated by students and their parents and carers. Effective liaison with partner organisations supports this work. Students feel they have the right information and time for reflection when choosing options in Key Stage 4 or going on to further education or training. Parents and carers of students attending ARC were fulsome in their praise of the positive impact it was having on their children.

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?

An inspirational principal leading a dynamic senior leadership team has developed a culture of continuous improvement focused on raising academic achievement. Leaders and staff at all levels are very clear about the priorities for improvement and there is a palpable and highly effective drive to improve all aspects of the academy. An appropriate focus on improving teaching has established good learning and a firm foundation for further academy improvement. Exceedingly challenging targets are set at an institutional, departmental and individual student level. The fact that the academy is consistently meeting and in some cases exceeding these targets has led to staff morale being high. Most aspects of the academy's work have developed rapidly through effective self-evaluation systems. A dedicated team of middle leaders

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say they are well supported in weekly link meetings with senior leaders and there are many opportunities for their own professional development.

Governors are very strategic and challenge the principal and senior team very well. Due to the way governance is structured, the quality and nature of their work is yet to be fully appreciated by some staff and parents and carers. Procedures for ensuring the health, safety and well-being of school members and visitors are extremely rigorous but some policies require updating. The academy has plans to develop community cohesion by undertaking a careful analysis of its context in the local community. The principal recognises this as an opportunity to boost collaboration and engagement, although the school community is very cohesive. Equality and diversity are very highly valued at Ashcroft as demonstrated by the quality of care and support shown to students from a variety of backgrounds and/or needs. The academy works closely with parents and carers and other partners to support its students' well-being and learning. The effectiveness of this work can be seen in the positive feedback from parental questionnaires and improving outcomes.

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	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
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	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

Students in the last two years have entered the sixth form with below average attainment and made satisfactory progress to achieve standards that were below national averages. Improvements in provision have resulted in current students making good progress towards challenging targets. Academic outcomes, in the form of module test results, have improved and students are on track to achieve the best A level results that the academy has had. Curriculum choice is broad for the size of sixth form and students appreciate the options open to them. This does mean group

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size can be small, which limits discussion based approaches to learning for some subjects. However, teaching and learning have improved and are now good. Students are very positive about the care, guidance and support they receive. This results in almost all students who begin Year 13 completing the year and having a good record of gaining places at university or going into employment. Lower entry requirements for the sixth form in the past meant that a number of students found the volume of study difficult and did not progress from Year 12 into Year 13, but recent changes have rectified this. Leadership of the sixth form demonstrates a clear ambition and careful planning to grow this aspect of the academy’s work. Careful work with teaching departments has resulted in improving outcomes. Changes to entry requirements, the opening of the new sixth form block with specialist accommodation and continuous review of the curriculum are underway to further raise standards.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers are very happy with the academy. They generally agree with all statements on the questionnaire. A few think that the academy does not help their child to have a healthy lifestyle, that their suggestions and concerns are not taken account of or that they are not helped to support their child’s learning effectively. Inspectors found that the academy provides many ways to encourage physical exercise, supports well the development of emotional and sexual health, and healthy lunch options are readily available. However, students do not always choose the healthy lifestyle they clearly understand. Parents and carers interviewed said that they could contribute their ideas and suggestions after parents’ evenings but otherwise opportunities were limited. Inspectors found the academy needs to collaborate and engage more fully with its community including parents.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashcroft Technology Academy 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 123 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1117 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	53	43	63	51	4	3	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	63	52	55	45	4	3	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	54	44	62	50	7	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	41	69	56	4	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	48	39	68	55	7	6	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	35	29	70	58	16	13	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	27	22	77	64	16	13	1	1
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)	47	41	62	54	6	5	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	38	31	74	61	10	8	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	52	43	55	46	9	8	4	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	23	20	72	62	20	17	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	46	38	67	55	5	4	3	2
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	59	48	54	44	7	6	2	2

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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

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.



5 February 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Ashcroft Technology Academy, London SW15 2UT

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your academy recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons and meeting with you. We were particularly impressed by the pride you take in your academy.

These are the main points we liked about your academy.

- Ashcroft provides you with an outstanding educational experience.
- The academy delivers an excellent and continually evolving curriculum with opportunities to experience a diverse range of extra-curricular activities.
- The care, guidance and support you receive are excellent and help you all develop as well-rounded individuals who value the relationships with teachers and each other. Promotion of equality and diversity is excellent.
- You gain very good qualifications because good teaching is coupled to excellent tracking of your progress and you get extra help when you need it.
- The principal and other senior leaders have the highest ambitions for your academy and demonstrate an outstanding drive to make it even better.

The inspection team and the principal agree that, although your academy is outstanding, it could be even better. We have asked the academy's leaders to ensure that:

- teachers always use the data they have on you to plan for different abilities in your lessons, and consistently provide quality written feedback on your work and ensure you act on it
- the academy works even more closely with its community to broaden the opportunities available to you to contribute
- the recent improvements in the sixth form are built upon to make it outstanding too.

You can do your part to help by ensuring that you always behave well in lessons, respect your fellow students and work hard. The team joins me in sending you best wishes for your studies and we hope that you all do very well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Peter Gale

Her Majesty's Inspector

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