

Acton High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	101932
Local Authority	Ealing
Inspection number	335811
Inspection dates	15–16 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Nasim Butt

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1162
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Guy Fiegehen
Headteacher	Ms Mandy Golding
Date of previous school inspection	5 September 2006
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 45 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of students. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's self-evaluation documentation, including 300 questionnaires completed by parents. The school's safeguarding procedures were also evaluated.

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

- The quality of provision and how effectively it leads to equally good outcomes and meets the needs of all students including vulnerable groups.
- How well the school is using assessment data to secure improvement for all groups of students.
- The rigour and depth of self-evaluation at all levels and the impact it is having on raising attainment, particularly in English in Key Stage 4.
- The impact of the school's media arts and applied learning specialisms on outcomes for students, their economic well-being and on community cohesion.

Information about the school

Acton High School is a slightly larger than average 11'16 mixed comprehensive. There are more boys than girls in the school. The school has specialist status for media arts and is also a full service extended school. It acquired High Performing Specialist School status (HPSS) in January 2009, taking on a second specialism of applied learning.

The students come from a diverse range of socio-economic and ethnic communities. The majority have a first language that is not English, and a small minority are at an early stage of learning to speak English. A very high proportion are eligible for free school meals, and the proportion with special educational needs is almost twice the national average. The proportion of students that join the school at times other than the usual starting points is the highest in the borough.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Acton High School provides a good standard of education. The care given to students is outstanding. The school promotes community cohesion effectively and this contributes to this being a harmonious and happy school.

The school faces exceptionally challenging circumstances due to very high levels of student mobility throughout the year; mobility is well above the national average. Over the years, this has had a significant impact on attainment. Attainment was low until 2008. Since then, attainment for Year 11 students has been rising significantly. GCSE results in 2009 were much higher than in the past, and for those students currently in Year 11 attainment is broadly average. This means that students have made good progress from their starting point. Achievement for students who have been at the school since Year 7 is good and this reflects broadly two thirds of all students. Students who join the school at unexpected times are well supported, so they also make good progress but do not always reach average levels of attainment, often due to interruptions in learning, emotional difficulties or because they sometimes arrive at the school with limited English.

The improved attainment and consistently good progress links directly to good leadership and good learning opportunities. Most teaching is good, and there are examples of outstanding teaching, although some teachers have been correctly targeted for additional support in leaders' drive to bring their skills up from satisfactory to good. Leaders are still working on this with good practice being shared, especially by the school's small team of advanced skills teachers. In a very few lessons, there is a lack of pace and students make slower progress.

Most teachers use assessment data well to help them to plan lessons for pupils' wide-ranging needs, although in some cases planning does not take sufficient account of the needs of learners who are at the early stages of learning to speak English. Although the progress they make is usually satisfactory, leaders recognise that even more could be done to engage them further and deepen their learning. Overall, most students are given clear guidance about what they need to do in order to improve.

Pupils said such things as, 'The school is perfect.' A strong caring ethos envelops the school community so that students feel safe and are able to take the appropriate risks necessary to become more independent learners. Students are polite and courteous and demonstrate good attitudes to learning.

The Building Learning Power (BLP) programme, which is part of the school's applied learning specialism, is having a considerable impact on developing students' social skills and ability to learn effectively. As a result of considerable changes to the curriculum,

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especially in Key Stage 4, students are now more motivated because courses match their interests and needs. The media arts programme enhances students' personal development well.

The school is well led. The headteacher and her senior team provide clear direction. Their school improvement planning is based on thorough analysis of strengths and weaknesses identified through rigorous monitoring of the school's work. Inspectors agree with the school's own analysis that literacy skills need to be further embedded across all areas of the curriculum in order to raise standards further in English. Recent improvements in provision, in particular those linked with the school's specialism, demonstrate that the school is well on the way to meet challenging targets this year. This, supported by the school's track record of lifting attainment, indicates that the school has good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further raise attainment, especially in English, by ensuring teachers of all subjects are equipped with the skills necessary to improve students' literacy skills within a wide variety of activities and subjects.
- Work with teachers to make sure that all teaching, learning and the use of assessment information are at least consistently good.
- Make sure that all lessons are suitably planned for pupils who are new to learning to speak English so that they are engaged fully in lessons and rapidly deepen their learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students enter the school with well below average skills and knowledge. They make good progress and there is a trend of improvement in standards, which is firmly established through the school. The improvement in standards by the end of Year 11 has been further aided by the provision of extra resources and specifically focused support groups. The samples of work and lessons seen confirm that students are on target to achieve in line with national averages. Students apply themselves well to learning. For example, a group of Year 11 science students studying the concept of momentum, asked several thoughtful questions of the teacher and deepened their understanding as a result.

Progress in mathematics is sometimes better than it is in English because the low literacy level of some students is holding them back from moving on faster. In this respect, some teachers miss the opportunity to link students' learning in different subjects with the promotion of their English skills.

In the subjects linked to the school's specialism of media arts, the results in 2009 were good, with nearly all Year 11 students sitting at least one of these subjects at GCSE. Any underachieving students are identified early and provided with focused support to help them to catch up. A programme of mentoring for more-able students has increased the proportion of A and A* grades. Students with special educational needs and/or

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disabilities, children in care and those from minority ethnic backgrounds made progress in line with their peers. However, the progress of pupils who are new to learning English as an additional language is more inconsistent. Overall, there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

Inspectors found students positive, friendly and keen to talk about what they were doing. The atmosphere in the school was calm and purposeful. Students look after the school building and show respect. They enjoy school and most join in enthusiastically with the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided. They are aware of the importance of a healthy lifestyle with a high proportion involved in an impressive range of sporting and physical activities. As a result of the good systems, attendance has improved over the last year and is now above average. The media arts and applied learning specialism, in Key Stage 4, enable students to develop useful workplace skills for their future economic well-being. However, literacy skills are not sufficiently well developed among all groups of learners and this holds them back from achieving better outcomes. The Building Learning Power (BLP) programme is well embedded in the life of the school, as a result of which students demonstrate strong skills of collaboration and teamwork.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
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	2
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	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
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?

Teachers have good subject knowledge and most demonstrate high expectations of their students. Lessons are effectively planned so that they usually meet students' differing needs. However, some teachers miss the chance to help pupils to make rapid progress in learning to speak and write in English. Students learn and behave well when they are engaged fully because teaching is energetic and enthusiastic and a wide range of activities is provided. Good use of questioning and opportunities for independent learning further contribute to students' good progress. For example, in a media studies lesson, good opportunities for collaborative learning were created, resulting in high levels of student motivation. In most lessons seen, teachers were making good use of assessment data and students knew what level they were working at and what they needed to do in order to improve, although this was not fully consistent in all lessons.

The well-established links with local organisations have contributed to the improvement in outcomes at GCSE level, as students are given practical experiences, which help them with their qualifications. Students in Year 7 who are working below age-related expectations are taught a very personalised curriculum, delivered mainly by one teacher to ease their transition into high school. The vast majority of Year 11 students have been entered for GCSE mathematics and English early to raise motivation and consolidate learning. The specialism in media arts and applied learning has resulted in the introduction of more vocational courses, for example AS photography, which is a popular and successful subject. The very good range of extended and out of school hours provision is popular with students and valued by all. Cross-curricular provision for literacy is not as well developed as it might be.

A strong team of well-trained teaching assistants provide very good in-class support for vulnerable students. Very effective transition arrangements ensure that students, who join Year 7 or other year groups, settle into their new school quickly and smoothly. Year team leaders and pastoral support assistants work very well together to review cases and target support. Weekly inclusion meetings and monthly multi-agency meetings ensure 'individuals at risk' and vulnerable pupils are swiftly identified and supported. Students have a high level of confidence in the school's ability to advise and support them.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

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How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well. Their vision to improve achievement for all students is shared by staff, and they are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for students. They are currently working to ensure that students who are new to learning to speak English do as well as others. They keep a very close eye on the progress of more-mobile students. Advanced skills teachers have a positive impact on improving teaching and assessment skills as a result of the good coaching and modelling of lessons. Self-evaluation is very thorough, involving leaders at all levels, and feeds into effective planning for improvement, particularly for the school's specialism, where leadership and management have been very good. Senior leaders maintain a good balance between providing direction and giving autonomy to middle leaders. Leaders at all levels feel very accountable for students' achievement within their departments. Systems for target setting, to raise academic achievement, are increasingly challenging, with stronger use of data and greater emphasis on higher expectations for all students. Although the quality of teaching is improving, leaders do not carry out a thorough analysis of the impact of teaching on the learning and progress of students at the early stages of learning to speak English as an additional language.

Governors provide good commitment and challenge to the school. They use expertise to assist in supporting community links, especially through media arts and applied learning specialist status. They are currently working on a project to develop a new sixth form. The school meets all the statutory requirements for safeguarding and the systems in place are coherent and effective.

Leaders have strong links with parents and carers. The school's 'fully extended status' is used well to help parents to develop their information and communication technology skills. Within the local area and through its international link with an Indian school, the school promotes community cohesion well. The strong partnerships with feeder primary schools and the Acton Community Forum and Arts Forum are having a good impact on students' well-being, attendance and achievement. The school is very successful in integrating a broad range of ethnic groups and encouraging them to work together. As a result, students willingly take on many responsibilities in the local community which help pupils to develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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

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The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Views of parents and carers

Just over 25% of parents returned questionnaires to the school. The large majority of parents are happy with their children's experiences and progress at the school and believe that the school keeps students safe. A similar proportion are happy with the school's leadership and the way in which they are informed about their children's progress. The large majority of parents also say that teaching at the school is good, and that their child is well prepared for the future. A minority of parents expressed concerns about the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Acton High School 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 300 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1162 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	145	48	147	49	5	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	124	41	160	53	9	3	4	1
The school informs me about my child's progress	129	43	153	51	12	4	2	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	109	36	157	52	25	8	3	1
The teaching is good at this school	111	37	169	56	12	4	2	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	96	32	177	59	17	6	3	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	84	28	169	56	38	12	3	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)	109	36	156	52	14	4	5	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	93	31	169	56	21	7	4	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	97	32	167	55	20	6	8	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	69	23	184	61	25	8	3	1
The school is led and managed effectively	98	33	168	56	21	7	5	2
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	137	46	140	47	12	4	5	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 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 pupil's 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.



18 October 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Acton High School, Ealing W3 8EY

After our visit to Acton High, I would like to share our findings with you and thank you for your friendly welcome and for taking time to talk to us.

Acton High is a good school overall where you make good progress and standards are rising, so that they are close to average; so well done for working hard. Your school is very distinctive because of its media arts and applied learning specialist status. The school provides you with so many opportunities to prepare you for future life, and to make a very good contribution to your school and local community. We were very impressed with how well the diverse communities represented at your school are integrated and work together. The school takes excellent care of you through its system of tutors, year team leaders and pastoral support assistants. There are very good strategies in place to identify those who need extra help. You tell us that you feel very safe and that there is always someone to turn to when you need help. The school's leadership is good and works hard to make improvements, so you can achieve even better. There are now more vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and this increase in choice is making a difference to the progress you make and you are enjoying learning more.

We have asked the school to make the following improvements and we would like you to help them by continuing to work hard.

- Help even more of you to do as well as possible in your GCSEs, especially in English, by ensuring all teachers help you to use your literacy skills in a wide-ranging variety of activities and subjects.
- Work with teachers to make sure that all lessons are at least good.
- Help those of you who are new to learning to speak and write English by always having activities to do that help you to make fast progress, interest you and deepen your learning.

I wish you all every success for the future.

Yours faithfully

Nasim Butt

Lead inspector

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