

The Ashcombe School - Overview

Please visit our website: www.ashcombe.surrey.sch.uk for full information

Context

The Ashcombe School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils of all abilities between the ages of 11 and 18 which has recently formed a MAT (South East Surrey Schools Education Trust - SESSET) as a partnership with 2 other like-minded schools to retain the ethos of the school. Pupils come to us not only from the seven Dorking primary schools but also from state and independent schools in other localities, many travelling here by rail and bus each day. There are approximately 1390 pupils on roll (with around 260 in the Sixth Form). The school is highly sought-after, and we have seen very high levels of interest for September 2019.

Ethos

The school has a number of key features that flow through all aspects of the organisation. Key core values include

- A commitment to comprehensive education and inclusion where all can achieve given the appropriate support.
- A calm and caring school.
- A school based on mutually respectful and high quality teacher-pupil relationships (this is evident in both pupil and parent surveys)
- A focus on teaching and learning that provides various forums to support staff to continually develop their repertoire of skills
- A belief in a no-blame culture that emphasises the importance of collaboration and mutual support.
- A school that believes that education is far more than what simply goes on in the classroom.

Standards

The school's academic success is widely recognised. We continue to have a broad & balanced GCSE based curriculum for all pupils. Key features of the results include

- Grades 9-4 achieved by 70 – 80% (formerly A*-C) in each of English Language, English Literature, Maths, Core Science and Additional Science
- 9-9 (equiv to upper A*) in Science achieved by 12% of cohort
- Grade 9-7 (equiv to A*-A) was achieved by over 30% in Art, Computer Science, Geography, History, and Science
- 37% of students gained at least one "top" grade (9 or 8 or A*)
- All pupils gained at least one 9-1 (formerly A*-G) grade.
- Over 90% of pupils gained at least 1 grade 9-4
- A commitment to offering opportunities with high Ebacc entry levels (80% of cohort) and low entry requirements at 6th form

6th Form

The school's 6th form is one of the strongest features of The Ashcombe. We have an inclusive entry policy aimed at offering opportunities to all. Some of the key features and successes are

- High value added score across the subject range
- Exceptional performances with the higher ability students flourishing in a diverse range of subjects.
- Long tradition of “competitive courses” success at universities including Oxbridge
- Student-centred approach for pastoral care and careers support

Organisation

David Blow is Executive Head for The Ashcombe and SESSET, supporting all three schools. The daily running of the school is led by the two Joint Head of Schools (Chris Panting and Alison Reed), supported by two Deputy Heads and seven Assistant Heads who together form the Senior Team. There are approximately 70 full-time and 20 part-time teaching staff, with a strong team of support staff. The management structure includes a Curriculum Committee involving Heads of Department and a Pastoral Committee involving Heads of Year and Assistant Heads of Year.

Staff Development is a major focus of the School Development Plan. The school is committed to an effective Equal Opportunities policy in all aspects of school life. Recruitment and selection will be in accordance with the “Safer Recruitment” guidelines, and all appointed staff will have to produce enhanced DBS clearance. The school has been inspected by Ofsted six times, most recently in January 2019, and on each occasion received very pleasing reports. As a result, we became a High Performing Specialist School and a Leadership Partner School in 2009. It is an accredited ‘Investors in People’ (IIP) organisation. The school has a purpose-built day nursery on site for the children of staff and others, professionally staffed on a non-profit making basis. Conditions of Service for staff have been protected in process of forming the MAT.

Accommodation and Resources

Overall the school has very good accommodation which includes eleven Science laboratories, a Design and Technology suite of five workshops, a Study Centre with a mezzanine floor, a gymnasium and a large sports hall, tennis/netball courts and extensive playing fields and an Assembly Hall, fully equipped for dramatic and musical productions. The Bradley Arts Centre has 3 Art rooms, two large multimedia Performance Areas, 2 fully equipped Drama teaching rooms and 2 Music teaching rooms with excellent practice facilities. On becoming a Language College the school was able to equip two outstanding ICT rooms based on the application of ‘cutting-edge’ technology. There are 6 further specialist ICT rooms and 2 classrooms equipped with dual-purpose computer desks. ICT is used extensively by staff both in teaching and administration. We are currently building a new Supported Learning Centre to help some of our most vulnerable pupils. This will be finished for September 2019 and is an exciting development.

Language College, Dorking Schools Partnership and Leadership Partner School

We gained **Language College** Status in September 1998. The school’s approach has been one of “extra opportunities” and sharing. The Modern Language interactive digital videos on the website have gained the school an international reputation. There are regular free workshops on ICT in MFL. As part of the Language College work, the school is a member of a very active partnership group of all the schools in Dorking including the other secondary schools and special schools. This approach has continued since the withdrawal of funding in 2010.

This commitment to working with our local schools has been developed with creation of the **Dorking Schools Partnership**, which includes taking responsibility for the Pupil Support Services for the area. We are also part of the **South East Surrey Schools** group which links the secondary schools in the area to facilitate collaborative working in areas such as Alternative Learning Provision and Staff Development

Becoming a **Leadership Partner School** in 2009 provided funding to support leadership development both within the school and wider afield. Although the funding stopped in 2010, the school still has a strong outward-facing approach and offers help to many schools as well as

collaborating on aspects of Teaching and Learning. This spirit of cooperation and partnership working is fundamental to South East Surrey Schools Education Trust (**SESSET**), the MAT we formed with Therfield School and The Warwick School in January 2017. It is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 10479401. The registered address is The Ashcombe School, Ashcombe Road, Dorking Surrey, RH4 1LY

Extra-curricular activities

Beyond the curriculum, the School has earned an outstanding reputation for its dramatic and musical productions. Other key features include:

- An outstanding range of sports teams that are competitive on a local regional and national basis
- A flourishing Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme with over 250 students involved.
- A large number of visits and trips are organised, both in this country and abroad. These include China, Uganda, America, Germany, France and Romania
- An inspiring range of music and drama that peaks with the annual school production. There are many opportunities to participate in music and drama, including School Orchestra, Junior Orchestra, multiple singing groups and Key Stage 3 Drama Club.
- A commitment to pupils supporting others including charity fund raising and peer mentoring.

A phrase which resonates with us is "education is what you remember when you've forgotten what you were taught"

Location and further information

The school is situated on the north-east edge of Dorking. The location has some great advantages

- Excellent rail links both to London and beyond including Guildford, Horsham, Reigate and Redhill.
- Close proximity to some delightful Surrey countryside including Box Hill and Ranmore Common perfect for walking and mountain biking.
- Easy access to the South Coast.
- A diverse range of housing locations including South London, Horsham, Crawley, and Reigate/ Redhill. Some staff have even chosen to live as far away as Worthing and Brighton.

Summary of main points from the Ofsted Letter (January 2019) and the Ofsted Report (January 2015)

The 2019 Letter and the 2008, 2010 and 2015 Reports are available on the school website in About the School > [Ofsted reports](#) together with the Letters to Parents. The following extracts come from our accompanying 2019 Letter to Parents:

...Ofsted have reconfirmed our existing status from the 2015 full inspection as offering a good and well-rounded education. The inspection concludes that "*The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. The Ashcombe School's vision for pupils' social and academic success is evident throughout the school*". "*Parents are very positive about the quality of education provided to pupils*", and highlighted "*that the school has 'dedicated, enthusiastic, skilled staff'* "

The Ofsted team praised the atmosphere and ethos permeating the school: "*Pupils' attitudes towards learning are very positive. Pupils are attentive and responsive in equal measure in lessons. As a result, there is a very harmonious learning atmosphere*" and were clear that the

school is a safe place: *"Leaders, including governors, are vigilant about keeping pupils physically, socially and emotionally safe at the school... Pupils spoke very positively about how staff help to keep them safe."*

...this school has always followed a broad and balanced GCSE based curriculum irrespective of the short-term impact on league tables, and this approach was commended by the Inspectors: *"Leaders have a highly ethical approach to the curriculum placing pupils' needs and interests at the centre of its design." "Leaders have established a very effective GCSE examination focused curriculum that both challenges and enthuses pupils."*

The Report also praised the 6th Form *"...leaders have ensured that students in the sixth form continue to make strong progress and attain well. Leaders have devised a curriculum which places students at the very heart.....Students told inspectors how much they valued the opportunities offered by the sixth form."*

The following extracts come from the 2015 Letter to Parents:

The recently published DfE Performance Tables [Jan 2015] confirmed the academic strengths of the school across the ability range, and this is endorsed in the Ofsted Report. We are delighted that the Report also praises other facets of the school not found in the Tables such as the *"exceptional pastoral care"* and the wider curriculum. *"The school makes an impressive contribution to students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development."... "The strong moral purpose of the school assists students' moral development and they know clearly the difference between right and wrong."...."It provides many opportunities for students to take part in sporting, musical, artistic, charitable and voluntary activities." "...the school prepares students well for life in modern Britain".* The text of the report gives a strong positive flavour of what the school is like... The Ofsted team told us how close we were to being judged "outstanding".

The teaching in Maths and English was particularly commended, and taken as a whole the teaching over time and careful planning by staff was considered to lead to progress which is significantly above the national average across subjects. The Report refers to the excellent results achieved at A-level by those who have entered the school as "most-able" (Level 5 in KS2 English and Mathematics).

The Ofsted team praised the atmosphere and ethos permeating the school. *"One of the strategic intents is that the school 'is a safe, warm and welcoming place'. Inspectors found this to be so". "The school is quiet and calm even at breaks and lunchtimes. Students move around the buildings in an orderly manner. They are extremely polite and courteous to visitors. They greet each other and adults warmly."...."Each member of the community is valued and their well-being matters to everyone."*