

# The Appleton School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115334
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	338568
<b>Inspection dates</b>	23–24 June 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Stephen Abbott HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1197
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr David Parmenter
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Karen Kerridge
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 September 2006
<b>School address</b>	Croft Road Benfleet SS7 5RN
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's safeguarding and assessment records, its self-evaluation and school development plan, various policies and minutes of meetings. They observed parts of 44 lessons, each involving a different teacher and held meetings with students, parents, governors and staff. All parents and carers and a random sample of students were invited to complete questionnaires. The inspectors received 137 responses from parents and carers and 184 from students.

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

students' attainment and progress in English

- how well the curriculum meets the needs of the more able students
- aspects of the school's work that were graded outstanding in the school's self-evaluation.

## Information about the school

The Appleton School is an oversubscribed business and enterprise specialist school drawing students from Benfleet and nearby districts. A very large majority of students are from White British backgrounds and very few are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The percentage of students known to be entitled to free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of students with recognised special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average, but the proportion with statements of special educational needs is close to average.

The school holds the Sportsmark, Artsmark Silver, Investors in People, Healthy Schools, National Environmental and International Schools Awards. It complies with Financial Management Standards in Schools requirements.

Sunshine Day Nursery Benfleet provides registered child care on the school's site, but is not managed by the governing body. It is therefore subject to separate inspection arrangements.

**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

The Appleton School is outstanding in many ways and is true to its ambitious and inclusive mission statement. The school provides an innovative curriculum that strongly reflects its specialist business and enterprise status. This wide-ranging and flexible programme allows the school to meet the needs of different groups of students very well. Students benefit from effective teaching in the great majority of lessons and therefore make good academic progress. The school's provision of care, guidance and support is exceptional, and as a result, students' personal development is outstanding in all respects. Students are proud of their school's welcoming and inclusive atmosphere and feel that their views are valued. As one student said, 'It's more like a family than a school.'

The school has achieved excellence through the sustained hard work of staff and students, inspired by outstanding leadership at all levels. The headteacher and senior team show an unswerving determination to drive the school forward, setting ambitious targets and refusing to settle for anything less than good. Their monitoring and evaluation is very rigorous and any areas of weakness are tackled robustly and with clear purpose. Subject and pastoral leaders are equally committed to improvement within their areas of responsibility. Staff morale is high. Teachers have good subject knowledge and convey enthusiasm for their subjects. They accept the school's view that 'satisfactory is not good enough' and are always looking to improve their own practice. The school therefore has an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

A major factor in the school's success is the close attention to detail shown by leaders at all levels. This is epitomised in the leadership of teaching and learning, where lesson observation is taken very seriously and professional development is tailored to the specific needs of individuals and departments. Although teaching is usually good and sometimes outstanding, senior leaders have identified two areas where improvements can be made, and inspectors agree. The first is that the use of assessment and feedback to students to promote learning is not fully embedded in all teachers' practice. As a result, students are not always fully clear about how they can improve. The second is that, in a few lessons, the roles of other adults are not clear in certain situations, such as when the teacher is addressing the whole class, or when a supported student is able to work independently.

The school is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and to ensuring that all students succeed. It monitors the progress of different groups of students, and has made sure that all are making at least good progress. For example, the presence of nearby selective schools means that the proportion of students with high prior attainment is below average in all year groups. In previous years, students in this group

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had not always achieved as well as expected, but they now make good progress as a result of higher expectations and changes to the curriculum. The school's outstanding care and support is evident in the progress made by students whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well in lessons to enable them to achieve as well, if not better than other groups. The school actively seeks out ways of supporting students from families on low income, using its disadvantage fund to support trips, visits and extra-curricular provision for those who could not otherwise afford them.

A very noticeable feature of the school is the students' outstanding behaviour. This does not happen by chance. The school has a very strong culture of celebration for any kind of success. It also offers very effective support for those who need to improve their behaviour. One student commented, 'The school helped me to change because they sent me on a Firebreak course to help improve my self-discipline and it works. I don't get in as much trouble.'

The school has a very strong programme of parental engagement. The views of parents and carers are canvassed regularly and the school always seeks to involve parents in supporting their children's learning and personal development. In the questionnaire responses, almost all parents agreed with the statement 'the school helps me to support my child's learning'. Several also commented favourably on the impact of the parenting group and the parenting classes provided by the school. One wrote, 'We have attended a 10-week parenting course at the school and found it very helpful and reassuring. We would recommend this course to any parents who are struggling with their children.'

The school has outstanding systems for keeping students safe, including careful vetting of staff, regular risk assessments, and a very effective anti-bullying strategy. The wide-ranging reviews of subject areas include checks on students' happiness and safety. Students show an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe. They follow safe practices, for example in physical education, science and technology lessons and when moving about the school. They know they can speak to a member of staff if they have any concerns. Bullying and racist incidents are rare, but students are confident that the school will take effective action if they occur.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by:
  - embedding the existing good practice in the use of assessment and feedback across the school, so that all students understand fully what they need to do to improve and can act on their teachers' advice
  - ensuring that efficient use is made of additional adults in all lessons, enabling them to play a fuller role in supporting the widest possible range of students.

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

2

The current students in Years 10 and 11 had average attainment when they joined the

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school. Standards have improved considerably in the last year, particularly in English and mathematics, and attainment is now above average in all respects. This represents good progress for these students, particularly because the substantial increase in attainment has been achieved in the face of more challenging contextual factors compared to last year, such as slightly lower prior attainment and more students with special educational needs.

The school's own assessments indicate that many more students are on track for A and A\* grades at GCSE than in previous years. Increases are expected in the number of students gaining five or more good passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics. The number of students gaining A\*-C grades in a modern foreign language is increasing because the most able students follow a fast track programme and obtain GCSE passes in Year 9. The proportion of students gaining two A\*-C grades in science subjects is also increasing.

Good learning and progress is evident in the great majority of lessons, because teaching is designed to develop students' understanding of the subjects they study. Many lessons also help students to develop leadership and teamwork skills and qualities such as independence of thought, which will help them in the future. The school's business and enterprise specialism is a major factor in the good preparation students receive for the world of work. Students' enjoyment of school is evident from their high attendance and from their excellent attitudes in and out of lessons.

Students across the school reflect on their own experiences and show empathy towards others. For example, students speak movingly of the impact of visiting the war graves at Ypres. Many students show concern for the environment, for example by using litter bins and by encouraging teachers to recycle paper. They respect other people's views and beliefs and are considerate of their different needs. The student-run juice bar sources its juice from Columbia through an organisation that helps farmers to earn a living without growing crops for the drug trade.

A very wide range of students contribute to the school and wider community, taking advantage of the many opportunities to take on responsibilities. There are 100 peer leaders, 50 peer listeners and 100 students involved in the leadership academy. Many students are prefects or school councillors. All students contribute to charity projects such as red nose day and others go further, for example by donating the profits of their 'young enterprise' businesses to a children's hospice. Many students support the school's international links by writing to pen pals in Uganda or Ethiopia.

Students participate enthusiastically in a wide range of physical activities and report that there is 'something for everyone'. They understand the value of exercise and a healthy diet, making sensible choices at lunchtimes.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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<sup>1</sup> 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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<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

### How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good in most lessons and sometimes outstanding. Relationships between students and teachers are very good and students show very good attitudes to learning. Teachers provide clear exposition, make effective use of resources and mark students' work regularly, giving feedback that identifies strengths and weaknesses. However, there is not always enough detail for students to know how to make the necessary improvements. Lessons are well structured to maintain a good pace of learning and to give students opportunities to work individually and in groups. Teachers move around the class as students work to identify any problems at an early stage, and use questioning effectively to probe students' understanding.

The curriculum is exceptionally well designed and the school works very productively in partnership with other providers to enhance its provision. The Key Stage 3 curriculum is unusual in providing business and enterprise lessons for all students. There is a strong cross-curricular focus on literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. The various Key Stage 4 pathways begin in Year 9 and provide a comprehensive range of courses and qualifications that meet students' needs well. Several courses include a vocational element, such as the hairdressing diploma, and the courses in engineering and employability. Additional individual needs are met by further personalising the curriculum. For example, the school provides one-to-one tuition for selected students, and strong support for those who are on the borderline for gaining 5 good GCSE passes including English and mathematics.

The effectiveness of the school's care, guidance and support is evident in the outstanding personal development outcomes and high attendance. There are excellent

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transition arrangements to identify students' needs before they join the school. The very effective guidance on option choices means that nearly all students and parents are content with the decisions made. Any students who have problems are given extremely well targeted support to enable them to settle at school and achieve well. The close and long-established partnerships with external agencies and other professionals supplement the in-house expertise.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

**How effective are leadership and management?**

When the school was last inspected, students' personal development outcomes were mainly good. Since then, the school has sustained and enhanced its outstanding features. As a result, achievement is improving strongly and all aspects of personal development are now outstanding. While everyone in the school deserves credit for the school's further improvement, there is no doubt that the leadership of the headteacher and her senior leadership team is central to the school's success.

The senior leaders provide a clear strategic direction for the school and back up their vision with very effective improvement planning. They recognise that it is not enough to have good ideas, and have therefore developed strong management practices to ensure that plans are implemented successfully, with regular checks on progress. Finally, they have established rigorous self-evaluation, including a comprehensive system of reviewing each area of the school. The drive for improvement is therefore outstanding.

The school has maintained a strong commitment to promoting equality and tackling discrimination with its well thought-out disability, race and gender equality schemes. The result is a very harmonious institution, where everyone feels safe and fairly treated, and where everyone is encouraged to improve. The school has a very good understanding of its religious, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic context. It contributes very strongly to the local community through its work with parents and its business and enterprise community programme. Its contribution to the international community is recognised by an International Schools Award. The school is also helping students to gain a greater understanding of the diversity they might experience in other parts of the United Kingdom, but this aspect is less developed.

The governing body is highly supportive of the school and provides a good level of challenge. Its members have been trained to understand school data and this allows them to recognise where the school is improving and to ask pertinent questions. They



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are kept well informed about the school's work through briefings from senior staff, visits to the school and by listening to the views of stakeholders. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties well, including its safeguarding responsibilities. It is self-critical and welcomes members who might offer additional areas of expertise.

The Appleton School makes good use of its resources and offers very good value for money. Its financial management is subject to regular independent audits. It works exceptionally well with many different partners to enable students to achieve well and to promote their outstanding well-being. The school's arrangements for safeguarding students are robust and regularly reviewed; exemplary practice is applied across all areas of its work.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

**Views of parents and carers**

Despite a lower than usual response rate, almost all parents who completed questionnaires are very positive about the school, with many adding comments. For example, 'My son has flourished, he's more confident and extremely happy'; and, 'My daughter has always said she loved being at school, and she has achieved her true potential due to hard work and care from teachers.' One parent wrote, 'My child had challenging behaviour at home due to mixing with the wrong peer group. With the school's support she improved immensely and has made us very proud of her.' These views reflect the inspection findings. A few parents responded negatively to one or two points in the questionnaire, but there was no particular pattern.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Appleton 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 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 137 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1197 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	54	39	80	58	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	58	42	76	55	2	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	77	56	55	40	4	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	66	48	69	50	2	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	55	40	80	58	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	51	37	82	60	2	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	31	84	61	6	4	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)	62	45	71	52	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	61	45	70	51	2	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	31	84	61	9	7	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	47	34	74	54	8	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	70	51	64	47	2	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	79	58	56	41	2	1	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 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	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 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"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
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.**



25 June 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of The Appleton School, Benfleet, SS7 5RN

I am writing to tell you the outcome of your school's recent inspection. First though, I would like to thank you all for the warm welcome we received and to thank especially those of you who gave up your time to talk to the inspection team or to complete our questionnaires.

We were very impressed by you and your school. The school provides exceptional care, guidance and support and, as a result, your personal development is outstanding in all respects. Your enjoyment of school is obvious from the high attendance and from your excellent behaviour and attitudes in and out of lessons. You are proud of your school and told us that your views are valued. You respect other people's views and beliefs and are considerate of their different needs. You understand the value of exercise and a healthy diet. Very many of you are involved in activities that give something back to the school and wider community. The school has outstanding systems for keeping you safe. Bullying and racist incidents are rare and you are confident that the school will take effective action if they occur.

The Appleton School is an outstanding school. It provides an innovative curriculum that strongly reflects its specialist business and enterprise status. The good teaching in the great majority of lessons helps you make good academic progress. Standards have improved considerably in the last year, particularly in English and mathematics, and attainment is now above average in all respects.

The school's senior leaders have identified two areas where improvements can be made, and we agree. These are to ensure that:

- all teachers use assessment well and give you feedback on how to improve
- the best use is made of other adults in the classroom to aid learning.

On behalf of the inspection team, I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Stephen Abbott

Her Majesty's Inspector

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