

# Ashley School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

---

**Unique reference number for social care** SC024573  
**Unique reference number for education** 137459  
**Inspection dates** 19/06/2012 to 21/06/2012  
**Inspector** Deirdra Keating

---

**School address** The Ashley School, Ashley Downs, LOWESTOFT,  
Suffolk, NR32 4EU

**Telephone number** 01502 565 439  
**Email** office @ashleyschool.co.uk  
**Headteacher** Mrs Lorraine Dupen

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

The Ashley School Academy Trust is a maintained residential special school for 130 pupils of either gender aged between seven and 16 years. Twenty nine of these pupils reside at the school for between one and four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in two houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Lowestoft and caters for pupils with moderate learning difficulties who have associated behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in June 2012.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The outstanding quality of care in the residential provision impacts significantly on the quality of the lives of residential pupils. Residential pupils participate in many new opportunities, building confidence, independence and realising their potential.
- The extremely high quality care is inclusive and responsive, flexibly meeting the needs of each residential pupil.
- The school manages residential pupils' individual health requirements extremely well, including the provision of fresh healthy food and the proactive promotion of healthy lifestyle choices.
- The safety and well-being of residential pupils is key. Safeguarding practices are excellent and staff work cohesively with external professionals and outside agencies.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision promote a highly organised, safe environment. Time in residence is planned with meticulous care to meet the individual needs of the residential pupils.
- The views of parents, placing authorities and professionals are consistent in their high praise of the residential school and the staff.
- There is a continued focus on development, resulting in significant improvements since the last inspection.
- All national minimum standards are met.

## Outcomes for residential pupils

The outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils benefit greatly from their residential experience and highly individualised care. They make significant progress with their social skills, independence skills, confidence and self-esteem. Teachers within the school report that the pupils' readiness to learn has a positive impact on their achievements during the school day. Quotes from parents include: 'My son has improved his reading and writing, he has learned to wash up and to cook', and, 'my son has really progressed with his independence skills.'

Relationships between residential pupils are extremely positive. Daily meetings, chaired by pupils, provide a forum to discuss and reflect on events within and outside of school. This helps them develop an understanding and acceptance of each other. Pupils also develop a comprehensive understanding of friendships and relationships. Aspects such as trust, responsibility, honesty, respect and effort are strongly encouraged through activities and discussions. This contributes to pupils' increased confidence, self-awareness and emotional resilience. Residential pupils are extremely positive about their relationships with the staff. They identify all care staff as easy to talk to. Residential pupils know to approach any of the care staff if they are anxious, worried or upset. Quotes from pupils include: 'Whatever problem we have we can tell the staff and they help us.'

Residential pupils' behaviour during residential time is very good. They respond well to consistent, positive reinforcement from staff, firm boundaries and the highly nurturing environment. As a result, there have been no incidents of physical restraint and very few sanctions.

Residential pupils enjoy a wide range of stimulating experiences and opportunities. They are able to make choices on a daily basis regarding the evening activities. This approach ensures that individual preferences are considered. Pupils choose from options such as: art and craft; making their own DVDs; cookery; archery; cycling; squash; football; crabbing; and a range of seasonal events. This helps them develop a wide range of skills, including: teamwork; turn-taking; fitness; social skills; and creativity. Pupils talk fondly of the events and activities they have engaged in and proudly show photos and displays depicting them.

Residential pupils have individual social targets which care staff support them to achieve. Pupils are able to name targets they are working on, their achievements, and areas they would like to work on in future. Targets are highly individual, and the level of support needed is tailored to each pupil. Staff monitor and review all targets, and each pupil contributes to the evaluation. Parents and carers say this has a positive impact at home as pupils become more self-reliant and independent. Pupils are prepared for a successful transition when they move on. A social worker summarised: 'There has been a lot of thought and input into transition into adult life and it has been very well managed. The result is in the young man; he has hopes, aspirations, and a direction for the future.'

All aspects of pupils' health are supported through the comprehensive knowledge of the staff team, communication with parents and carers and effective links with external agencies. Emotional well-being is high and pupils report that staff help them to feel good about themselves. Examples include pupils having their hair washed by staff, in line with intimate care plans, the provision of breakfast for those arriving early, and individual staff time to discuss any worries. Pupils make good progress in taking responsibility for their health, and as a result the diet and physical well-being of a number of residential pupils has improved.

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of the residential provision and care is outstanding. Highly effective and cohesive links between pastoral and academic staff result in exceptional residential care for pupils. Consequently, pupils thrive and progress socially and academically. Teachers reflect that reading is greatly improved as a direct result of the residential provision. Pupils speak confidently about staff addressing issues, stating that residential staff talk to teachers to resolve problems that have arisen during the day. Consequently, pupils feel secure and benefit greatly from a consistent approach.

Induction for new residential pupils is gradual and timely, with emphasis on each individual feeling comfortable and happy in the residential environment. Induction materials are comprehensive and child-friendly. The Statement of Purpose is available in DVD format, using an entertaining and informative approach that is easily understandable for pupils. The dedicated, vibrant and child-focused staff team provides pupils with highly individualised care. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the care provided. They say: 'I am absolutely ecstatic with the residential provision, it is fantastic', and, 'the whole school is excellent, I could not wish for anything more. They could not do anything any better.'

Detailed care plans are compiled with parents prior to admission to the residential provision. The plans are comprehensive and effectively implemented and reviewed. Social targets are set in liaison with parents and pupils. Pupils contribute fully, promoting their sense of involvement and achievement. Thorough records for each pupil ensure that progress and development are recorded. This ensures that a constructive contribution is made to pupils' reviews and provides clear evidence for parents and professional of pupils' progress. An external professional said: 'I have experience of many different schools and this one stands out.'

Purposeful, enjoyable activities are a key feature of the residential provision. Pupils have been able to make short films, choosing their themes, music and props. They take part in activities and discussions which promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity and their understanding of other cultures and religions. Pupils talk positively about the time they spend with the community police, who visit and take part in activities. They say that they enjoy spending time in residence and say: 'We like doing fun activities, like information and communication technology, sports, crafts

and arts; we go on trips and have parties for Jubilee and Halloween.'

Staff work well with parents, carers and external agencies to ensure that health needs are promoted. Health needs are detailed in care plans and all required consents are obtained. Pupils say that they are looked after well when they feel ill. A range of strategies are used to ensure the emotional well-being of pupils. The use of a feelings board encourages pupils to express themselves. Pupils say that staff check the board and discreetly ask individuals if they would like to talk about why they are upset or angry. This contributes to pupils feeling valued and well cared for.

Catering arrangements within the school are excellent. The catering team receives regular training and has achieved a five star award for food safety. Effective communication between catering staff and residential staff ensures that each individual's dietary requirements and preferences are catered for. Catering staff demonstrate exceptional attention to detail, including unobtrusive adaptation of menus to suit individual choices. Each residential pupil has a birthday cake baked, and special events are celebrated with themed meals. All meat and dairy produce is sourced from a farm assured supplier. No convenience foods are used, ensuring residential pupils benefit from high quality meals made from fresh ingredients. Food is plentiful and fresh fruit and vegetables are always available. Pupils eat meals with enthusiasm and say they enjoy all of the meals.

The residential accommodation comprises communal living spaces that are warm, inviting and well furnished. There is extensive personalisation, with displays representing pupils' achievements and activities. Positive imagery is also a key feature, with anti-bullying messages, and information regarding different cultures that support the promotion of diversity. Pupils are able to personalise their bed spaces and have secure storage space to store possessions. There are a wide number of resources available, facilitating activities, education and interests. Pupils also have access to outdoor areas, for games and sports; this provides fresh air and physical activity to promote healthy lifestyles.

Pupils have access to a phone enabling them to make private calls to those who are significant to them. Numbers of friends and families are on a speed dial system, enabling pupils to make calls independently. Telephone numbers for external professionals are also programmed so that pupils can make calls to agencies such as ChildLine and Ofsted. Staff make regular contact with parents and carers to keep them updated about their child's progress, and any concerns are shared in a timely manner. Parents are very positive about how this works quoting: 'I can't praise them enough. If there are ever any problems they contact me.'

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The safety of the residential pupils is outstanding. The safety and welfare of residential pupils are embedded in practice. The school gives the highest priority to the safety of pupils while allowing them to participate in a full and varied curriculum.

Staff assess risk well by identifying protective factors and the individual vulnerabilities of pupils. This enables pupils to take reasonable risks and enjoy activities that are challenging and exciting. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed a crabbing trip during which they behaved exceptionally well. This trip was managed extremely well by staff who balanced risk assessment and the sharing of safety rules with enabling pupils the excitement of safe and full participation. Real experiences and trips teach pupils about personal and road safety.

The residential pupils' welfare and safety are fully supported by clear safeguarding procedures that are comprehensively understood by staff. Designated staff have key roles of accountability. All staff are trained in safeguarding and understand their responsibility and role in the implementation of the safeguarding procedures. Staff work very well with a wide range of outside agencies to safeguard children's welfare. They regularly attend meetings and conferences where individual needs and risks are assessed, at times, prior to admission. These early interventions and identification of concerns result in joint working that safeguards each pupil's welfare. This ensures that care is well planned and tailored to meet individual needs. The local authority reported that the school is very proactive in the safeguarding of children. Professionals contacted during the inspection emphasised: 'The school are outstanding in their communication with myself and with other social workers. They inform us straight away of any issues.'

The systems for the recruitment of and checks on staff are stringent. All staff and regular visitors, including trade professionals, undergo Criminal Records Bureau checks and these are updated periodically. This ensures that pupils are only in contact with safe and suitable adults and are protected from potential harm.

The behaviour management of residential pupils is promoted exceptionally well. The expectations are openly shared and pupils are central to developing these. They work together to display colourful and child-friendly prompts that are eye catching and simple. These remind pupils about meal times, being kind to one another and personal safety. Staff are skilled and adept in bringing out the best in pupils with a strong focus on positive encouragement. Consequently, pupils strive to do well and take pride in treating one another with respect and adhering to agreed rules.

Residential pupils report that they feel safe and secure and quote: 'Staff always make us all happy and smile. If something worries us we can talk to them about it.' The atmosphere is relaxed and fun, and pupils report that their belongings are safe. Surveys also show that all pupils strongly agree or agree that they feel safe in the residential provision.

The environment is physically safe and secure. Regular safety checks are carried out to ensure that appliances are safely maintained, fire prevention equipment is in place and hazards are minimised. This ensures that pupils are protected from the dangers of fire and accidents while in the residential provision.



## Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. High quality care and provision have resulted in pupils that progress significantly in their personal and social development. They are comfortable and feel at home in the residential provision. They confidently contributed their views about the provision to inform the inspection. The aims of the residential provision are fully understood and translated into extremely good practice by staff who are proud to work at the school. Comments from staff include: 'I am very proud to work in our team. We pull together really well and I believe the children get an excellent service. I hope this place will be open for a long time. It's an honour seeing the differences we can achieve to these young people.'

The residential provision is managed with energy, efficiency and drive by the head of care and residential staff team. Residential staff are fully supported by the school management team. Clear roles and lines of accountability ensure that well-organised systems, staff and records support pupils' welfare and well-being. The benefit of the team working is emphasised by staff who say: 'We have good relationships throughout school; it's an amazing service with significant outcomes for children.' Other professionals say: 'The school is for the children. My praise for them is high because they have handled concerning issues very robustly.'

The day-to-day management of the residential provision is very well organised. The team works extremely well together to run an exceptional service that is highly responsive to the diverse and changing needs of the residential pupils. This is summarised by staff who commented, 'there is a strong sense of team across the whole school', and, 'I couldn't wish for a better team.' Different areas of expertise and skill are utilised well to enhance the residential experience for pupils, who subsequently relish their residential time. Established systems work very well and the staff team strive to ensure all pupils feel equally valued and included.

The management of tasks and innovative creation and use of resources have promoted a warm, colourful environment that is clean, tidy and safe. Staff deployment is a key strength. They support pupils closely and fairly, providing fun, guidance and emotional security at all times. Residential pupils have formed strong attachments to key staff and this supports them emotionally while spending time away from home.

Staff receive regular supervision from line managers. This ensures training needs are identified and staff are supported in their professional development. As a result residential pupils benefit from staff of a high calibre who are knowledgeable and professional in their practice. Staff are insightful and reflective. They are supportive of one another while feeling comfortable enough to challenge one another. This has resulted in a team who constantly improve their practice, including areas of practice relating to behavioural support and managing safeguarding concerns. This has provided an extra element to safeguarding pupils and providing support that is

carefully tailored to the changing life events of the residential pupils.

There have been no complaints about the provision. In contrast, compliments are abundant as demonstrated throughout the report. The views of the pupils are sought daily and used to make changes. Pupils stated that first floor refurbishments have highlighted the need to redecorate the communal areas on the ground floor. In light of their views and age of the décor, this has been raised as an area for the school to improve further.

The school is monitored both internally and externally, and the findings considered carefully to ensure that the systems work to drive improvements. These include the ongoing refurbishment of the sleeping accommodation. Pupils have been consulted on their colour choices and this is incorporated into the plans. The accommodation has been upgraded to provide a more modern and appealing environment for pupils to sleep in. Additional improvements include recruitment of permanent staff, and the sharing of safe internet use between parents, pupils and staff. Staff share an ambitious vision for the school and work both individually and as team to raise the quality of care for residential pupils. Comments from staff summarise how, 'Staff rally to ensure that the development of the school is taken forward.'

Overall, outstanding practice has been sustained and the school have evidenced many areas of improvement and plans for development since the last inspection. This has promoted better outcomes for residential pupils and demonstrates how the school values the pupils and strives to continually improve.

## **National minimum standards**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- update the décor and furnishings in the ground floor communal areas of the residential provision.

**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.**



19/06/2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Ashley School**

I recently visited your school with another inspector. We both spent time in your houses and took part in the wii dance evening and the crabbing trip. We talked to you and staff and think that the staff take care of you very well. You told us how well you get on with the staff and how much fun you have in-house. The displays and photographs in the houses showed us the wide and exciting range of activities you take part in.

We were very pleased to see the transformation of the sleeping accommodation in one house and glad to know that work is being carried out in the other house. This will provide you with a more modern and pleasant bed space area. You told us that you would also like your living areas to be redecorated and we agree and have asked the school to make plans for this to happen.

Thank you for making us so welcome and showing us by your attitudes, progress and behaviours what a superb school you have. It was a pleasure spending time with you; we both enjoyed it and have given your residential school an overall grade of outstanding which is our top grade.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdra Keating