

Ashley School

Cawfield Avenue, Widnes, WA8 7HG

Inspection dates

31 October– 1 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The majority of students make at least good progress and achieve well from low starting points. They make outstanding gains in their social and communication skills. All groups of students achieve equally well.
- Reading, writing and number skills are practised in all subjects of the curriculum so that students make good progress in all of these areas.
- The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers use questioning well to check on students' understanding of what they are learning and adjust their teaching to make things clearer.
- Relationships between staff and students are highly supportive and mutually respectful. Staff help students to build their confidence and self-esteem extremely well.
- As a result of the excellent relationships, behaviour is outstanding. Students have very positive attitudes to their lessons. They work hard, are polite and look out for each other.
- The school works hard to help students to understand their responsibilities in society. Citizenship is an important part of the school curriculum. The achievement of the full International Schools Award is proof of the outstanding commitment to this work.
- The headteacher is highly ambitious for the school and leads by example. She and her team, including the governing body, are constantly seeking ways to improve the provision. As a result of the current work and training towards achieving Autism Accreditation, the quality of teaching is improving rapidly.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Students are not always given sufficient time to try things for themselves before help is offered.
- On occasions students are not told exactly what work they are individually expected to complete in every lesson so that they do not always make as much progress as they should.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons taught by 12 teachers. Three of these were joint observations with the headteacher and an assistant headteacher.
- Inspectors attended a meeting of the School Council. They also met with members of the governing body, parents and senior staff. Discussions were held with a representative of the local authority, an adviser from Autism Accreditation, and informally with students at break time.
- Inspectors looked at a range of school documents, including the school’s data on student progress, self-evaluation and improvement planning, safeguarding and curriculum documents, especially those relating to the achievement of the International Schools Award.
- There were only 3 responses available on Parent View. The inspectors took account of the 20 staff questionnaires returned.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ellwood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashley is a secondary special school for students who have learning disabilities associated with social and emotional problems.
- An increasing number of students have social and communication difficulties including autistic spectrum disorders. All have a statement of special educational needs.
- The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium is well above the national average at approximately half of students in the school.
- The vast majority of students are of White British heritage.
- Students often join the school at older ages and at any time during the school year. Some of these may have been out of school for periods of time.
- Students in Key Stage 4 access vocational courses at Building Futures and Ditton Nursery. They attend taster sessions at Riverside College. The school also uses leisure facilities in the local community.
- The school has achieved many awards including International Schools Award (full award), Schools Curriculum Award, School Achievement Award, a lifetime ENCAMS School Award (environmental work), Speaker's School Council Award, FA Charter Awards, Arts Mark (Silver), BECTA ICT Mark, Enhanced Healthy Schools Standard.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure teaching is more consistently outstanding in order to accelerate students' progress, by:
 - making sure all students are clear about what each of them is expected to achieve in every lesson
 - allowing students more time to find out and try things for themselves before offering help.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter the school with low starting points as a result of their learning difficulties. Some students may also have had learning interrupted by poor attendance before they start at Ashley.
- Most students have very weak literacy and numeracy skills when they join Ashley School. Teachers and teaching assistants want the best for them and provide opportunities for them to practise these skills in other subjects so that they make at least good and some make outstanding progress in these areas. Sometimes, however, students are not clear exactly what each of them is expected to achieve in a lesson, and do not always understand that this may be different for different students, so that occasionally individuals may not make enough progress.
- Students study difficult books with enjoyment, for example a group of Year 10 students were enjoying, 'Of Mice and Men' because the teacher made it fun to read and understand the text. In a music lesson, younger students used their counting knowledge to work out rhythms for African drumming.
- All students achieve external awards in a broad range of subjects, mainly at entry level. Some students achieve GCSE grades at lower levels and occasionally individual students attain A to C grades. As well as subject awards, they are able to gain success in other areas such as Youth Award, Sports' Leader and British Safety Council Award.
- The building of positive, supportive and trusting relationships with staff, helps students to feel confident and to learn how to succeed. They make outstanding progress in their social and communication skills, learning how to express themselves in lessons and in the many student committees. They want to do well and contribute to life in school.
- The school is rightly highly regarded for its work on citizenship. The school council, Anne Frank committee, student health and safety committee, peer mentors and prefects, amongst others, give students plenty of opportunity to learn how to take responsibility for themselves and others in the school and in their local and wider communities. As a result they make outstanding strides in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and are well prepared for the next stage in their lives.
- The school's system for tracking and monitoring student progress identifies students who are not doing as well as expected and puts extra support in place for them. This means that all groups and individuals, including the large number of students who are eligible for additional funding through the pupil premium, have an equal opportunity to succeed.
- The curriculum is rich and imaginative and well-matched to students' needs and interests. Students have many and varied opportunities to practise skills they have learned in the trips they make to places of interest, such as the Houses of Parliament. Additionally, they can learn vocational skills such as construction at Building Futures or take a child care course which includes placements at a local children's nursery.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching across the whole school and in all subjects is good and the work of the higher teaching assistants is equally effective. Students are tested on entry to the school to find out what they have already learned, so that work, especially in English and mathematics, is well planned to build on their previous learning and ensure they make good progress from their starting points.
- Teachers and teaching assistants create a very positive and supportive atmosphere for learning. Parents comment on how well their children settle into the school, start to thrive and make good progress. However, in their eagerness to help, teaching assistants occasionally jump in too quickly and students are not given enough time to try to do things or find out things for themselves.
- Lessons are well-planned with clear shared expectations of what students will learn in the lesson. In a few lessons teachers do not make it clear enough what they want each individual

student to have achieved to ensure all are making the best progress they can.

- Teachers use questioning very skilfully to check on student's understanding and adapt their teaching when necessary to improve learning. They encourage students to make contributions and express their views and even reluctant speakers learn to do this with confidence in the warm, supportive atmosphere.
- Lessons at Ashley are fun. Teachers use their imaginations to think of ways to interest and enthuse their students, making up games such as the 'bean-bag' game in a German lesson, when students threw a bean bag into a larger bag the teacher was holding when they could say the German word for a colour. Students enjoyed this immensely and remembered words well so that they could have a turn.
- Teachers are becoming increasingly skilled in creating the well-organised routines, visual symbols and other strategies to meet the needs of the rising number of students with autistic spectrum disorders. The training which all of the staff is undertaking to achieve Autism Accreditation is contributing to overall improvements in the quality of teaching.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students' behaviour is exemplary and makes an outstanding contribution to their learning and to their personal development. Students say that they are very happy and feel safe in school. They enjoy their lessons and want to do well.
- Behaviour outside of the classrooms is equally exceptional. Students are polite and respectful of each other and of adults. Several students asked the inspectors if they had everything they needed, were enjoying their day, knew where they were going and held doors open for them. When they go off-site on visits students are a credit to the school.
- Staff are developing their knowledge and skills around the approaches which support students with autism or those with social and emotional difficulties, as a result of which incidents of difficult behaviour are rare.
- Students learn about all forms of bullying and prejudice in their citizenship lessons and are keen champions of those they see as less fortunate, such as the children in the schools they link with in Uganda and China. Some students have made overseas visits and seen work in other cultures at first hand or fundraised for equipment for their link schools as part of their work in achieving the very prestigious International Schools Award.
- Members of the school council's health and safety committee regularly monitor the school for potential hazards and advise the school's leaders when jobs need doing. They can talk knowledgeably about issues such as internet safety.
- The warm atmosphere in classrooms and around the school and the respect they have for each other, means that students are not afraid to express their views. They have lots of opportunities to do this in lessons and in the many student committees. The frequent visits they make into the local and wider community and the rich experiences, such as a range of residential visits, extend their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding exceptionally well.
- Attendance is high because students want to come to school. Students who have been reluctant to attend in previous schools, settle quickly, feel comfortable and confident and begin to attend well.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher is an exceptional leader. She has led the school over a long period of time, always looking for ways to improve learning and ensure the well-being of the students who are admitted to the school.
- In agreement with the local authority and the governing body, she has begun the developments needed to achieve Autism Accreditation so that parents can feel confident the school can meet the needs of their children very well. As a result of the professional development work necessary

to meet the standards for the award, the quality of teaching is improving rapidly and all staff are increasingly competent and confident in working with these students.

- The school is highly respected in the community. The school's leaders work in partnership with the local authority to plan future provision for young people with special educational needs in the borough.
- Performance management of teaching and learning is very strong. All teachers have targets to improve student achievement, to improve their own professional skills and to support the school's plans for improvement and these are linked to salary progression. Middle managers take responsibility for ensuring high standards in their areas of responsibility. This shared leadership motivates staff and everyone is committed to raising standards for the students.
- Safeguarding arrangements are securely in place both in the school and in the alternative placements students attend. The school works very closely with other agencies and with parents to ensure the well-being of those who might be at risk because of their learning difficulties and disabilities or because of their circumstances.
- Parents express their appreciation of the support the school provides to them in helping them to manage their children at home. They feel well-informed about what their children are learning.
- The curriculum is outstanding. It is rich and varied and meets the needs and interests of all students exceptionally well. It ensures that students develop the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy as well as they can but also creates opportunities through, for example, the achievement of the Speaker's School Council Awards and environmental work. As a result, students are prepared exceptionally well for the next stage in their lives when they leave school. Most go on to further their education.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body have a good range of skills to support and challenge leaders and managers. The sub-committees meet frequently and probe the information given to them. They expect regular updates on student achievement and performance management of teaching and learning. Members of the governing body ensure that resources are used appropriately, including the additional funding for pupil premium and expect that leaders will report on the difference it has made.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	111515
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	403152

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	67
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Marjorie Constantine
Headteacher	Linda King
Date of previous school inspection	12 December 2007
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