

Ashcroft School

The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 1JE

Inspection dates	12–14 February 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- The school is well led and managed. Governors take an active role in the running of the school, challenge leaders and strive for sustained improvements. As a result, pupils achieve well and make good progress.
- Teaching is good. Good arrangements for the induction of new pupils ensure that they quickly adjust to school life and perform well according to their abilities.
- The school places a strong focus on the personal development of pupils; teachers seize every opportunity to encourage pupils to consider their actions and to improve.
- The school has improved since the previous inspection particularly in its provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Systems for the professional development of staff, such as lesson observations and training, are not fully effective.
- The curricula for history, geography and religious education are not fully developed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed ten lessons taught by nine teachers.
- The inspector looked at pupils' work and held meetings with governors, the headteacher and staff, pupils, the school's improvement advisor, parents and carers.
- The inspector looked at the school's documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning and records of pupils' progress. He checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools. The inspector took account of the views expressed in 18 questionnaires returned by pupils, 16 from staff and four from parents and carers.

Inspection team

Chanan Tomlin, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashcroft School provides education for up to 40 boys and girls between the ages of eight and 18 years with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; some also have additional complex needs.
- Of the 28 pupils on roll, four attend part time by agreement with their placing authorities.
- All pupils except one have statements of special educational needs and almost half are looked after by local authorities. All have histories of disrupted schooling and are unable to access a place at a mainstream school.
- The school is run by The Together Trust which provides residential care, foster care, social work and educational services.
- The school is located on the main Together Trust campus in Cheadle, Greater Manchester. Some pupils attend off-site courses run by colleges and training organisations.
- The school was last inspected in May 2009.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve further the overall effectiveness of the school by:
 - embedding current systems for the professional development of teachers
 - broadening and enriching the curriculum through improving the provision for history, geography and religious education.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good. Pupils come to the school with a wide range of difficulties and none of them has succeeded in mainstream education. As a result, their academic starting points are usually much lower than average. Taking account of this, all pupils make good progress in their academic learning. Good quality teaching leads to pupils acquiring knowledge quickly and gaining a firm grounding in a good range of subjects which cover all the required areas of learning, including literacy and numeracy. They are prepared well for the next stage in their education, training or employment through acquired skills in reading, writing and communication. The school educates some pupils with high academic abilities. These pupils attain standards well above the national average; this is usually accomplished through individual tuition.

All pupils finish school with at least one externally moderated qualification and some with GCSEs. Some pupils achieve college qualifications while attending school and some have achieved a Duke of Edinburgh Award. The achievement of pupils very much depends on the length of time that they spend at the school. Pupils that attend the school for more than a year are more likely to achieve sustained progress because they can take better advantage of the education and support provided.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. Pupils welcome visitors to the school, respect each other and get along well together. They have good attitudes to learning and are conscientious and engaged in lessons; this creates a calm learning environment where pupils thrive. Given that most pupils come from backgrounds where disengagement from education was the norm, attendance rates at the school are good. Pupils arrive to lessons punctually and behaviour in lessons, corridors and outside is good. Pupils are aware of the different forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and say that incidents are rare. They say they feel safe at school. The improvements in pupils' behaviour are successful because the school inducts pupils gradually in three stages, starting with a nurture group and ending with full attendance at the main school. By the time they reach the main school, pupils are well adjusted and incidents of serious misbehaviour are rare. Every school day starts with 'emotional literacy' when pupils discuss and share what is on their minds. These are valuable opportunities for them to connect with each other and staff, and to prepare for each day's learning.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school believes that self-confidence and self-esteem are the keys to pupils' success in both their personal and academic development. Because of this, staff utilise every opportunity to help pupils acknowledge and appreciate their potential and accomplishments. During an outstanding assembly, staff nominated different pupils for the ways that they showed integrity during the previous week. This assembly was a wonderful opportunity for pupils to take pride in themselves and to appreciate the importance of honesty and upright moral behaviour. Pupils are taught to consider real-life issues in depth and how to respond to moral dilemmas. In an English lesson, pupils were asked to choose who they felt should be saved from a potential disaster from a list describing different people; they approached this challenge with maturity and gave each decision due consideration. Pupils acquire a good knowledge of their own and other cultures through art, history, religious education, and discussions with their teachers. Pupils are respectful of the views, lifestyles and cultures of other people. They learn about the legal system and public services through citizenship and history, and are well equipped to make positive contributions to society, for example, through charity work.

Quality of teaching**Good**

Teaching is good. Teachers develop warm, supportive relationships with pupils; they are keen that pupils excel in their work and convey this to them consistently. As a result, pupils with a wide range of abilities achieve well and make good progress. Teachers plan lessons well and use a good range of resources and strategies to make lessons interesting. Reading, writing, communication and mathematics are taught effectively, giving pupils a firm grounding in developing key skills to support learning in all areas.

Pupils are encouraged to offer their own opinions and to engage in discussion. In a personal, social and health education lesson (PSHE), pupils shared their ideas about borrowing and spending money responsibly. Academic progress is assessed regularly; this helps pupils to focus on how to improve their work and provides teachers with information to plan lessons and adjust the curriculum as necessary. When pupils display challenging behaviour, teachers manage these situations well. Often, teachers will incorporate a pupil's particular difficulty into the lesson being taught, turning challenge into a meaningful learning experience. For example, when a pupil complained during an art lesson, the teacher asked the pupil to choose a colour that best related to her feelings.

Quality of curriculum**Good**

The curriculum is good. All the required subjects are taught and the curriculum is designed well to meet the needs of all pupils. It provides good opportunities for pupils to develop key skills in English, mathematics and science, and to make good progress in art and information and communication technology (ICT). Specialist rooms for science, art and ICT are equipped with the necessary resources to support these subjects. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is an integral part of the curriculum and supplemented with a good programme of outdoor education and project work. The provision for history, geography and religious education (RE) is not quite as well developed. Generally, mornings are designated for the study of academic subjects and afternoons for outdoor education and project work. This provides pupils with a good structure for learning and enables them to channel their attention effectively.

The curriculum is supported with detailed planning and schemes of work that challenge effectively pupils of different abilities. Planning for pupils with statements of special educational needs is suitably tailored to meet the provision specified. Pupils are well prepared for the future through a firm grounding in English, mathematics and ICT. Some pupils attend college and work-related settings such as a working farm. Extra-curricular and enrichment activities support pupils' academic progress well and are designed to promote personal and social development. On a residential trip to the Lake District, many pupils recalled that they had accomplished feats that they felt were well beyond their capabilities. This trip had a major impact on pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem, and provided valuable opportunities for them to socialise and bond with staff.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety**Good**

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. Staff are highly committed to the welfare of pupils, and good supervision both in school and on trips ensures that they are kept safe at all times. The school conducts regular risk assessments to ensure that the premises are safe and that potential risks in and out of school are managed effectively. The school provides nutritious meals and pupils are taught about how to lead healthy lifestyles.

Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils are robust and all staff have been trained in child protection to the required levels. Procedures for the recruitment of staff ensure that they are all suitable to work with children. The school's systems for behaviour management are very effective; this helps create a calm, purposeful learning environment. Bullying is rare and, when instances

occur, the school is quick to deal with them effectively. A recent fire audit indicates that there is a satisfactory level of fire safety; fire drills are carried out regularly and are duly recorded. All of the required policies and procedures related to the welfare, health and safety of the pupils are in place and implemented effectively. As a result, all of the independent school standards are met.

Leadership and management

Good

The leadership and management of the school are good. Leaders and managers work well together and share the common goal of improving provision for the pupils in all areas of school life. Governors are very involved in the running of the school and are outstanding in the ways that they support and challenge senior leaders. They gain first-hand knowledge about the day-to-day operation of the school. Good systems for the professional development of staff, including governors' involvement in the observations of lessons, ensure that teaching is consistently good and that pupils achieve well. While the school can already point to the positive impact of their systems for professional development, the arrangements have not been in place long enough to have moved teaching and learning to outstanding. Senior managers appreciate the importance of self-evaluation; an external advisor assists the school in identifying areas of strength and areas that need to be improved.

Effective and well implemented policies ensure that all areas of learning are well-established. Senior managers and governors are clear about the school's ethos for the personal development of pupils and, as a result, this is promoted well. The school works very well with parents and carers to secure strong support for pupils so that they achieve well. Parents and carers are very positive about the school. One parent said: 'Every other school has failed my children but from day one in this school, there was no looking back!'

The school's premises and accommodation are maintained and resourced well and provide a good foundation to support the provision of the curriculum. The school meets all of the requirements related to the provision of information to parents, carers and others, and the complaints procedure includes all of the necessary details. The proprietor and school managers have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	106162
Inspection number	397612
DfE registration number	356/6025

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Special Day school - for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD)
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	8–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Number of part time pupils	4
Proprietor	The Together Trust
Chair	Roger Horne
Headteacher	Eileen Sheerin
Date of previous school inspection	13 May 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£32,152
Telephone number	0161 283 4832
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