

Ash Field Academy

Broad Avenue, Leicester, LE5 4PY

Inspection dates 26–27 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- All pupils, of all ages and abilities, make outstanding progress.
- Pupils' progress is very carefully checked. Very good support is given to any who fall behind so that they get back on track.
- The school's expertise in helping pupils to communicate through the use of technology and other aids is excellent.
- Pupils' achievement in communication, reading, writing and mathematics is outstanding.
- The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers and curriculum assistants and other staff work very well together. The teaching of reading is a strength of the school.
- Teaching and activities are demanding and encourage pupils to think for themselves and learn as much as possible.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, and their attitudes to work and school are exemplary.
- The sixth form is outstanding and prepares students very well for the next step in their lives.
- Pupils concentrate very well and try very hard in all that they do. Sometimes, this demands much physical effort, but they do not give up.
- Discussions with pupils and surveys of their parents' and carers' views confirm that pupils feel safe and happy at school. Their relationships with staff are outstanding.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. The school's leaders and the Board of Trustees are creative in improving teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The school's partnerships are outstanding. Not only do they improve the quality of provision and pupils' achievement, but they improve the knowledge and skills of many other pupils and adults in the local and wider community.
- The quality of teaching is closely checked. Very good support is provided to improve individuals' work and increase the amount of outstanding teaching.
- The range of subjects and activities provided is rich, relevant, and meets pupils' needs well.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 10 lessons. All were jointly observed with the principal or a vice principal. In addition, inspectors listened to some pupils read and observed pupils in other situations, such as lunch time.
- Meetings were held with the executive principal, the principal, the three vice principals, other staff including office staff, pupils, a small group of parents and the Chair of the Board of Trustees.
- Inspectors reviewed many documents including those relating to pupils’ academic progress and behaviour management, curriculum and lesson planning, the quality of teaching, safety and safeguarding, governance and development planning.
- There were insufficient responses to Parent View, the online questionnaire, to be shown. Inspectors took account of the school’s own survey of parents’ and carers’ views, pupils’ views as given to the inspection team and in documented pupil discussions with school staff, and 45 responses to the staff inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Judith Charlesworth, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Christine Fraser

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school converted to become an academy school in April 2012. When its predecessor school, Ash Field School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- Ash Field Academy provides for pupils with physical disabilities. The majority have additional problems including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. About a third of the pupils have a visual impairment, and smaller numbers have difficulties such as autism and attention deficit disorder.
- A large number of pupils have medical needs that require routine attention during the school day. About one quarter of pupils have progressive deteriorating conditions, almost all pupils are wheelchair users, and about one third need additional equipment to help them communicate.
- Almost all pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The complexity of pupils' needs on entry is increasing, and increasing numbers are joining the school at a young age.
- The school offers residential and extended day experiences as part of its educational provision. About half the pupils stay at the school for one or two nights on a rota basis throughout the year. There are 18 beds in total. The residential provision was not part of this inspection.
- The school has two other functions. It is commissioned to run an Assistive Technology Assessment Centre which supports pupils from schools throughout Leicester city. It also functions as a regional professional development centre. The school hosts visits and provides numerous courses and placements for adults from schools and universities on a national and global scale. These additional functions were not part of this inspection.
- More than twice the usual proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium which is additional government funding to support the achievement of certain groups of pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- Half the pupils are from ethnic minority heritages, and about half of these families speak English as an additional language.
- A small number of pupils have a dual placement with their own local mainstream school. A number of older pupils have work experience at mainstream schools. The school uses alternative provision to provide education, as some older pupils follow courses at Gateway Sixth Form College, South Leicestershire College and Leicester College.
- A significant building programme to replace unfit temporary buildings and provide extra accommodation is due to commence in July 2013 under the final phase of the national 'Building Schools for the Future' initiative.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that pupil groups, staffing and lessons are organised so that all pupils have an unobstructed view of the activity they are involved in, and do not have to wait for their turn at an activity.
- Make sure that the activities provided for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are pitched at the right level in all lessons, so that the pupils have the best possible chance of understanding and learning all the time.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils' attainment when they join the school ranges from above average to very low for their age. Their ability to learn and make the progress expected from this starting point varies as a significant number have progressive conditions and other difficulties which can slow their rate of learning or make it patchy. Nevertheless, pupils' achievement is outstanding due to their exemplary attitudes to learning and the high quality of teaching and provision that takes these factors into account.
- Pupils are very carefully assessed on entry to the school, and then each term thereafter. Staff set each pupil targets, based on the expectation that they will make faster progress than average. These are then adjusted to take account of pupils' individual circumstances which means that targets are demanding but realistic.
- Pupils' progress is checked exceptionally carefully and a detailed termly review is shared with all relevant staff. It forms the basis of target setting and planning for learning for the next term. Where individuals are not on track to make the progress expected, the school provides support or interventions. This may be extra support for learning, or a change in routine to meet changing needs, for example, to help the pupil be more comfortable and in a better position to learn. The success of these interventions is shown by the improvement in these pupils' progress.
- Comparison of the information collected since the school converted to academy status with national information shows that more than three quarters of the pupils have made at least expected progress and many have made better than expected progress and exceeded their targets. Pupils make similar progress in English and mathematics. They make particularly good progress in science, as seen in one lesson where pupils were enjoying their investigation into how much force was needed to pull open a drawer, or tow a car.
- Pupils' achievement in English is outstanding. This is evident in lessons and in their records of progress. Some pupils are developing skills in line with their mainstream peers, which enables them to study and gain GCSEs in up to five subjects. Those who continue their education in the school sixth form, and who attend courses in the sixth form college or at other colleges, continue to achieve very well.
- According to their needs and abilities, pupils learn to communicate using complex electronic equipment, signing or age-appropriate speech. Reading is a strength. Most pupils learn to read and their skills range from the fluent wide-scale reading of complex age-appropriate texts to recognising simple symbols and objects. Writing skills vary from rapid, well-formed and punctuated script or word processing to simple mark-making. All of these are significant achievements for the individuals concerned.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is outstanding. They develop their mathematical skills rapidly, with particular success in learning about shapes and space. The use of this information varies according to pupils' abilities. For example, the youngest and least able pupils learn to place objects in containers while some pupils in Key Stage 3 use grids and logic to identify coordinates and locate a given item.
- Pupils in Key Stage 4, the sixth form and the Early Years Foundation Stage all achieve equally well. The youngest children learn to communicate and separate happily from their families. They enjoy their activities and some can talk about what they have done, such as 'I chose a red pom

pom' (for his puppet's nose). As pupils become older, many use and apply their skills independently in school, in the community and in various college and work experience placements. They study for a good range of accreditation at various levels and are very well prepared for the next step in their lives.

- The school's analysis of pupils' achievement shows that all ability, disability, ethnic and gender groups make equivalent progress. No gaps in performance are noted for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium. Nevertheless, these pupils have been identified in each class, and teachers consulted about how the additional funding can be used to help them. An extra curriculum assistant has been employed to support individuals with reading, and to run additional clubs where eligible pupils have priority to attend.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding in all areas of the school and underpins pupils' outstanding achievement. Lessons include clear learning targets that are explained well and revisited during the lesson so that pupils know how well they are doing. Teachers call pupils' attention together every few minutes to outline progress so far, check on understanding, and remind them what else they have to do and how long they have got.
- Work and learning expectations are clearly set to match pupils' abilities. They are outlined on the teachers' plans and curriculum assistants are briefed well. These adults' work is excellent and supports learning extremely well. Pupils use various aids, tablet computers and other complex electronic equipment to support their communication, literacy skills and understanding. These aids also help the communication and understanding of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- Teachers pitch questions to suit individual pupils so that they can check on their understanding and correct any misconceptions. An excellent example of this was seen when, during a whole-class question and answer activity in mathematics, one pupil was found not to fully understand what coordinates were, due to being absent the previous day. The teacher then partnered this pupil in the next activity. He taught him what coordinates were through an enjoyable practical game, and tested the security of his new understanding several times.
- Praise is used appropriately, specifically and when deserved. This gives it real value and the pupils feel proud of themselves. Staff are not afraid of telling pupils that they have got something wrong, or need to redo it. This means that pupils try hard on their own, rather than expect an adult to do it for them.
- Teaching for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage concentrates well on developing the children's communication and personal skills through interesting play activities and individual support. Very good relationships are established with the children and their parents and carers. Teaching in the sixth form firmly encourages students to work and think for themselves. Staff establish a mature atmosphere, which prepares students very well for work and college, and for the next step in their lives.
- A recent emphasis on improving staff skills in teaching early reading and writing through phonics (linking letters with the sounds they make) has been very successful. Outstanding teaching in one Key Stage 2 lesson, for example, was due to the very high quality of literacy teaching where pupils confirmed their understanding of a new sound, 'l', and then went on to read simple words by joining the sounds together.

- Occasionally, the small classrooms and the bulk of pupils' specialist seating and electronic equipment means that pupils are not always best-placed to have a clear line of vision of the teacher, activity or screen. Sometimes, they have to wait their turn to participate. This situation can also occur when individuals' medical needs, such as tube-feeding, are being met as adults can unintentionally block pupils' view. This restricts some pupils' engagement in the lesson for a short while, which can limit learning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The school's most recent survey of parents' and carers' views indicates that virtually all respondents feel their children enjoy school, that unacceptable behaviour is dealt with effectively and that the school keeps their children safe. Discussion with the pupils, the staff's inspection questionnaire returns, and inspection findings confirm these views.
- Pupils' behaviour in class and around the school is outstanding. A very small number have behavioural difficulties associated with their complex needs. These are extremely well managed by carefully written and implemented strategies, and reduce very quickly to the point of being 'invisible'. Relationships between the staff and pupils are excellent.
- All pupils enjoy school and learning. The atmosphere in class is always busy and productive which helps them to participate and learn. Unless absent due to illness, surgery, or other such unavoidable reasons, pupils' attendance is good.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. They concentrate very well, participate in activities enthusiastically, and try exceptionally hard to complete all that is asked of them. On several occasions, for example, severely disabled pupils were observed communicating, writing and using computer technology by tiny movements of their eyes, heads or hands which was very physically tiring as well as intellectually challenging.
- Pupils are kind, sociable and supportive of one another. They clearly show very high levels of moral and social development. Pupils are exceptionally patient and accepting of each other's varying needs. There is no antagonism or discrimination between the ethnic groups. The more-able pupils have a good sense of friendly competitiveness. For example, they strive to be the first to complete a challenge, but are, nevertheless, pleased at their friends' success.
- More-able pupils have a very good understanding of keeping safe and of bullying and the different forms it might take. This is due to the school's emphasis on teaching them about these aspects. There are almost no anti-social incidents and pupils say they have faith in the staff to deal with any that might occur. Most pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe in the community, for example, when at work placements or at college, and when using the internet.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The school's leaders have a very clear vision of excellence. They work very hard to achieve the best for their own pupils and for others, schools and professionals in the local, wider and global community. Ash Field continues to be a resource for the local authority, for example, in training other staff.
- The school has many partnerships with a wide range of professional agencies, educational establishments and businesses which contribute extremely well to pupils' education, well-being and future lives. These are now strengthening further through the new charitable trust set up by

local special schools in Leicester, and the legal partnerships involved in the school's academy status.

- Parents, carers and staff are highly supportive of all aspects of the school, including the decision to convert it to an academy. All staff contribute to the evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development. Improvement plans are imaginative, accurate, realistic and focused firmly on pupils' achievement and well-being.
- Pupils' progress is carefully checked each term. Excellent, clear and detailed data-based reports are produced that are circulated to all relevant staff and the Trustees. Any pupils who are not likely to meet their targets are carefully investigated and appropriate support is provided to help them get back on track.
- The quality of teaching is closely checked in various informal and formal ways, including with reference to the national 'Teaching Standards'. All observations are well documented. Senior leaders continually seek to increase the proportion of outstanding teaching. Individuals are supported if necessary, and newly qualified teachers are allocated a mentor (professional friend) as well as an induction tutor. Their combined support means that new teachers quickly settle and teach well.
- The school encourages staff to add to their qualifications as well as attend regular training for their everyday work. This often means that individuals leave the school to take first or second degrees. The school has its own system for salary progression, and this is appropriately based on teaching quality.
- The range of subjects and activities provided is rich, relevant and provides well for the very wide age and ability range of the pupils. The curriculum makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, particularly through the wealth of visits and interesting extra activities provided, such as its Arts Award work, and visits from a theatre group.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage enjoy working and playing with the other children in their class. They learn rapidly from the interesting activities provided and have a very good start to their education. The Key Stage 4 and sixth form curriculum is suitably focused on helping pupils gain as much accreditation as possible, often in line with their mainstream peers. They use their skills in various community, work-related and further educational contexts. Pupils are very well prepared for moving on from the school to the next stage of their lives, and for living in a modern, multi-cultural, democratic society.
- The school has recently introduced a very good new approach to working with pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties in recognition of their very small steps of progress. However, this does not always fully match the activities provided in lessons, which are occasionally not pitched at the right level for these pupils.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The Board of Trustees is well led, and the professional relationship with senior leaders is strong and effective. The Board has been fully involved in the work related to the conversion to academy status, and the new building project. Members play a full part in determining the direction of the school and in making decisions, for example, on staff salary progression and how best to support pupils through the pupil premium. They are very well informed by the school's regular reports and presentations from staff. They understand pupils' performance and its link with the quality of teaching, how teaching is improved and the school's strengths and areas for development.

- The Board of Trustees keeps a close eye on the school's finances, which are at a particularly complex stage at the moment. All statutory duties are met, including those to safeguard pupils.

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	138094
Local authority	Leicester
Inspection number	408924

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	123
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	32
Appropriate authority	The Board of Trustees
Chair	Haydn Gopsill
Executive Principal	David Bateson
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	0116 273 7151
Fax number	0116 273 9962
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