

Ashmount School

Thorpe Hill, Loughborough, Leicestershire, LE11 4SQ

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- Pupils make outstanding progress in English and mathematics because they are taught exceptionally well.
- Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make rapid progress. Their achievement is outstanding.
- The sixth form is outstanding. Students develop excellent employability skills. All go to college when they leave school.
- Support for communication is a part of every lesson. Consequently, pupils make rapid progress in communicating using gesture, pictures, specialist technology and words.
- Teaching is outstanding because of the ways in which it inspires pupils to learn and enables their outstanding progress. Innovative activities are planned at the correct level of challenge.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils are adept at keeping themselves safe.
- The specially modified furniture and resources help remove obstacles that would otherwise get in the way of pupils' learning.
- Pupils' complex intimate care needs are met exceptionally well.
- A rich range of therapeutic programs and subjects contribute to pupils' outstanding learning.
- The very effective leadership of the senior leadership team and the governing body contributes to improving the quality of teaching and raising pupils' achievement.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed eight lessons and a session delivered by an external orchestral group. Seven of the lessons and the orchestral group session were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. The lead inspector also conducted a tour of the school with the headteacher to observe pupils' engagement with learning.
- Inspectors listened to pupils from different disability and special educational needs groups read. In addition, inspectors observed feeding programs being carried out and observed pupils leaving school by buses and taxis at the end of the school day.
- The lead inspector carried out a detailed work scrutiny.
- Meetings were held with staff, pupils and representatives from the governing body. The lead inspector also had a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors examined pupils' intimate care plans, their handling plans, a selection of feeding plans, a sample of individual educational and behavioural plans linked to their statements of special educational needs, restraints data, attendance data and pupil progress data. They also examined teachers' planning, the school's improvement plan, monitoring of teaching and learning information, a wide range of policies including the performance management policy and all safeguarding policies, and minutes of governing body meetings. Recent visit notes from the school's external consultant were examined.
- Inspectors examined 63 questionnaires completed by staff.
- There were 29 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, at the time of the inspection. These views were taken into account by inspectors.

Inspection team

Jeffery Plumb, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sa'ad Khaldi

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school makes provision for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe and additional learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder and visual impairment. A significant number of pupils have additional complex medical needs. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school admits pupils from all over North East Leicestershire.
- The school moved into new purpose-built premises on a site with a mainstream secondary school in January 2014. At this time its designation changed to become an area special school with a full range of pupils with special educational needs and it is planned that numbers will rise to above 125. The staffing structure has been put in place ahead of the increase in pupil numbers (the new pupils will follow at a later date). Because of this the school runs with a small and approved deficit budget with a clear plan to eradicate that deficit.
- In March 2014, at the time of the inspection, the school gained status as a National Teaching School.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding is above the national average. This is additional government funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, from service families or who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below the national average, as is the proportion from families who speak English as an additional language.
- The school makes use of off-site alternative provision to enable Year 11 and sixth form students to have job opportunities. It also uses Loughborough College to provide students with opportunities to follow work-related courses in catering, horticulture, animal care and hair and beauty.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently outstanding by:
 - ensuring that all staff have the confidence to change what they are doing 'on the spot' so that pupils are enabled to learn even faster.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children join the Early Years Foundation Stage with exceptionally complex needs. Often unable to communicate, they present very challenging behaviour out of frustration. Typically, they cannot take turns when playing with a toy and are not able to sit still on a chair for even a few seconds. Helped to overcome these difficulties they make outstanding progress in their communication and personal development and so rapidly become ready to learn.
- Attainment for sixth form students is variable reflecting their range of needs. Yet the progress of each student measured from their starting points is outstanding. Some achieve an Entry Level 1 qualification in English and mathematics while others achieve an Entry Level 2 qualification in these subjects. Within capability students acquire outstanding employability skills. The most-able learn to travel on a public bus by themselves and gain confidence in going to a shop and buying what they need to prepare and cook a healthy meal on a tight budget.
- Throughout Key Stages 1 to 4 most pupils, whatever their particular disability or special educational needs, make outstanding progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Typically, by Year 6, 9 and 11 most pupils make better than nationally expected progress in English and mathematics for pupils with complex needs measured against their starting points.
- Pupils' achievement in communication across all subjects is outstanding. This is because the school ensures that every classroom is allocated an adult with the specialist skills required to develop pupils' communication. The most effective way forward for each pupil is supported by high quality resources. For example, some pupils use specialist technology and switches; others use pictures; yet others are positioned carefully so that they can communicate by pointing with their eyes; and those who speak using words are challenged to sound out the words they use accurately.
- Achievement in reading is outstanding. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties anticipate what is going to happen next as adults move them around during sensory story time. For example, during a story about going on a journey pupils anticipated being moved in a different direction. Other more able pupils read text independently showing that they can sound out the new words they meet. The most-able pupils can find the meaning of new words they meet by using a simple picture dictionary.
- Writing is difficult for pupils with severe physical difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. With careful positioning and hand-over-hand support from an adult pupils' with the most complex needs experience making the shape of letters with their fingers in 'gloop'; others assisted by symbol and word programs on computers sequence words so as to create short sentences. The most-able who also have freedom of movement in their hands and good arm muscle control write stories and short letters independently, spelling words with a reasonable degree of accuracy and using simple connectives and punctuation.
- Pupils' mathematical development builds step by step from a wide range of starting points. All pupils experience mathematics and within their capability develop relevant skills such as measuring the length of an object and telling the time. The most-able pupils carry out calculations and solve simple money problems.
- Pupil premium funding is used exceptionally effectively to support individual pupils improve their communication skills and to pay for additional physiotherapy so as to help them walk with greater freedom and enjoyment. Mostly it is used to provide one-to-one additional support with

English and mathematics. As a result these pupils, including those looked after by the local authority make the same outstanding progress in these subjects as their classmates.

- Minority ethnic pupils, including those from families that speak English as an additional language, make the same outstanding progress as their classmates, because the school attends to their needs and provides highly effective support to them and their families as they begin to communicate.
- Occasionally, pupils' with complex medical needs slip backwards. Decisive action is taken to pull them back up by enabling their complex intimate medical needs to be met sensitively inside the classroom so that they do not miss out on learning.
- Outstanding achievements in personal development include greater confidence in movement, using fingers to untie shoe laces and improved feeding with more tasty foods. Older students develop important life skills such as using the self-check out at the local supermarket and paying for a drink by themselves when visiting a cafe. Because the most-able students communicate confidently and count accurately they are able to hold down jobs, such as in the local community food bank.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- Typically most teaching is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the sixth form. Similarly this is also the case throughout Key Stages 1 to 4, including in English and mathematics. No teaching is less than good in any part of the school. The senior leadership team has an accurate view of the quality of teaching.
- Every class has a specially trained adult equipped with the expertise required to develop pupils' communication skills. Approaches to promote effective communication vary so as to best suit the wide range of pupils' needs across the school. Consequently, all pupils are supported in communicating their needs with confidence and also are equipped to access learning across all of their subjects.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent. Teachers and teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning because they know what best helps them to learn. Classrooms are set out in a way that helps pupils with different abilities and needs to speed up their learning. For example, pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are provided with a sensory environment to stimulate their learning while those with autism spectrum disorder are allocated quiet work areas to minimize their risk of distraction. Activities are planned to enhance pupils' learning. These factors contribute successfully to pupils' enjoyment of, and excitement for, learning.
- Questioning is skilful. Pupils' are given space to respond using whatever means of communication they are comfortable with. For example, when pupils are given a number of pictures to make choices teachers and teaching assistants do not rush in when they take time to reflect on the answer they wish to give. This enables their learning to be deepened and quickly so.
- A wide range of specialist methods and therapeutic programs are used by staff to provide excellent support for pupils learning. For example, in a swimming lesson the teacher used the plans prepared by a physiotherapist. Each pupil moved with greater freedom and thoroughly enjoyed the session while also improving their communication skills.

- Modifications to resources and adaptations to furniture support pupils with physical disabilities in accessing productive learning opportunities. Careful adaptations particularly enhance the learning for pupils with visual impairment.
- Detailed assessments, lesson by lesson, lie at the heart of the successful teaching. Thorough assessments and detailed knowledge of what pupils know and can do are used in lessons very effectively to challenge pupils and so improve their reading and writing, and to speed up their development of new mathematical skills.
- Pupils' work is annotated with detailed notes to inform planning to raise their achievement. Often it contributes to a re-alignment of approach to teaching so as to accelerate pupils learning. When a pupil falls behind there is an investigation to find the reasons why. Then immediate support is put in place to help that pupil catch up.
- Teachers and teaching assistants do not always use their observations of what pupils do in a lesson to change tasks so that pupils make the best possible progress there and then. Occasionally, teachers take too long to get down to the main activities planned to help pupils move forward. When this happens pupils' learning slows and is good rather than outstanding.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. Pupils enjoy learning because teachers remove obstacles that could interfere with their learning. For example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorder are steered away from objects in classrooms that could cause them to be distracted and/or be distressed. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties are positioned comfortably in specially adapted chairs that enable them to have the freedom to reach out and use the equipment they need to learn.
- Outstanding accommodation and resources, such as the hydrotherapy pool with amazing light and sound effects, calms pupils and as a result supports them in their physical developments because they are relaxed to try new strokes and movements in the water.
- Exceptionally skilful behaviour management of pupils with autism spectrum disorder ensures that they are swiftly re-engaged with learning when their attention wanders. Physical restraint to keep pupils safe is rare. All pupils who are restrained have detailed handling plans.
- Pupils welcome visitors by smiling; using gesture or signs; and lifting their heads to say, 'Hello'. Lunchtimes are happy family-based occasions where most pupils eat together in the dining hall, supported by adults. The few requiring careful attention with their feeding to ensure that they are safe are fed with dignity and respect in a separate classroom by specially trained staff. After lunch pupils enjoy playing, including on their specially modified 'bikes', outside in the most stimulating grounds that include a special access trampoline for pupils with a disability. Throughout they are monitored and supported to ensure that they are safe.
- There are no recorded racist or bullying incidents. Pupils able to speak using words say, with certainty, that they have an adult who they trust at school and would tell that adult if anybody was ever nasty to them. There are no exclusions.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Pupils who require lifting are supported in slings that are regularly checked to ensure that they are safe. Arrival and departure of buses and taxis is monitored rigorously to ensure that it is both a safe and enjoyable experience for pupils. Those pupils with intimate care needs are involved in shaping their care

plans and they are encouraged to say how much help they want from an adult when using the bathroom.

- Within their capability pupils have a very good understanding of what constitutes bullying and what to do if it ever happened to them. Their knowledge of how to keep safe is clearly evident in a booklet they have produced called, 'Keeping Safe at Ashmount School'. The most-able older students who use a mobile 'phone when they travel on a bus by themselves to college or work know that they must not respond to a text message they may receive from a stranger. Similarly, they know how to keep themselves safe when using a computer. Those pupils out in jobs for part of the week know how to keep themselves safe in the work-place.
- Attendance is higher than that found typically in a special school and is improving. Most absence is due to lengthy stays in hospital.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and deputy headteacher provide outstanding leadership for the school. They have successfully communicated high expectations to staff and pupils. A strong learning culture is in place and all staff have embraced the school's vision of the highest achievement for every pupil.
- The leadership is ambitious. Leaders have a clear understanding of the importance of continuous improvement. There is a deep commitment, now they are in the new building, to expand and develop the school further.
- Although spending on staff and resources has run ahead of the scheduled and certain growth in pupil numbers the effective business manager keeps a close eye on the school's budget.
- Frequent and regular checks on teachers' work and meetings of the new staff teams, assisted by the recently appointed assistant headteachers, effectively support the different key stage and disability sub-groups within the school. Teachers are held to account for the effect their teaching has on pupils' achievement from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to the sixth form. Teaching at all levels is improving and getting even better than what it already is.
- Senior leaders closely analyse data to make sure all pupils make outstanding progress. Where required, they re-organize the level of support provided so as to give all pupils equal opportunities to succeed and avoid any possible discrimination. For example, Year 9 pupils made slower progress in mathematics in 2012 – 2013 compared with other year groups. Since September 2013 they have received intensive support in mathematics and their progress has accelerated as a consequence.
- The training provided for teachers has made an exceptionally valuable contribution to their skills, particularly in promoting pupils communication and reading skills. The literacy leader is very effective in all that she does to raise pupils' achievement across the school.
- The management of the team of therapists and the school's nurse help remove barriers to the personal development and academic learning for pupils.
- The programmes of study, under constant review in the context of National Curriculum change and the loss of traditional accreditations, meet pupils' academic and personal needs exceptionally well. An extensively wide range of interesting activities and work-placement opportunities as well as off-site college courses in a range of vocational subjects are provided so

as to broaden pupils' horizons and contribute to their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' awareness of cultural diversity is promoted exceptionally well.

- The school makes very good use of its primary sports funding to increase the resources available to support pupils to improve their freedom and enjoyment of movement. The investment in modified bikes and a program to develop pupils' use of their hands to dress themselves with the minimal of help are creative moves. However, these initiatives are at too early a stage of development to measure their impact.
- Effective workshops for parents support them in helping their children to improve their communication skills.
- The local authority recognizes this school as a highly effective school. It has supported the development of the new build and has a vision that this school will provide high quality training across its schools throughout North East Leicestershire.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body is knowledgeable about the school and is very ambitious about its further development as a National Teaching School. Governors work ceaselessly to ensure that a positive learning culture pervades the school and to ensure that every pupil gets the best possible education. They ask, as appropriate, tough questions about pupils' progress. For example, they recently asked challenging questions about the potential impact of the action plan to use the primary sports funding. This resulted in an improved plan to raise pupils' achievement. Governors know how pupil premium funding is spent and check what difference it makes on pupils' progress.
- Governors visit the school regularly and gather evidence about how well it is doing. They have a very good handle on the quality of teaching. Governors are clear that only effective teachers can move up the pay scale. There is a clear and agreed approach to check out how well the headteacher performs and to set him robust targets aimed at improving pupils' achievement. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively and ensure that the school meets all requirements in the way of safeguarding 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	120352
Local authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	428934

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	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	93
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	16
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Lewis
Headteacher	Dave Thomas
Date of previous school inspection	14 February 2011
Telephone number	01509 268506
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