

Airthrie School with Hillfield Dyslexia Trust

27–29 Christchurch Road, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL50 2NY

Inspection dates 29 April – 1 May 2014

Overall effectiveness	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

This is an outstanding school because

- Pupils make continual sustained and outstanding progress over time in their learning, particularly in English and mathematics, as a result of effective teaching and assessment.
- The outstanding teaching over time contributes to the high standards of the pupils' achievement.
- The well-planned curriculum effectively reinforces the pupils' skills and knowledge, providing them with an exceptionally diverse programme, greatly enriched by a wide range of trips, visiting speakers and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. In all age groups pupils are kind, courteous and respectful of others. They are highly motivated to learn, enjoy school and embrace enthusiastically all aspects of school life.
- The promotion of pupils' welfare, health and safety is excellent. The school offers an extremely nurturing and safe environment, where every pupil is known very well and valued.
- The headteacher is an inspiring leader with a clear focus on supporting the specific educational and emotional needs of each pupil. The outstanding leadership and management have had a strong impact on raising the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement. The school works in very close partnership with parents and carers.

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

- This inspection was carried out with one day’s notice.
- The inspectors observed 15 lessons or parts of lessons, many accompanied by the headteacher or senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with the school's leaders, teaching staff and pupils. A range of documentation was examined, including policies, assessment records, and curriculum and teachers’ plans. The inspectors heard pupils read and looked at pupils’ written and other work. They attended an assembly and observed pupils at break times and lunchtimes.
- The views expressed by 22 members of staff through survey questionnaires were considered.
- There were 56 responses to Ofsted’s online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspectors spoke to many parents and carers in person and received 14 emails from parents and carers who wished to communicate directly with the inspectors.

Inspection team

Jill Bainton, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lesley Voaden

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Airthrie School with Hillfield Dyslexia Trust is an independent non-selective day school for boys and girls, which was founded in 1940. The Hillfield Dyslexia Trust, which is within Airthrie School, provides specialist advice and support to staff and some pupils of the school, but does not constitute a discrete unit for the teaching of pupils with dyslexia. The school has been run for many years by the current proprietors. It is registered for 180 pupils aged three to 11 years. There are currently 140 full-time and 29 part-time pupils on roll. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school occupies linked Victorian houses in a residential area of Cheltenham. The site is adjacent to the extensive sports complex of a large public school and all pupils of Year 1 and above have access to this provision for sports.
- The school aims to realise the potential of all its pupils and produce well-rounded individuals.
- The school was last inspected in November 2008 as a light touch inspection, when it met all the regulations. Since then a progress monitoring inspection was carried out in February 2013 to follow up the school's progress in implementing an action plan to improve its washroom facilities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sustain pupils' high levels of achievement by:
 - continuing to monitor the quality of teaching and learning to ensure all teaching is of the highest quality
 - continuing to provide staff with good opportunities for development and training including through peer observation.
- Review the use of assessment data to avoid repetition and track the rates of progress of all pupils more effectively.

Inspection judgements

Achievement of pupils

Outstanding

- The school has been successful in raising pupils' levels of achievement from good to outstanding since the last inspection. All groups of pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, make continual sustained progress in their reading, writing and mathematical skills during their time at the school. Pupils achieve above national expectations, especially in mathematics and English, by the time they leave the school.
- Pupils join the school with varying educational experiences and at different times. After an initial detailed baseline assessment the staff then track and review each pupil against their own individual targets very regularly. Pupils are very well supported to achieve their potential academically through this careful monitoring. Those requiring additional support are identified at an early stage and appropriate help is given.
- Standards in English are exceptionally high throughout the school because pupils are given challenging work. This, coupled with the very high expectations for each pupil, ensures that all pupils are always working to the best of their abilities and this enhances their achievement. As a result all pupils read very competently by the time they leave the school. Very firm foundations are laid in the Early Years Foundation Stage, and these are then built upon as pupils are heard to read very frequently, with parents and carers involved in this process. Younger pupils have a very good knowledge of letters and sounds and the majority of older pupils are highly articulate and passionate readers. The school library is well stocked and pupils have a clear idea of how to find information, for example by using a glossary and thesaurus.
- Mathematical achievement is also high, again due to high expectations and thorough grounding in the basic mathematical skills and processes and frequent practice as the pupils move through the school.
- The most-able pupils are making rapid progress; this is reflected in their high levels of achievement in comparison to national expectations. Those with identified needs are very well supported both in class and through individual and group specialised support, including those identified with dyslexia, who are making sustained progress in overcoming their barriers to learning and achieving good results.
- By the time they leave pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education with many gaining places at selective schools of their choice, including many with scholarships.

Quality of teaching

Outstanding

- Much of the teaching in all key stages over time is outstanding and never less than consistently good. Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can do and they plan motivating and interesting activities, which engage and enthuse all the pupils, including those with identified needs.
- Teachers use their questioning techniques skilfully to extend pupils' learning. They explain carefully at the beginning of lessons what pupils are expected to learn in their work and set a high level of challenge to help them achieve this. Lessons are made fun with pupils using a wide range of practical learning experiences. These range from the wealth of planned practical activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage to enjoyable ways of learning about adjectives in English through playing charades and rounding up numbers in mathematics using 'real money'.
- There is an excellent balance of activities for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, some of which are led by the teacher, others driven by the children themselves. The play activities are purposeful and every opportunity is taken to enhance and accelerate the young children's learning using the very well-equipped inside and outdoor areas.
- The wide variety of approaches used by teachers enables them to respond to pupils' different learning needs. In response the pupils are very enthusiastic about their learning, confirming that they 'love doing maths... art is great fun... sports are fantastic here'.

- Pupils at Airthrie School are provided with very many opportunities for communication, for example talking with partners, peer marking with verbal evaluation, and answering questions. They are confident to ask when they do not understand and to give their considered opinion if they differ in views from the teacher. For example, in a mathematics lesson older pupils debated different ways of solving problems in complex equations, questioning the teacher's methods. These activities result in pupils being highly articulate and confident speakers.
- Teachers are well qualified, experienced, have good subject knowledge and many are specialists. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education as they are used to a range of different staff. Pupils are given good access to a higher level of knowledge and understanding.
- Marking is very regular and gives pupils constructive feedback on how to improve their work. A recently introduced marking system is well understood by the pupils who have made useful contributions, and many of their ideas have been implemented. Homework is used well to support and extend learning.
- Assessment during lessons is effective with very regular checking of pupils' learning and understanding. The overall assessment of pupils' progress is rigorous and well documented. However, the assessment data are somewhat cumbersome and repetitive and could be streamlined to enable staff to track the rates of progress of all pupils more effectively.
- The curriculum has been developed considerably since the last inspection. It is very well documented and covers a wide range of subjects, such as French, music and sports, many taught by specialist staff. These combined activities have a very positive impact on the pupils and contribute to their excellent academic achievement and enjoyment of school.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils around the school, in the playground and in lessons is outstanding. This means pupils' learning is not disrupted and they are highly motivated to learn. There is a very positive feeling of shared enthusiasm for and love of learning across all ages at the school, including the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Relationships are excellent at all levels with an atmosphere of mutual respect and courtesy between both staff and pupils and among the pupils themselves. Pupils have high levels of confidence and self-esteem and this is reflected in their very high attendance levels.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school as they confirmed through discussions. They are motivated to learn and most take a pride in presenting their work to very high standards. They are highly articulate and pupils of all ages very much enjoyed engaging the inspectors in conversation. They are very enthusiastic about the school, making comments such as, 'learning is fun here... we all know each other... we are a big family'.
- The school house system is named after forests and the pupils eagerly participate in house events and earn 'leaf points'. They enjoy helping to care for the poultry and rabbits who are housed in the playground. During the inspection they delighted in showing off the newly hatched ducklings.
- Pupils confirmed that they are aware of how to keep themselves safe and of different types of bullying, including cyber bullying of which they are aware. They expressed confidence that the staff always deal with any small problems, which they said are rare, very effectively. The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- The older pupils enjoy taking responsibility, for example as playground buddies, organising charitable fund raising activities and hearing the younger pupils read.
- Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the excellent behaviour and safety of pupils in the school; many parents and carers confirmed this during discussions with inspectors, and through the online questionnaire and many emails. They spoke very warmly about the 'Airthrie effect', which promotes in their children a very enthusiastic, positive attitude towards learning. Parents and carers themselves feel very well supported through their time at the school; they confirm that staff always have time to speak to them and positively engage with the

whole family.

- The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and enables pupils' to thrive in a highly supportive, caring and nurturing learning environment. Pupils are receptive to new ideas, have a well-developed knowledge of their own and other cultures and racial harmony is effectively promoted.
- The school has a close connection with the local Church of England and they use the church for festivals. The vicar visits the school regularly and leads assemblies. Pupils also study world religions in religious education and visit other places of worship locally, with older pupils visiting a synagogue during the inspection.
- Leaders ensure that when controversial and political issues are considered steps have been taken to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

- The quality of leadership and management is outstanding and underpins the school's continuous drive for excellence. Along with her husband who is a joint proprietor, the headteacher has run the school for many years and she shares her ambitions with the staff. She works extremely closely with her senior staff, some of whom have been appointed recently and have wide experience of management. The leaders are very passionate about continually driving the school forward and have very high expectations of pupils and staff. All staff, in their responses to the inspection questionnaire, state unanimously that they are proud to work at the school. Parents and carers demonstrated through their responses to the questionnaire, discussions with inspectors and emails that they are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and its ethos.
- Senior leaders have developed effective arrangements for the review of teaching, learning and pupils' progress. The evaluation of the school's effectiveness is robust and accurate, and it contributes to a well-informed and focused school improvement plan. Senior staff monitor closely the quality of teaching and staff development. As a result, all staff know their personal strengths and areas for improvement accurately and have good opportunities for professional development. There is a supportive and open culture within the school.
- The leadership has achieved excellence in teaching, the curriculum and pupils' achievement; it has made many improvements across all aspects of the school's work since the last inspection.
- The detailed school curriculum promotes an eagerness in the pupils to learn. As a result they make sustained progress both academically and in creative and sporting activities. The curriculum effectively promotes the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils through a rich and varied range of activities. The curriculum is also greatly enhanced by a very rich and varied range of extra-curricular activities, which include lunchtime and after-school clubs, many and varied curricular off-site visits and visitors to the school.
- The school's safeguarding systems are robust and maintained to a very high standard. There is excellent attention paid to detail and the implementation of all the regulations, including the statutory requirements for the Early Years Foundation Stage. All staff have been checked for their suitability to work with children and the information is recorded on the required single central register of staff appointments.
- The premises and accommodation are very well maintained and provide a stimulating learning environment, including the very attractive outdoor play area. All the required information is provided for parents and carers, including a suitable complaints procedure.
- The headteacher and staff provide high-quality role models for the pupils and demonstrate excellent dedication, commitment and a consistent capacity for continued development.
- The proprietors have ensured that all the regulations for independent schools and statutory safeguarding and welfare requirements for the Early Year Foundation Stage are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	115799
Inspection number	443461
DfE registration number	916/6037

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	Primary school
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	169
Number of part time pupils	29
Proprietor	Mrs A E Sullivan and Mr M J Sullivan
Headteacher	Mrs A E Sullivan
Date of previous school inspection	14 November 2008
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,655 – £8,175
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