

Ash Trees Academy

Bowes Road, Billingham TS23 2BU

Inspection dates

26–27 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- School leaders, in partnership with the trust, have brought about improvement to the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. As a result, outcomes for pupils have also improved.
- The head of academy knows the school well and has a clear vision for the future. Her close working partnership with the executive headteacher has enabled her to develop an effective plan for the future.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together to ensure that the complex needs of pupils are met both inside and outside the classroom.
- Staff know pupils well, understand their needs and are skilful at ensuring that they are nearly always well supported in the classroom. This ensures that pupils make good progress from a range of different starting points.
- Overall, the quality of teaching across the school is good. However, in one or two areas on both sites, teaching is inconsistent. Resources, particularly in mathematics, are not effectively used to support pupils' learning. The most able pupils do not always get sufficient opportunity to complete longer pieces of work.
- Children in the Reception class make good progress from a wide range of starting points.
- The curriculum is carefully designed to meet individual pupils' needs. Staff make regular checks on how well pupils are learning. These checks inform them of any changes they may need to make to planned work.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare are very clear priorities for all staff. Parents who spoke to the inspection team agreed with this view and shared their pleasure at the progress their children have made since coming to the school.
- Pupils' behaviour at the time of the inspection was good overall. This was evident in the calm atmosphere in most classrooms and at playtime.
- Behaviour records kept by the school show that incidents of difficult behaviour are effectively logged and are followed up appropriately. Often these incidents are linked to a pupil in crisis and school leaders and staff work hard to reduce the impact on other pupils.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection were very positive about the work of the school. Some who responded on Parent View, or through the Ofsted texting service, were less so. The inspection team followed up all issues raised by parents and concluded that better communication was needed between school leaders and a small number of parents.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency in the quality of teaching and learning by ensuring that:
 - the most able pupils have more opportunities to write longer pieces of work
 - appropriate resources to support pupils' mathematical learning are used consistently in all areas of the school.
- Increase opportunities for senior leaders and trustees to communicate with the small number of hard-to-reach families who remain concerned by actions taken by the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school leadership team has a clear understanding of the strengths and areas in need of improvement within the school. This has enabled leaders to put in place effective plans for future improvements.
- Since the last inspection, the school leadership team has worked closely with members of the trust. As a result, more effective checks have been put in place to monitor pupils' progress over time. The quality of teaching and learning is now more closely monitored and regular feedback is given to each member of staff. These actions have ensured that the quality of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils have continued to improve across the school.
- All staff in the school have their performance measured through the annual performance management system. The system for teachers and teaching assistants is closely linked to targets identified on the school's improvement plan. The system also enables staff to develop their skills. It enables senior leaders to improve the quality of teaching and learning further by rewarding staff for improvements in their performance.
- The school has a caring ethos which extends to staff as well as pupils. Staff spoken to compared working at the school to 'being part of a large family'. Actions such as the introduction of a 'well-being group' to promote social engagement demonstrate the value and appreciation leaders give to their work.
- The role middle leaders play in bringing about improvement has increased since the previous inspection. For example, middle leaders now produce individual self-evaluation plans for subject areas. These have helped to pinpoint changes needed and contribute to bringing about further improvements.
- The school has developed a bespoke curriculum which is delivered over three years. Currently, the curriculum comprises overarching themes which are then developed to meet the needs of all pupils. At the time of the inspection, the curriculum theme was 'Me, myself and I'. This wide theme lends itself well to a diverse range of different work, from 'myself and my family' in early years to 'proud of where we live' in key stage 2 geography.
- The curriculum is further enhanced by a wide range of different visits and activities. Destinations included a residential visit to an outdoor pursuits centre for key stage 2 pupils. This enabled them to experience hill walking, a high-rise challenge, archery and orienteering. A diverse range of visitors, including fire officers and refuse collectors, has enabled pupils to develop an understanding of fire safety and recycling. Experiences such as these contribute well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- School leaders use the funding they receive to support disadvantaged pupils creatively.

Some funding is used to accelerate pupils' learning through increased staffing and opportunities to learn in small groups. Funding is also used to enable pupils to join in extra-curricular activities, for example by providing extra staffing for residential visits. This ensures that disadvantaged pupils of all abilities are supported to make the best progress possible from their starting points.

- All pupils who attend the school have recognised special educational needs and/or disabilities. School leaders and members of the trust have close links with the local authority and ensure that funding is used appropriately to meet the needs of pupils across the school.
- Physical education and sport premium funding is effectively used to develop a range of different sports in school. School leaders' underlying aim is to ensure that pupils are given opportunities to try sports they would not usually access and develop an understanding of healthy eating. Specialist sports leaders and staff offer pupils a range of different sporting activities, including cricket, gymnastics and horse riding.
- Overall, parents have a positive view of the work of the school. Parents of children spoken to during the inspection were particularly positive about the work of staff. Comments such as, 'Staff are really approachable', and, 'I can talk to everyone about any problems I have' reflected their views well.
- However, responses received through Ofsted's online text service from a small number of parents were less positive. The inspection team followed up all issues raised by this group of parents. The inspection team concluded that school leaders need to improve communication between themselves and this group of parents in order that issues raised by parents can be addressed promptly and misunderstandings can be reduced.

Governance of the school

- The trustees know the school well and have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school.
- Trustees have a range of skills and knowledge about both governance and the local community. Minutes from trustee meetings show that trustees hold leaders effectively to account, particularly regarding pupils' progress.
- The members of the trust and trustees have played a key role in moving the school forward. Their clear focus on continuous improvement and support for senior leaders has ensured that the quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection.
- Trustees are very clear about their responsibility to ensure that the school uses the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils effectively. They support the way in which funding is spent, but also keep a sharp eye on the progress of disadvantaged pupils overall.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Safeguarding pupils is a key priority for all members of staff. This ensures that a strong

culture of safeguarding prevails across the school.

- Regular training and update sessions ensure that all staff are aware of current legislation and are clear about what to do for a child in need.
- New members of staff receive comprehensive training on safeguarding on arrival and this enables them to feel confident of safeguarding systems when they start work.
- The head of the academy takes a lead in safeguarding and has put in place a clear and logical system for referrals which enables staff to share their concerns quickly. Records show that close working partnerships with other professionals have successfully supported families and pupils.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff are very skilled at recognising and meeting the needs of pupils in their care. The school's focus on providing an individual approach to learning in a nurturing environment enables pupils of all ages and abilities to become successful learners.
- Staff constantly strive to make opportunities for learning even better. They regularly evaluate carefully how to improve their practice and planning and, as a result, have improved outcomes for pupils since the previous inspection.
- The constant focus on meeting the individual needs of pupils is apparent across the school. For example, a group of pupils who have profound and multiple learning difficulties were experiencing through touch, taste and music the joy of attending a teddy bears' picnic. Staff carefully discussed the outcomes of each action taken to engage pupils. This led to small changes which increased pupils' ability to explore and experience and learn.
- Staff in the vast majority of classrooms work very closely together to plan learning. This leads to a calm working environment in which adults are clear about the roles they play and are knowledgeable and skilled at asking questions which support pupils' learning.
- Pupils love books. Some most-able pupils develop the skills required for reading. However, many just enjoy listening to stories or sharing a book with an adult.
- Mathematics is taught to all pupils in school. Many pupils spoken to during the inspection said that they found doing mathematics hard, although some said that it was their favourite subject. Observations of learning made by the inspection team showed that sometimes pupils were not given sufficient practical apparatus to support, for example, counting skills. This led, at times, to pupils making mistakes and occasionally becoming frustrated.
- The most able pupils enjoy writing in a variety of different ways. Work in pupils' books showed clearly the good progress they have made over time. However, work in books also showed that, at times, there was insufficient opportunity offered to these pupils to undertake longer pieces of writing in subjects other than English. This limits their progress overall.
- Teaching staff are adept at using signs and symbols to communicate with pupils. These

enable pupils to make their views known in lessons and outside the classroom. A basic set of symbols given to all visitors reassures pupils and enables them to communicate confidently.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Senior leaders have created a caring ethos within school which extends to pupils, parents and staff. Pupils are taught the importance of caring for each other and this is reflected in the caring attitudes observed during the inspection.
- Developing polite and positive attitudes towards each other and adults also contributes to pupils' development of spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Learning how to make the right choices also contributes to pupils' understanding of British values and how to be a good citizen.
- Senior leaders ensure that the well-being of every child is a key priority. As a result, pupils whose personal development and well-being are a concern are clearly identified and supported to succeed.
- Staff are skilled and knowledgeable about individual pupils' needs and take a highly nurturing approach to all pupils. These actions have contributed to pupils' excellent behaviour and personal development across the school.
- Pupils told inspectors that they enjoy coming to school and that staff keep them safe. Some also said that staff helped them to learn how to keep safe when crossing the road or using a computer.
- Pupils spoken to were aware of bullying and understand that it should not happen to them. They also were clear about what to do if someone were to hurt them or call them names.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
 - Behaviour records kept by school leaders show that the vast majority of pupils behave well in school. A small number arrive in school in crisis and demonstrate difficult behaviour. These small numbers of pupils often account for a high number of recorded incidents.
 - Staff work closely and successfully with pupils and their parents to reduce the number of times pupils go into crisis. Often over a short period of time, incidents of difficult behaviour reduce dramatically and pupils become more settled as they engage with the routines and expectations of school.
- At the time of the inspection, attendance was close to national expectations for primary

schools. Last year, there was a small dip in attendance levels overall; however, this coincided with an increase in the number of pupils who have significant medical needs joining the school.

- The work of the family and pupil support worker has contributed significantly to an overall rise in attendance since the previous inspection.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress overall across the school from a wide range of starting points. Staff and leaders carefully check their progress against challenging targets which match their needs well.
- The curriculum is tailored to the needs of pupils and offers them opportunities to learn and develop skills in mathematics and English in line with their levels of ability. Other subjects are also taught through overarching themes. Work in books and photographs taken by staff show that pupils clearly enjoy learning and work hard to complete tasks set for them by staff.
- Staff are knowledgeable about the learning needs of pupils. For example, pupils who have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder are often provided with a structured learning environment with few distractions where they can learn calmly. This enables this group of pupils to make good progress overall.
- Current information shows that there is little difference in the progress made by pupils with a range of different identified needs. This is because learning set across the school is skilfully and accurately matched to individual pupils' needs.
- All pupils have identified special educational needs and/or disabilities which are supported by an education, health and care plan. Targets set for pupils' learning reflect the needs identified on the pupils' plans and this enables them to make good progress academically, socially, emotionally and physically.
- Extra funding received by school to support the needs of disadvantaged pupils is used creatively and prudently to meet the extra needs of these pupils. As a result, this group of pupils also make good progress overall.
- The small group of most-able pupils make good progress alongside other groups. However, they make slightly less progress in writing because they are not offered sufficient opportunities to practise writing longer pieces of work.

Early years provision

Good

- Teachers and the other staff understand the needs of the children well. Staff check children's knowledge and understanding when they join the school, and frequently throughout the year.
- Early checks on children's starting points are carried out in partnership with the nursery provider. This ensures that a secure and accurate starting point is established.
- Activities are meticulously planned so that children's learning is focused directly on their needs and, as a result, children with a wide range of needs settle quickly and

begin to understand the classroom routines.

- All staff are very skilled at developing children's vocabulary and language skills through songs, questioning and conversations. Children are encouraged to express themselves to each other and adults using a range of different signs and symbols and speech where appropriate.
- Staff have close working partnerships with other professionals such as occupational therapists and speech and language therapists. These support staff in their understanding of the sensory needs of children, as well as providing advice to develop children's language skills. The success of their work is measured through children's readiness to learn and behaviour.
- Children's welfare and safeguarding needs are given a high priority within the early years unit. Staff have completed a wide range of training to ensure that medication is administered safely and prescribed feeding routines are followed closely.
- Strong leadership is provided to the unit from the deputy headteacher and teachers who work in the three Reception classes. The effectiveness of their partnership could clearly be seen in the calm and well-ordered learning environment in the unit.

School details

Unique reference number	141345
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	10036389

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

Type of school	Special school
School category	Academy
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	154
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Nick Hurn
Head of Academy	Wendy Coates
Telephone number	01642 563712
Website	www.ashtrees.org
Email address	ashtrees@ascenttrust.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The school meets the needs of primary-aged pupils in the Stockton area who have profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, communication difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder.
- The school is located on two sites. Younger pupils attend the Rievaulx Avenue site, and older pupils and a small number of younger pupils attend the Bowes Road site.
- The school received academy status in November 2014 when it joined Ascent Academies' Trust.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who attend is in line with that in other primary schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in classrooms across the school. Some observations were carried out with members of the senior leadership team.
- A range of school documents, including safeguarding documentation, pupil progress information and the school's curriculum planning, was analysed by the inspection team.
- Meetings were held with pupils, senior leaders, middle leaders, members of staff, the chair of the board of trustees and three members of the academy trust.
- Informal meetings were held with five parents. The inspection team took into account the feedback from 27 parents given via Ofsted's online texting service and 31 parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Patricia Head	Ofsted Inspector
Sara Roe	Ofsted Inspector

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