

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
[www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)



4 December 2017

Jane Booth  
Headteacher  
Ash Field Academy  
Broad Avenue  
Leicester  
Leicestershire  
LE5 4PY

Dear Mrs Booth

### **Short inspection of Ash Field Academy**

Following my visit to the school on 21 November 2017 with Julian Scholefield, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in June 2013.

### **This school continues to be outstanding.**

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your deep commitment to the school and exceptional leadership is reflected in the quality of support you provide for the pupils and their families. Your strong track record of success means that you are held in high esteem by other schools and professionals.

You have strengthened the leadership team and ensured strong leadership at all levels. By further developing the role of middle leaders, you have established depth and consistency across the school. The pathway and curriculum leaders feel they have been given greater clarity of purpose and have the opportunity to innovate. Teaching assistants and their leads fully understand their duties and level of responsibilities. All staff are very well supported by the school's high-quality professional development and training.

The work of the teaching school provides opportunities for pupils themselves to be involved in training and presentations which they enjoy. It supports staff development within the school, as well as providing a high-quality offer to schools in the alliance and beyond. Ash Field staff take every opportunity to reflect on their training and the experiences they are offered. They have a real thirst to learn and are keen to put new knowledge into providing even better care and learning for pupils within the school.

Your self-evaluation is accurate and clearly defines the school's many strengths. You and your staff are always looking to improve the school further and have very clear plans for the future. Your passion in providing the best quality care and education for each and every pupil permeates throughout the school. Staff work tirelessly to ensure an outstanding provision for pupils.

Since the last inspection, pupil numbers have grown year-on-year together with an increase in the complexity of their needs. The leadership team have responded by providing specific training to ensure that staff have the skills and understanding needed to work with their pupils. The appointment of the Ash Field nurse together with the work of the well-being team has proved to be very beneficial in supporting pupils and their families.

Pupils are at the heart of what staff do each day and are always put first. Teachers expertly plan sessions so that pupils of all abilities make outstanding progress over time. Staff go to great lengths to ensure that pupils can access all learning activities. Pupils told us they love coming to school, are happy and very well cared for. Their behaviour around the school and in lessons continues to be exemplary. Pupils are kind and respectful towards each other and their staff.

Parents say how delighted they are that their children attend this school and the vast majority would recommend the school to other parents. One parent expressed the view of many, commenting that Ash Field is an exceptional school with incredible staff who go the extra mile and do over and above what is expected of them.

As a result of the work you have undertaken on the three learning pathways together with your development of assessment, the curriculum now meets pupils' needs even better than before. For example, learning is developed for each pupil, reinforced by the six weekly progress meetings enabling teachers to finely tune the activities they plan in response to how well pupils are achieving. As a result, pupils across all pathways and in all key stages make excellent progress.

You are passionate about the wide variety of activities that the school provides for pupils which includes residential visits. Pupils are keen to engage in new activities and there is a great sense of learning being fun across the school. Older pupils are given a range of opportunities to learn life skills and to take part in enterprise activities in preparation for their next steps when they leave the school.

The school learning environment is warm and welcoming and is carefully looked after and respected by everyone. The recent classroom extensions and refurbishment have enhanced this further. Your strong vision for excellence is followed by all. Staff organise their classrooms to maximise learning for their pupils and provide a wide range of resources to support and stimulate learning.

Previously, inspectors asked you to make sure lessons were organised so that all pupils were fully involved in activities without waiting for their turn. Also, that

activities for pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties were always pitched at the right level. These aspects have been fully addressed. Since the last inspection leaders have worked extensively on developing curriculum and assessment within the three learning pathways. This has enabled staff to support pupils' individual needs even more effectively. However, you rightly acknowledge that the school needs to create opportunities to benchmark judgements about pupil progress with partners outside the school.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and careful checks are made by staff and governors. The single central record is kept up to date and all necessary checks are made when appointing new staff. Pre-employment and induction training provides a strong starting point for incoming staff, especially those new to the school environment.

Child protection records are very well maintained. All staff receive regular training and updates. They are aware of how to make referrals using the school's system. Partnerships with local agencies are strong and very well established. Staff are meticulous in how they maintain records and administer medications for pupils. The introduction of the school nurse has meant little learning time is lost due to medical needs being met. This has reinforced the school's safety procedures.

Staff know their pupils exceptionally well. Any concerns about pupils' welfare are swiftly addressed. Staff ensure that pupils, including those who have communication barriers, have every opportunity to express any worries and concerns. Pupils say they feel safe and are kept safe by staff.

In discussions with senior leaders, convincing evidence was provided about pupils' attendance. It is clear that staff do all they can to make sure that pupils attend regularly. However, for some pupils, due to medical reasons, attendance is not consistent. Leaders acknowledge the need to develop their work further to try to improve attendance and make provision for pupils who are unable to attend school due to their health.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, inspectors focused on the key lines of enquiry: how well leaders and staff ensure that pupils are safe; how successfully leaders are tackling the area for improvement from the previous inspection; how effectively leaders at all levels monitor the progress pupils make across the curriculum; how well the curriculum supports the learning needs of all pupils to enable them to achieve outstanding outcomes.
- The assessment and curriculum reviews have led to greater individual support of pupils' learning. Personal goals and plans are designed to ensure that pupils make substantial progress over time. Their learning is carefully observed and recorded by classroom staff who ensure that next steps are made clear. Teaching

assistants are highly skilled in providing valuable feedback to pupils at the end of lessons.

- The school offers an extensive range of learning opportunities which include the arts, sports and music. Lessons and activities are designed around the learning needs of individual pupils. The work of the well-being, communication and movement teams greatly support pupils to engage in and enjoy their learning. Therapies are integrated into individual learning plans to ensure the best outcomes for each pupil.
- Roles, including through membership of the school council, enable pupils to develop their self-confidence. A broad range of extra-curricular activities, including arts and craft, singing, computer, yoga and relaxation, help to enrich pupils' lives.
- Pupil premium funding is used to support both individual pupils and wider school initiatives. Consequently, in common with other groups of pupils, disadvantaged pupils, including the most able of them, make exceptionally strong progress. This is because the tailored curriculum allows pupils to overcome any barriers they have in their learning. The staff are clear where each pupil is in their learning and carefully plan the next steps that need to be taken.
- The school excels in developing pupils' communication and movement skills. It provides an effective programme of support. Children get off to a very strong start when they join the school. Well-embedded routines with visual supports ensure that every opportunity is a learning experience. Specialist staff ensure that programmes of support are understood by class staff and are effective in meeting each individual pupil's needs.
- Teachers use interactive technology effectively to help pupils understand their learning. Signs, symbols, gestures and the use of real objects and photographs, are a regular part of everyday lessons throughout the school. Inspectors saw pupils using different forms of communication when moving from one area of the school to another to help them prepare for their next activity. Every pupil has a means of asking questions and expressing choice due to the excellent methods available to help pupils communicate.
- Leaders monitor teaching and learning with increased rigour. Checks on teaching are carried out by leaders in small teams to ensure that judgements are reached with clarity. The involvement of middle leaders in this process is helping to ensure further accuracy and enable improvements and interventions to be put in place swiftly.
- Careers education is well established and there is an extensive focus on preparation for college and employment. Lessons which focus on key skills and life skills are delivered as part of the curriculum. You have established excellent links with colleges and a range of agencies to support pupils' transition. Pupils' work in their folders reflects an excellent understanding of the areas covered as part of their accredited coursework.
- Governance has continued to improve and strengthen. The board of trustees is very well led and has a strong professional relationship with senior leaders. Members know the school's strengths, areas for development and priorities, and

are well equipped to provide effective support and challenge in the continuous drive for improvement. Members have high aspirations. They ensure that the board maintains a wide range of skills and they play a full part in decision-making, for example in appointing key staff and in supporting pupils through use of the pupil premium funding. The board of trustees keeps a close eye on the school's finances to ensure the most effective use of resources and best opportunities are provided for the pupils.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current procedures to improve attendance and support for learning when pupils are absent from school due to illness are strengthened
- opportunities to externally benchmark judgements about pupil progress are created.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Leicester. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Lynda Morgan  
**Ofsted Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

Inspectors held meetings with you, other leaders, four members of the board of trustees and a group of staff. They also held telephone conversations with the school's raising achievement partner, a headteacher of a partner school and four parents.

Inspectors visited classrooms with senior leaders and looked at pupils' work. They spoke to pupils formally and informally and heard pupils read. They considered the five responses to Parent View and the evaluations from the school's own recent parent survey.

Various school documents were scrutinised, including safeguarding records, assessment information about pupils' progress, information about behaviour, attendance and safety, the school's self-evaluation and development plan. Inspectors also looked at information published on the school's website.