

Ashbrooke School

Ashbrooke Street, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7JA

Inspection dates

13–15 March 2018

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The school's board, which governs the school, and senior leaders ensure that the school complies with all of the independent school standards.
- The headteacher and senior leaders model their determination and ambition to provide high levels of care and education for all pupils. Staff and pupils are motivated by this. As a result, the school is improving.
- Senior leaders use the information they gather about pupils' progress and well-being to personalise learning and support programmes. As a result, pupils learn well and grow in self-confidence.
- Leaders ensure that arrangements to keep pupils safeguarded are fit for purpose and effective. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and well.
- Pupils learn to manage themselves increasingly well, as they settle into school. Most pupils attend well and improve their attendance. A few pupils do not attend regularly enough.
- Teachers know their pupils very well. Teachers have strong subject knowledge. They plan interesting and engaging lessons that support pupils' learning well. As a result, pupils make good progress across a range of subjects.
- Teachers have successfully focused on re-engaging pupils in learning and developing their speaking and reading skills.
- Leaders recognise that more work is needed to develop skills in writing, especially at key stage 4. Pupils' writing is rich in ideas, but some pupils do not write accurately enough.
- Supportive communication strategies for pupils with autistic spectrum condition are not used consistently to develop their written skills as well as in other parts of their learning.
- Senior leaders and governors check regularly how well pupils learn and make progress. Governors challenge and support leaders effectively to make continuous improvements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop and embed the school's work to improve pupils' attendance further and re-engage the small number of pupils who do not attend regularly enough.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - developing staff skills further so that they all make consistent use of a range of communication strategies that support the needs of pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder
 - developing further strategies which enable pupils to practise, consolidate and develop their skills by writing accurately and frequently, across a wide range of subjects and topics, particularly at key stage 4.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher has a clear and determined vision to provide the highest standards of care for all pupils, so that they flourish and achieve well in a safe environment. The proprietor, through the board that governs the school, supports and challenges the headteacher and other leaders to bring his vision to life. The proprietor ensures that all the independent school standards are met consistently.
- Staff feel valued. They are committed to their pupils and live out the school's values in their day-to-day interactions with pupils. As a consequence, pupils grow in self-esteem, feel safe in the care of their staff, and make good progress in their learning.
- Leaders ensure that staff have regular opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need to meet pupils' needs. As a result, staff value their professional development; they work closely together, with a shared endeavour to do the best they can for pupils.
- Senior leaders use an effective framework of monitoring activities to check on the quality of teaching, and on pupils' personal development and achievement. They work effectively with a range of teaching and therapeutic staff to refine highly personalised programmes for pupils' well-being and learning. As a consequence, pupils grow in confidence and begin to achieve well after a period of settling in.
- Leaders ensure that they provide a broad and balanced curriculum, which supports pupils' learning well across a range of areas. The curriculum provides access to a range of appropriate external qualifications in key stage 4, which helps prepare pupils well for the next steps in their education and training. Leaders listen carefully to pupils' views and amend the curriculum to meet their personal interests and needs. For example, qualifications in media and motor vehicle maintenance, as well as other enrichment activities, such as horse riding, have been introduced as a result of consultation with pupils.
- The work of the school to support pupils' personal development is well considered. The programme for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is effectively led. It provides a rich range of learning opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of the society they live in. It provides insight into how governance works and the role of public services. This prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and respect for others. This reflects the school's work to promote diversity and equality in the school. Pupils learn about risks to their well-being and how to manage them. This, along with their regular attendance at school and re-engagement with learning, helps keep them safe.
- Leaders work with a wide range of outside agencies and teams to re-engage pupils in learning, develop their self-esteem, and promote their social and emotional well-being. Pastoral leaders use information from other teams to coordinate support in school to promote pupils' development and achievement. As a consequence, pupils attend and behave well, and make good progress overall. Pupils say that they attend and learn much better than they did in their previous schools. Nevertheless, despite the school's best efforts, a small number of pupils do not attend regularly enough. In response, the board and headteacher are further extending their work with families and carers, through the recent appointment of a family liaison officer.

Governance

- The board maintains high levels of challenge and support for the school by:
 - ensuring that safeguarding and pupils' safety remain the highest priority for the school at all times. The child protection policy on the school's website is well informed and considered. It takes into account the current statutory guidance of the Secretary of State
 - setting a clear strategic direction with the headteacher to secure pupils' well-being and achievement through high-quality pastoral care and strong teaching, learning and assessment
 - visiting the school frequently to gather the views of pupils and checking records of their attendance, well-being and progress
 - ensuring that it is well informed about the school's performance and development, including by making its own checks.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. They keep pupils safe and safeguarded and are fit for purpose. The proprietor ensures that all the required checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils are carried out and recorded carefully. The proprietor and headteacher ensure that all staff have extensive and up-to-date child protection training. As a result, staff know and can recognise the signs of abuse and neglect. They know what to do if they have a concern. Leaders actively encourage staff to raise even minor concerns, so that, if required, early help for pupils can be put in place in a timely manner.
- Staff establish positive relationships with pupils and are vigilant for any signs that cause them concern. Pupils say that they have a trusted adult with whom they can talk, if they have a concern or worry. Pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, and grow in self-esteem as they settle into the school. Alongside their improved rates of attendance, this helps keep them safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers and classroom staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils' needs and their own good subject knowledge to plan lessons that engage and interest pupils. Teaching is well focused to meet pupils' needs and helps them to close the gaps in their learning effectively. As a result, pupils participate in their learning increasingly well as they settle into the school.
- In-depth assessment of pupils' prior achievement and barriers to learning on entry to the school form the basis of teachers' planning for good progress from these starting points. Staff use their periodic and day-to-day checks on pupils' learning to plan activities that challenge pupils. Staff are adept at amending support for pupils, if they are struggling with their learning tasks, and move them ever forward. As a consequence, pupils apply themselves and make good progress.
- Teachers work closely with classroom support staff, deploying them with skill to provide

personalised support and challenge to pupils. Staff build positive relationships, which help pupils focus well on their learning.

- Teachers are effective in using pupils' interests to engage and develop their reading skills. Alongside focused work on teaching phonics, effective use of the reading schemes brings about strong improvement in pupils' skills. Pupils show that they can reapply their skills across a range of subjects. They read with increasing fluency and understanding.
- Teaching is effective in engaging pupils in writing. They enjoy capturing their knowledge and experiences in a range of tasks. Overall, pupils improve the quality of their writing well. Teaching of literary texts at key stage 4 is effective. Pupils show good understanding of the characters and events in their texts. However, pupils' progress across key stage 4 is not quite as strong as it is in key stage 2. This is because teaching has not fully addressed the gaps in pupils' skills to write accurately with good spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- Teachers do not always make the most effective use of visual and other communication strategies to promote rapid progress in writing for pupils who have autistic spectrum condition.
- Across a wider range of subjects, pupils make strong progress from their starting points and across key stages 2 to 4, because teachers prepare well-considered activities that meet pupils' needs, challenge them and hold their interest. Staff are adept at using questions to check that pupils have not misunderstand and help them develop their thinking further. This promotes the strong progress seen in a wide sample of pupils' work across key stages 2 to 4.
- Teachers and staff maintain high expectations of pupils' conduct. This helps pupils apply themselves to their work. Staff are skilled at helping pupils to refocus on their learning, when they lose concentration for a short time.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils grow in self-esteem as staff help them to reconnect with learning. Interesting and engaging lessons help pupils participate in discussions about their own ideas. As a consequence, pupils feel valued and they enjoy their learning, including in a range of enrichment activities and visits out of school.
- The strong and positive relationships between staff and pupils enable pupils to feel safe in school. They know that staff care for them and say that they feel safe in school. Pupils inspectors talked with say that there is someone they trust, with whom they can talk if they have a concern. Pupils are confident that they will get the help they need.
- Pupils grow in self-awareness and awareness of others through the personal development programme. As a consequence, they have a good understanding of the harm that bullying causes. They know that it is wrong. With very rare exceptions, the overwhelming majority of parents and carers also speak very highly of care shown for their children. They are full of praise for the 'difference the school has made'.
- The close integration of therapeutic interventions, pastoral care and day-to-day learning

in school provides pupils with a framework of support and expertise in resolving issues. This underpins and promotes their emotional well-being. As a consequence, pupils begin to build their personal resilience as they settle into the school, and grow in confidence as young adults.

- Staff model respect for each other and for pupils. As a result, pupils show increasingly their ability to recognise and respect differences between them. The well-considered programme for PSHE helps pupils to develop this respect for others who have different backgrounds and family circumstances from their own. This helps prepare pupils well for life in modern Britain, and reflects the effective work done to promote diversity and equality.
- Whenever pupils reveal inappropriate attitudes, staff use this as a learning point to help pupils consider and reflect on their views. For example, a highly effective lesson on stereotypes helped pupils to understand that their views are sometimes negatively affected by some of the messages given in the media.
- Pupils learn about the risks to their well-being posed by the misuse of drugs and alcohol. They learn about healthy eating through food technology and the importance of physical activity to keep well. Pupils are helped to understand the risks that digital technologies and social media can pose. This helps them keep safe and well.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils, many of whom have disrupted histories of education, settle well into school life. Incidents of misbehaviour diminish quickly as pupils develop the skills to interact positively with each other, and with adults and their high expectations for learning.
- Pupils build strong relationships with staff showing them and their peers respect. As a result, they learn to manage themselves increasingly well. Conduct is positive during lessons and around the school. At lunchtime, staff and pupils enjoy conversation together in a calm and orderly atmosphere.
- When pupils struggle to manage themselves, effective supervision and sensitive responses from staff enable pupils to calm themselves and re-engage with learning quickly.
- The vast majority of pupils maintain and improve their attendance at the school, often from very low starting points on entry to the school. Some pupils have not attended school for some time before taking up a place at this school. This reflects their recognition that staff care for them, and work hard with them to settle into the school. Nevertheless, a small number of pupils do not attend regularly enough, despite the increasingly focused efforts of leaders and staff to support their re-engagement in school life.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress in their learning across a wide range of subjects.
- Irrespective of their starting points, careful planning for learning provides pupils with challenge and support that engages them. As a consequence, the vast majority of pupils make strong progress over time, particularly in English and mathematics.

- Teachers and classroom staff keep a firm focus on developing pupils' reading skills. This helps pupils to develop confidence in their learning and provides good access to learning across subjects. Pupils develop their skills in phonics well and this supports them in making sense of words and sentences in new contexts. Progress in basic language skills is particularly strong in key stage 2.
- At key stages 2 and 3, pupils develop a good understanding of basic mathematical operations and numeracy skills; these prepare them well for future learning for qualifications.
- Pupils develop effective speaking skills, so that they can discuss their ideas and relate them to their own experiences. This helps prepare them to develop subject-specific skills, for example in recording their learning about Stone-Age life. Others developed their ideas about characterisation in their literature study text, Jekyll and Hyde.
- Pupils' progress in writing is strong across the school and particularly in key stage 2. At key stage 4 pupils make very strong progress in their writing to show understanding about different texts. However, their writing does not reflect the same levels of accuracy in terms of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Leaders recognise that this aspect of pupils' achievement in English needs to be further developed.
- Pupils make strong progress in their mathematical knowledge and skills. At key stage 4, pupils demonstrated effective skills in answering examination-style questions. For example, in a mathematics lesson, pupils showed good levels of mental agility to tackle a range of different questions quickly and accurately. Work in books showed that pupils are on track to achieve the targets set for them by the school. These skills prepare them well for the next steps in their learning and in preparing them for life as young adults.
- Overall, pupils who have autistic spectrum condition make the same or better progress as others in the school. However, at key stage 4, the progress these pupils make in writing is not as secure as for others in the school. Nevertheless, the school's strong focus on developing the use of spoken language has greatly enhanced these pupils' ability to engage with others.
- Pupils who are looked after by the local authority make the same good progress as others, because teachers and staff personalise challenge and support to them effectively.
- Pupils make strong progress in a wider range of subjects across the key stages. This helps prepare pupils in key stage 2 well for their next steps, as they move into the secondary phase. Pupils in key stage 4 are similarly well prepared for their future education and/or training after they leave the school.

School details

Unique reference number	143532
DfE registration number	394/6000
Inspection number	10043661

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Limited
Chair	Jude Jones
Headteacher	Derek Cogle
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,136 to £81,206
Telephone number	01539 566081
Website	https://witherslackgroup.co.uk/ashbrooke-school/
Email address	Derek.cogle@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school was registered with the Department of Education in January 2017. This was the school's first standard inspection since opening.
- Ashbrooke School opened for pupils in the spring term 2017. It is an independent special school for boys and girls aged five to 19 located in Sunderland. Currently, there are 35 pupils, aged between seven and 16.
- The school provides education for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, and for pupils who have autistic spectrum condition.

- The pupil population of the school is drawn from a number of local authorities across the region.
- The school does not make use of other alternative education provisions.
- The school staff comprises both educational and clinical teams.
- The school is a member of the Witherslack Group of schools.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held discussions with senior and middle leaders, and with members of the board that governs the school on behalf of the proprietor. Inspectors also held meetings with pupils and other staff, including the clinical team.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents expressed in Ofsted's online questionnaire and in a small number of telephone calls.
- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in lessons across all key stages, and scrutinised a wide sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors examined a wide range of documents, including records of pupils' progress and attendance, a range of monitoring and evaluation documents and the school's plans for improvement.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's arrangements to keep pupils safe and safeguard them.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

Patricia Head

Ofsted Inspector

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