

Ashcroft School

The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JE

Inspection dates

26 February–1 March 2019

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has a strong vision for the school and is constantly looking at ways to enhance pupils' personal, social and academic development.
- All staff care deeply about pupils. Nurture provision is outstanding, and pupils form strong, trusting bonds with adults.
- Senior leaders and the proprietor are exceptionally well supported by trustees and governors. Together with the proprietor, they ensure that teaching and pupils' outcomes are good and all the independent school standards are met.
- Pupils access a range of therapies, which help them to come to terms with past traumatic experiences and support their productive participation in lessons.
- Pupils benefit from a personalised curriculum, which supports their good progress in English, mathematics and science, and ensures their readiness for further learning and employment after they leave school.
- Throughout the school, teaching is strong. However, teachers do not always adhere to the school's feedback and assessment policy.
- Pupils' poorly presented work sometimes goes unchecked by teachers. Occasionally, adults do not model good grammar and fail to highlight pupils' incorrect spelling and punctuation.
- Pupils have access to excellent facilities and good teaching at Ashcroft College and Building Opportunities, the school's construction centre.
- Pupils' behaviour, attendance and attitude to learning in the key stage 3 School House have improved considerably and are now good.
- Leaders' work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding and their appreciation of British values is good.
- Pupils' behaviour and attendance are good. Pupils are respectful and empathetic, and are becoming increasingly resilient learners.
- Pupils' attainment in subjects such as music, construction, health and beauty, and art is good, as shown in the BTEC National Diploma, GCSE, and functional skills qualifications they acquire.
- Parents and carers are very supportive of the school. They say their children are safe, well cared for and making good progress

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?

- Improve the quality of teaching and learning by:
 - encouraging pupils to take pride in the presentation of their work in all subjects
 - making sure that teaching staff model good grammar and regularly check the accuracy of pupils' spelling and punctuation.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that teachers consistently adhere to the school's feedback and assessment policy.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is dedicated to the pupils of Ashcroft School and is committed to helping staff to improve their skills and knowledge. Together with an effective senior leadership team and the full support of trustees and governors, the headteacher has maintained, and in some areas improved, the good teaching and learning evident at the time of the previous inspection.
- Senior leaders have an in-depth understanding of each pupil's personal circumstances and challenges, and are determined to help pupils succeed and realise their potential. The headteacher is full of good ideas and focuses on identifying solutions in response to the personal, social and academic needs of pupils.
- Trustees, governors and senior leaders work tirelessly with a wide range of specialists to ensure that the curriculum enhances pupils' individual aptitudes and abilities. The proprietor and leaders constantly modify and evaluate the impact of the curriculum and ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- Middle leaders play a full role in improving the quality of teaching and learning. They regularly observe teaching, talk with pupils about their learning and assess the quality of work in pupils' books. Leaders are highly appreciative of the professional development and training available, which they say is helping to improve their leadership skills, subject knowledge and understanding of conditions such as autism, dyslexia and attention deficit disorder.
- Teachers are highly complimentary about senior leaders' work. All enjoy the challenges and rewards emanating from their work. Teachers are of the view that the school has an 'open culture', which supports sharing good practice. Staff know exactly what the school is trying to achieve and are eager to play their part in ensuring that Ashcroft is a safe place where pupils thrive. The school has a long track-record of investing in and developing staff. For example, some teachers and middle leaders were previously teaching assistants and support workers.
- All pupils in the main school have education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils on other sites either have EHC plans or are in the process of acquiring them. Senior leaders and appropriate staff are familiar with pupils' academic, behaviour, attendance and personal development targets. They work closely with a range of partners to ensure that targets are consistently met.
- Senior leaders' and teachers' work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is good. Pupils are aware of the major world faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam, and have visited different places of worship. They celebrate events such as Black History month, and are familiar with cultural traditions, such as Diwali and Eid.
- Pupils have a deep sense of moral responsibility and empathise strongly with others. They regularly raise funds for various good causes, including homeless charities, and organise collections for food banks. Pupils enjoy outdoor learning, engaging in various orienteering activities linked to the Duke of Edinburgh Award, music, art, drama and dance. Older pupils hone their practical skills while interacting with parents, carers and the public, who

come to Ashcroft College to be pampered in the hair salon, nail spa and treatment rooms. All pupils enjoy the many educational trips and visits available, especially those which enable them to explore local history and visit museums.

- Pupils know much about British history, democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and like to have their say on the pupils' council. Pupils have won various competitions. For example, they were recently recognised in an awards ceremony at the Imperial War Museum for the research they carried out to identify past Together Trust pupils who died in battle during the First World War. A memorial plaque bearing their names has pride of place on the school site, situated in an area for quiet contemplation.
- Most parents and representatives from placing authorities are very positive about the school. Parents who submitted text messages during the inspection indicated that they are happy with their child's good progress and behaviour and much improved attendance. Typically, parents comment, 'I would highly recommend the school to anybody', and, 'The campus always looks neat and tidy, staff are welcoming and friendly and there is a good selection of amenities.'
- Senior leaders welcome external support and advice. The school's independent consultant knows Ashcroft exceptionally well and has reviewed the quality of teaching and learning over several years. Regular reports and recommendations have helped senior leaders to raise standards and improve the effectiveness of teachers and middle leaders.

Governance

- The board of trustees and the service director have a good overview of the school's achievements and priorities. Trustees are fully supportive of senior leaders' ideas and aspirations for extending school services. They ensure that staff have access to a comprehensive range of training and professional development, which is offered through the Together Trust's organisational development department.
- Governors know the school exceptionally well. They provide challenge and support to leaders in equal measure and have many years' experience as education professionals. Governors visit the school regularly. They talk with senior leaders about their priorities and meet pupils and staff. Governors attend pupils' various plays, performances and celebration events. Governors' close involvement with the school gives them an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- Governors bring a wealth of experience to their respective roles, which is of great benefit to the school. They take advantage of training offered through the Together Trust and ensure their safeguarding training is current.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- All safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose, and there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school.
- Leaders carefully monitor and risk assess all pupils. Additional risk assessments are in place to ensure that pupils are always safe when on school premises and when participating on educational trips, visits and outdoor pursuits.

- The school's safeguarding policy is current, comprehensive and available on the school's website. Staff sign a declaration to indicate they have read the safeguarding policy and the latest government guidelines on keeping children safe in education. Staff and governors have been trained in their Prevent duty, which is part of the government's agenda for tackling radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff are vigilant and highly skilled in spotting signs of neglect and/or abuse and know exactly what to do if they are concerned about a pupil's welfare or safety. All appropriate checks are made on staff to ensure they are suitable to work with children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers tailor learning to pupils' individual aptitudes and abilities. Teachers are aware of pupils' different learning styles and plan activities to ensure that pupils engage in lessons and enjoy learning. This was evident in an upper key stage 2 class, where pupils were finding out about the characteristics of different types of triangles. The most able used protractors to measure triangles and decide their type – obtuse, acute or right-angle – while others described different types of triangles which were illustrated on small cards.
- Across the school, teachers' subject knowledge is strong. This is evident in English, where pupils are introduced to the works of Shakespeare and well-known authors, such as Michael Morpurgo and Willie Russell. Teachers focus on developing pupils' reading and spelling. This was evident in a class where pupils learned about the eclectic nature of the English language, which they linked to Britain's colonial history and relationship with Africa, India and the Caribbean, and the differences between English and American spellings.
- It is not always evident that teachers consistently adhere to the school's feedback and assessment policy. Teachers give pupils verbal feedback on their work and encourage pupils to discuss how they can improve their reading, writing and mathematics. However, teachers' spoken grammar is sometimes incorrect. In addition, occasionally pupils' punctuation and spelling errors go unchecked. As a result, they repeat errors.
- Teachers encourage pupils to be expressive. Pupils often excel in singing and playing various musical instruments. This is evident in the well-received public performances in which pupils have participated. Such activities are helping to build pupils' resilience and develop their confidence.
- Pupils benefit from regular writing, music and drama activities, which they thoroughly enjoy. This was shown during a nurture-group workshop, where pupils listened to each other's views and started to create lyrics for a rap song. After eagerly sharing ideas, one group began to piece together the words for a song, while others listened to a simple backing track. They altered the pitch of the track sequence to get the right beat and used keyboards to 'overlay' interesting sounds. By the end of the session, pupils had the basis for their song, which they planned to refine during the next workshop.
- Teaching in School House is strong and rapidly improving. Teachers ensure that pupils know of the work of different authors and playwrights. Pupils are familiar with the tragic story of Macbeth and understand that the basic plot centres on the damaging effects of political ambition on those who seek power for its own sake. Pupils can name the main characters in the play, including Banquo, Macduff and Macbeth's wife, and explain their role and motivations.

- Teachers and teaching assistants ensure that pupils who are taught on a one-to-one basis do not miss out on the exciting learning available to their peers. When possible, such pupils are integrated into the school's mainstream provision. Pupils have a good understanding of politics and confidently debate topical issues, such as British citizenship, crime and punishment, economic development and global communications.
- Pupils say science teaching is interesting, particularly because it is, 'hands on'. Pupils enjoy taking their scientific experiments out of the classroom, where they can create explosions, to simulate the chemical reactions inside a volcano and investigate rocket propulsion.
- Classroom displays show that pupils usually take pride in their work and pay close attention to detail. This is evident in pupils' excellent art, biographical work and skilfully produced ceramics tiles. However, pupils' written work is not consistently well presented. Some workbooks contain graffiti, which is not challenged by teachers.
- Highly effective teaching helps to ensure that pupils are equipped with the practical skills, knowledge and understanding essential for the next part of their learning after they leave school. For example, in Ashcroft College pupils learn practical cooking skills, develop their functional skills and enhance their confidence in interacting with members of the public. The work-related skills and qualifications pupils acquire at Building Opportunities, including in trowelling, plastering, woodworking and bricklaying, furnish pupils with the requirements to enter employment in the construction industry.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Parents and representatives from placing authorities are fully involved in the school's induction process, which is part of each pupil's admission to the school. The pastoral leader is quick to collect information on pupils' likes, dislikes and previous academic performance. Together with information in pupils' EHC plans, pupils' personal profiles are created. These form the basis of pupils' tailored social, emotional and academic programmes.
- Pupils are developing their resilience and ability to learn from their mistakes. However, in some instances, pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) render them averse to failure and reluctant to try new ways of doing things. Some pupils find it difficult to learn alongside their peers. In such instances, pupils are taught on a one-to-one basis, to prepare them for reintegration into the mainstream of the school.
- The school provides a range of specialist therapeutic programmes to support pupils' personal and social development. Programmes include play therapy, access to clinical psychologists, speech and language and occupational therapies. In addition, pupils can access canine therapy, with Henry the resident dog. Reluctant readers, especially those in key stage 2, often prefer reading to Henry rather than adults. Such therapies help to develop pupils' confidence to participate in lessons and support them in coming to terms with, and overcoming, past traumatic experiences.
- Pupils say they always feel safe in the school. They are confident to share their concerns with staff, secure in the knowledge that such concerns will be taken seriously and dealt

with promptly. Pupils are not allowed to use mobile phones in the school, and their access to the internet is closely monitored. Pupils know how to stay safe while online and are aware that they should think carefully before accessing social media sites, ensuring they are age-appropriate.

- Pupils say they accept people for who they are and indicate that bullying does not take place in the school. Pupils know what racism and homophobic bullying are and say neither happen in the school.
- Leaders are keen to develop pupils' leadership skills. As such, they encourage pupils to share their ideas. This they do as members of the pupils' council.
- Pupils do not always commit to improving their work. Occasionally, their workbooks in subjects such as science, English and mathematics are poorly presented.
- Pupils benefit from independent careers advice and have access to a personal adviser. They are supported in creating their personal profiles and learning the necessary skills to present themselves well in interview situations. Pupils are given details of colleges and information relating to their careers of interest. Information about their destination after leaving school indicates that almost all pupils go on to further education, training or employment after they leave the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils learn strategies to manage their own behaviour. Most pupils have been at Ashcroft for several years. Some are reflective and confident in talking about their previous poor behaviour and its impact on their learning, peers and teachers.
- Pupils learn that inappropriate language and disrespect towards staff are not tolerated. Teachers always challenge such behaviour. They remind pupils of the importance of good conduct and the school's sanctions for breaking the rules. Pupils' behaviour was good during the inspection; no foul language was heard.
- Pupils are respectful. Those prepared to talk with inspectors about their learning did so very positively. Pupils feel a strong sense of belonging at the school and develop strong bonds with staff. Behaviour in class is usually good. Most pupils are keen to participate in learning and find out new things.
- Pupils who met with inspectors said that behaviour is good most of the time. They recognise that there are 'fall outs' and 'melt-downs'. However, they also indicate the school is typically calm and orderly. Staff and governors are of the view that behaviour is good, as are most parents.
- Pupils move around the school sensibly and with due consideration for others. They are appreciative of the school's extensive grounds and green spaces, which they look after and keep tidy.
- Some pupils have been out of school for significant periods and are not used to the daily routine of coming to school and participating in lessons. However, school records show the frequency and severity of rule-breaking decreases rapidly as pupils settle into school life. Excellent pastoral support, nurturing and clear expectations of pupils' behaviour help to ensure that Ashcroft is a purposeful and productive school.
- Pupils are usually punctual to lessons. Their attendance improves immediately after they

start at the school. Pupils attend regularly, because they enjoy learning with their peers and value the positive relationships they have with adults.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Almost all pupils start school with gaps in their learning, having spent significant periods out of education. Shortly after pupils start at the school, various assessments are carried out to establish the level of their language, communication and calculation skills. The assessments provide leaders with a useful basis from which to develop pupils' individual learning programmes.
- Leaders are prepared to go the 'extra mile' to develop pupils' talents and help them realise their potential. For example, physics, German and access to music studios have been offered to help individual pupils secure the skills and knowledge necessary for them to pursue their goals.
- From their individual starting points, pupils make strong progress in a wide range of subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils also make strong progress and gain BTEC National Diploma qualifications, via a suite of vocational opportunities, including in health and social care, hair and beauty, and catering and hospitality. In addition, pupils make good progress to acquire skills in areas such as brickwork, joinery, plastering, and painting and decorating.
- Pupils attain GCSE qualifications in subjects such as English, mathematics, art and science. They acquire functional skills in reading, writing and mathematics, for which they are accredited through The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance. Pupils are certificated for their internet-safety work and gain silver and bronze awards as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Award. Too few pupils are entered for GCSEs to make any meaningful comparisons between their performance and that of other pupils nationally.
- Most pupils are reluctant to read to adults. However, some are competent readers, keen to extend their reading repertoire. The school uses a systematic form of phonics to arm younger pupils with strategies to develop their reading fluency. Older pupils are familiar with the work of different authors and genres. They enjoy reading poetry and have had national recognition for writing their own verses. The school offers a one-to-one reading programme. School records show that this programme is highly effective. For example, some pupils have improved their reading age by up to three years, after regular sessions delivered over short periods.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics is strong. Teachers ensure that pupils know the importance of having secure calculation and problem-solving skills. They provide pupils with challenging activities in class and encourage them to indicate how they calculate their answers. Pupils' workbooks contain various problem-solving activities and evidence of their good understanding of basic calculation methods, percentages, fractions and decimals.
- Key stage 3 pupils in School House are supported well in developing their writing skills. This is evident in their well-written texts. In Ashcroft College, pupils' portfolios contain many examples of precisely written informational texts. For example, in hair and beauty, pupils write detailed factual pieces, accompanied by competently drawn illustrations, on the harmful effects of shoddy nail-spa treatment on the cuticles and fingers.

- Pupils make good progress in a wide range of additional subjects and areas of the curriculum, through outdoor learning activities such as canoeing, bush craft, fell walking, map reading and orienteering.
- Pupils make excellent progress in art. This is demonstrated in the high quality of the art work displayed throughout the school and in the thoughtful work in pupils' portfolios. Folders contain skilfully executed drawing and painting of the structure of the eye as well as well-executed three- and two-dimensional paintings and models of insects. Pupils develop a broad range of skills in art, as shown in their replication of traditional aboriginal jewellery, pottery and Chinese paper craft. All of that prepares them well for their GCSE examinations.
- The functional skills, GCSE and BTEC National Diploma qualifications that older pupils, including those above 16 years of age, acquire in English, mathematics, science, construction and various additional vocational areas help to ensure their further training readiness. As such, pupils are well placed to be successful in the next part of their learning and employment after leaving the school.

School details

Unique reference number	106162
DfE registration number	356/6025
Inspection number	10067883

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 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	125
Proprietor	Together Trust
Chair of the board of trustees	Ralph Ellerton
Chair of the board of governors	Roger Horne
Headteacher	Eileen Sheerin
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,000
Telephone number	0161 2834832
Website	www.togethertrust.org.uk/special-education/ashcroft-school
Email address	ashcroft.school@togethertrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	21–23 June 2016

Information about this school

- Ashcroft School is one of several services, which include schools, care homes, outreach and adult and community services, owned and managed by the proprietor, the Together Trust. The Trust's main belief is that, 'Everyone has the ability and the right to experience joy, happiness and hope.' Trustees strive to, 'do everything in our power to make that happen'.
- Ashcroft School is based in Cheadle, Cheshire. The school caters for pupils with complex social, emotional and mental health needs and conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum condition. Many pupils have suffered from

severe trauma in their early years. Currently, the school provides for 121 pupils between the ages of eight and 16. The school provides post-16 provision for fewer than five students.

- Most pupils learn at the main Ashcroft School site, in several groups. The Cheadle group consists of several small groups of key stage 3 and 4 pupils. The nurture group consists of several small groups of key stage 2 and 3 pupils. The school also offers an access programme for, 'pupils whose needs prevent them from functioning academically and socially in a group or school setting'. Most pupils on this programme are taught on a one-to-one basis.
- The school runs Ashcroft College for key stage 4 pupils, which offers a range of vocational courses in areas including hair and beauty, health and social care, and catering and hospitality. Pupils at the college have access to Building Opportunities, the school's construction site, which enables pupils to gain accreditation in areas including bricklaying, woodwork, plumbing and plastering.
- In partnership with the Manchester pupil referral unit, the school manages School House, which caters for up to 15 key stage 3 pupils.
- Most pupils have been excluded from mainstream provision and/or spent significant periods of time not in education.
- All pupils in the main school have an EHC plan. Pupils on other sites either have EHC plans or are in the process of being assessed for such plans.
- Most pupils are boys of White British origin. A small number of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, and a few speak English as an additional language.
- In March 2018, the DfE approved the school's material change application to extend the age range of pupils from eight to 18 to five to 18. At the time of the inspection, no pupils were in key stage 1.

Information about this inspection

- At the time of the inspection, a sizable proportion of the teachers were engaged in industrial action. This limited the number of observations that took place in the main school.
- Inspectors observed learning in a range of subjects, including English, mathematics, food technology and humanities. Most observations were carried out jointly with senior leaders. Pupils' work and assessment folders were scrutinised during observations and separately.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, teachers and teaching assistants. Meetings were also held with the chair of the board of trustees, the service director and three governors, including the chair of the governing body. A meeting was held with an independent careers advisor. Telephone conversations were held with representatives from placing authorities.
- There were too few responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, to be considered. Inspectors read five text messages submitted by parents during the inspection. A formal discussion was held with pupils. Informal discussions were held with pupils throughout the course of the inspection. Inspectors considered 23 responses by staff to the inspection questionnaire and 14 responses by pupils. Inspectors also considered the school's own surveys of parents' views.
- Inspectors examined a range of documentary evidence. This included pupils' EHC plans, checks on the quality of teaching, information on teachers' performance, and safeguarding documentation, including risk assessments. In addition, inspectors scrutinised the school's development plans and reviews of its own performance.
- Inspectors checked various records of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour and the school's records and checks on the suitability of staff to work with children.

Inspection team

Lenford White, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Lisa Morgan	Ofsted Inspector
Linda Griffiths	Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019