

Inspection of Ash Lea School

Owthorpe Road, Nottingham NG12 3PA

Inspection dates: 2–3 October 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to school and greet staff with smiles as they arrive each morning. They know that staff care for them and support them. Pupils place great trust in the adults who work with them. Staff make sure that all pupils can communicate in ways which the staff understand. Pupils say that school is safe and they know who to tell if they have any worries.

Pupils are keen to learn. They receive challenge and support from staff as they prepare for their next steps, focusing on 'Life after Ash Lea'. Younger pupils learn to play and improve their physical skills on the wide range of outdoor equipment. Older pupils understand the importance of their work experience and college 'taster' courses. As one pupil said, 'It is helping us think about what we will do when we leave school.'

Pupils behave well at all times of the day. Pupils receive support to help them learn how to manage their own feelings and behave. If there are any incidents of bullying, staff deal with them well. Pupils are proud of their efforts. They celebrate their achievements with staff and with each other, throughout the day and in assemblies.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Governors, leaders and staff have a clear understanding of what pupils should learn. The plans for learning identify what pupils should learn and when. These plans focus on pupils making small steps in what they learn. Teachers check what pupils already know and remember. They use this information to plan what to teach next. This makes sure that pupils work towards the long-term goals of their education, health and care plans.

Staff focus on catering for pupils' physical and medical needs. They do this to reduce any possible blocks to learning. Pupils who are unable to talk use a range of resources to enable them to communicate. All staff use signs and symbols to support pupils' learning and understanding.

Staff encourage pupils to be independent. They support pupils to move about the school on their own. Staff encourage pupils to achieve as highly as they can. This includes disadvantaged pupils, those in the early years and the sixth form.

Pupils prepare for adult life through a range of experiences both in and out of school. Music and drama lessons encourage pupils to develop their confidence. Primary pupils enjoy trips out, for example to Belvoir Castle and Tollerton airport. Older pupils visited County Hall to receive their travel training awards.

Pupils achieve well in different subjects. Subject leaders have more to do to prepare pupils as they move into the more formal stage of learning, so that pupils can build on what they have learned already.

Pupils are enthusiastic about stories and reading. They like to read their books to staff. They are keen to dress up and act out characters from stories, such as Harry Potter. Teachers develop the early reading skills for younger pupils well. Teaching is not always as focused as it could be to support pupils who are learning new sounds. For example, some books do not always match the sounds pupils have learned.

Pupils learn about real-life situations in their mathematics lessons. For example, they learn about how to use mathematics when shopping. Older pupils enjoy challenges in this subject. They gain appropriate qualifications in mathematics before they leave the school.

In the early years, children make a good start to their education. They learn to communicate well. They settle into school routines and learn to use signs and symbols. Adults who work in the early years provide close support.

Sixth-form students value their learning environment. Relationships with staff are positive and behaviour is good. Students are proud of their achievements. They rise to the challenges staff set them. For example, students are keen to succeed in their travel training. They aim to travel alone locally. Students value their work experience opportunities and strive hard to gain different qualifications.

Staff are very positive and passionate about their work. Leaders and governors are considerate of teachers' workload. They try to think of ways to reduce unnecessary tasks.

Leaders know which aspects of the provision they need to improve. They do not fully involve curriculum leaders to check that the improvements are successful.

Parents and carers are supportive of the staff's work. They recognise that staff 'go the extra mile'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Pupils' safety and well-being are central to all leaders' decisions and actions. Staff are vigilant about pupils' welfare. They identify pupils who may be at risk and are quick to act in response.

Leaders work with determination with a range of agencies and organisations. This ensures that families get the help they need. Parents are very positive about this support.

All staff receive regular training to keep up to date about their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff make sure they teach pupils to keep themselves safe. This includes when pupils use the internet.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Most pupils study the 'Ash Lea pre-formal and semi-formal curriculum' which is based on the early years curriculum. Leaders have designed this learning so that it builds on what pupils already know. The 'formal' curriculum is not so well designed. Leaders have not ensured that the small number of pupils who study this curriculum build on what they already know. Leaders should ensure that pupils who study the 'formal' curriculum reflect on what they have already learned as they study new concepts. This will help pupils to build up their knowledge and understanding over time.
- Senior leaders have only recently begun to check on the quality of the provision. These checks do not fully involve curriculum leaders. This means that the checks are not as comprehensive as they could be. Senior leaders must ensure that they use all curriculum leaders to check on the provision. This will help to ensure that checks are thorough and help to bring about further school improvement.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	122957
Local authority	Nottinghamshire County Council
Inspection number	10110090
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dr Alex Macdonald
Headteacher	Dawn Wigley
Website	www.ashlea.notts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8–9 October 2014

Information about this school

- Ash Lea is a special school catering for pupils aged three to 18 years who have complex learning difficulties. Many pupils also have significant physical and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school has devised three stages of learning known as pre-formal, semi-formal and formal. The vast majority of pupils work at the pre-formal and semi-formal learning stages which are based around the early years curriculum as a framework for learning.
- The school has fewer than five children in the early years. They work within the primary classes.
- Sixth-form students work in a purpose-designed area of the school, where they have their own common room. They also access courses at local colleges and a variety of work experience opportunities within the school itself, and the local community.
- The school does not send pupils to alternative provision.
- The school works in partnership with schools locally and with teaching school alliances, which include Candleby Lane and Affinity.
- The school receives support from the local authority education improvement

adviser through their core offer.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and senior leaders, middle leaders and other staff. An inspector met with members of the governing body and spoke with a representative of the local authority. Discussions explored a wide range of aspects of the school, including safeguarding arrangements.
- In considering the quality of education, inspectors looked in detail at four subjects. These took place in reading, mathematics, physical education and physical development, and 'my community' (geography), which focused on travel training within the local community. Inspectors visited lessons across the school with senior leaders. Inspectors also met with teachers, curriculum leaders and pupils, and looked at a sample of pupils' work in these subjects.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents. These included those related to safeguarding, behaviour, attendance, the school curriculum and the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. An inspector looked at plans for improvement, together with leaders' evaluation of the school's performance. Inspectors also considered the information on the school's website.
- Inspectors spoke with parents at the start of the day and on the telephone. Account was taken of the 30 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and the responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lynda Morgan, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Steven Barnes	Ofsted Inspector

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