

Inspection of Ashbrooke School

Ashbrooke Road, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear SR2 7JA

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 July 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where pupils thrive. Once they are settled at Ashbrooke, pupils attend well. No lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils are safe and trust staff to help them. Bullying is extremely rare. If it does happen it is dealt with promptly by staff.

Pupils at Ashbrooke have a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Many pupils have missed out on a lot of learning prior to joining this school. Leaders design bespoke education and therapeutic plans for each pupil. Staff meet the needs of their pupils extremely effectively. Pupils catch up on missed learning quickly. They become confident learners.

Leaders are determined that pupils will be successful after Ashbrooke. Pupils study subjects that match the national curriculum. Pupils complete a wide range of recognised qualifications. The teaching of reading is a priority in this school. Pupils have many opportunities to broaden their understanding of the world. Pupils are prepared fully for their next step in learning and for adulthood.

Most parents and carers are very happy with the school. Many parents are full of praise for the school and the positive difference they have seen in their child since moving to Ashbrooke.

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

The curriculum is purposefully designed to meet the needs of all pupils in the school. The subject content matches the national curriculum. All subject plans are extremely detailed and well structured. Pupils' learning is constantly reinforced across different subjects. What pupils learn about negative numbers in Year 10, for example, is used at the same time in science for their osmosis experiments.

Pupils' personal development is at the heart of every subject lesson in the school. For example, there is a programme called 'topic' for the study of geography, history and religious education through key stages 2 and 3. Pupils cover all that is required from the national curriculum for these subjects. In addition, staff use something about the local community as a theme for each topic. For example, the school is in an area that was dominated by mining in the past. Staff build pupils' understanding of history, geography and worship using mining as the topic. Pupils' learning about geography, history and religious education is then enhanced through creative activities and trips out of school.

Most pupils admitted to Ashbrooke have struggled in their previous setting. Leaders gather essential information on pupils before they start at the school. Subject staff add to this with checks on what a pupil knows and can do. The pastoral care team, special educational needs co-ordinator and clinical staff assess what learning and therapeutic support pupils need. Staff implement the adaptations and strategies for each pupil diligently.

The teaching of reading is highly effective. Leaders recognise that pupils need to master phonics. All staff are trained to deliver the school's chosen reading scheme. Every morning, the reading leader practices a daily phoneme with staff to refresh their training. Pupils who can read fluently access a wide range of books. They are given lots of opportunities to choose books and read quietly.

Leaders expect pupils to behave well. Leaders know that pupils at this school need help to do this. All staff implement the school's positive approach to behaviour consistently and effectively. Pupils learn how to understand and manage their emotions. Most pupils are very positive about their learning. Most pupils' attendance improves significantly when they join Ashbrooke. There is a very small number of pupils whose attendance is low. Leaders have support plans in place for each of these pupils. The family liaison officer works closely with parents to develop these support plans.

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is an important subject at Ashbrooke. PSHE is carefully planned. Pupils learn about themselves and their world. They learn how to live healthily. Some pupils need extra help to manage essential daily routines. The school's clinical team work directly with pupils to support their independent living skills. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught through PSHE. Parents have been consulted about the RSE programme.

Pupils are given leadership roles in the school. These roles include running the library, organising trips and working towards the 'Eco-school' award. All pupils have access to a full programme of careers education. Older pupils get independent advice to help them make plans for their future outside of school. A small number of pupils stay on in the school as post-16 students. The school does not currently have a sixth form. Each post-16 student follows an individual plan appropriate to their needs. Pupils who stay on as post-16 students have more time on their key stage 4 studies. They also have highly personalised work experience.

The proprietor has an ambitious vision for the school. This vision is shared by staff. Staff are well supported by leaders. Leaders ensure staff keep their subject expertise up to date through regular training. Early career teachers have access to a dedicated support programme which is externally validated. Leaders share what is working at Ashbrooke with other schools in the proprietor's group.

The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards are met consistently. There is a school board which meets half termly. The board is chaired by the chief operating officer of the proprietor group. Leaders prepare detailed reports for these meetings. These reports are scrutinised robustly by board members. The proprietor ensures the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met in the school. The school is very well maintained. Leaders ensure robust health and safety checks are completed by trained staff.

Most parents speak highly of the school. Leaders organise events that involve parents. Parents appreciate these events and the chance to understand how they

can support their children at home. Local authority stakeholders are equally positive about the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The headteacher has established a very strong culture of safeguarding. Staff have a highly developed understanding of the additional vulnerabilities of their pupils. Staff are quick to communicate any concerns they may have. The proprietor ensures that all staff are trained in child protection and wider safeguarding. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and his deputies have additional specialist training. The DSL is very knowledgeable. He follows up referrals robustly. Local agencies speak highly of how leaders respond to safeguarding concerns.

The proprietor has set up a comprehensive process to recruit staff safely. Senior staff are trained in safer recruitment. The proprietor group has specialist safeguarding staff who regularly check the safeguarding arrangements in the school. The proprietor and school leaders refer any adult they have concerns about to statutory agencies.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	143532
DfE registration number	394/6000
Local authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	10212954
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	103
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Phil Jones
Headteacher	Joanna Burdon
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,540 to £92,000
Telephone number	0191 607 5610
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk
Email address	ashbrooke@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 March 2018

Information about this school

- 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. The school is part of the Witherslack Group.
- The school's last standard inspection was in March 2018 when it was judged to be good. The Department for Education (DfE) commissioned an emergency inspection and a material change inspection on 21 October 2020. The DfE approved an increase in the school's capacity from 80 to 90 following the October 2020 inspection. On 13 August 2021 the DfE approved a further change to the number of pupils the school could take with an increase from 90 to 126.
- Since September 2021, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of pupils at the school. There are currently 103 pupils on roll.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder or attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. Some pupils have a learning disability. All pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school currently uses two unregistered alternative education providers.
- Pupils are placed at the school by their local authority.
- The school's staff comprises both educational and clinical teams.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, including those responsible for safeguarding, and the proprietor. They also met with a range of other staff and members of the school's clinical team.
- Inspectors undertook a tour of the school and visited the classrooms, social areas and other facilities. They checked the school buildings and grounds against the independent school standards.

- Inspectors did deep dives into English (including reading), mathematics, topic (this is the school's humanities programme and includes history, geography and religious education) and PSHE. The deep dive for each subject included a meeting with curriculum leaders and a review of subject documents and plans. The deep dive also involved lesson visits, meetings with pupils and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the science leader, looked at the curriculum plans of all other subjects and visited a range of other lessons.
- Inspectors visited a training session being run for staff and reviewed the programme of support that is provided for early career teachers.
- Inspectors visited a school assembly. Inspectors also visited a school information event for parents which was about reading.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school throughout the day, including breaktimes and in lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised school documents and the arrangements to safeguard pupils. This included checking the school's safeguarding systems and the single central record of staff recruitment checks, meeting with the DSL, and speaking with staff and pupils about safeguarding. The lead inspector spoke to the local authority designated officer.
- Inspectors reviewed the arrangements in place for the school's use of two unregistered alternative providers.
- Inspectors considered seven responses to Ofsted's Parent View, individual conversations with seven parents, two emails from parents and surveys completed by 34 staff and a small number of pupils.
- Inspectors spoke to representatives from the local authorities who commission places at the school.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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