

# Inspection of an outstanding school: The Ashley School

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR32 4EU

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Inspection dates:

10 and 11 May 2023

## **Outcome**

The Ashley School continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils feel they are part of one big happy family. The Ashley School is a special place where pupils thrive. Pupils say that their school is amazing. They are enthusiastic about what they learn and the friendships they make. Many say that there is not a thing they would change about their school. Pupils feel, and say they are, safe at school.

Pupils achieve exceptionally well. Staff commit themselves to helping every pupil to enjoy success. Adults place no limits on what pupils are able to do. Their genuine care of pupils reflects the high expectations shared by all. Staff expect pupils to work hard and to do their best. Pupils are extremely well prepared for their future lives.

Kindness and respect are givens at this school. Staff are highly skilled at supporting pupils to manage their behaviour. Gentle reminders encourage pupils to make appropriate choices. Adults work with pupils to build their understanding of how to behave and respond in social situations. This means that pupils behave very well, and bullying is rare. Pupils are confident that adults will resolve any of their concerns.

Many parents are highly positive about the experiences their children receive. They appreciate that attending this school has had a life-changing impact on their child's education.

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

Leaders have designed an ambitious curriculum. It is tailored appropriately to individual pupils, all of whom have special educational and/or disabilities. Leaders ensure that pupils receive a high-quality education that prepares them well for adulthood.

Individual pupil's learning programmes make clear the important things they need to know. Pupils learn in small steps. Their individual targets are woven through every learning activity they undertake. These are regularly reviewed and adapted. This ensures that the targets remain ambitious, helping pupils to make excellent progress.

Subject leaders are passionate about the curriculum areas they lead. They share their specialist expertise with staff. This has supported teachers to become skilled at planning their lessons. Learning is often linked through different topics and themes. Pupils revisit things they have learned in the past. This builds their understanding through repeated and regular practice. For example, pupils revisited their knowledge of mathematics by carrying out an enterprise project based on horticulture.

Teachers know pupils well. Questions are purposeful, supporting opportunities for pupils to express their ideas and opinions. This develops their confidence and gives pupils a 'voice' in their learning. Adults use assessment well to check what pupils know.

Leaders understand the importance of ensuring that all pupils can read. Teachers make use of a phonics programme to check and teach pupils' knowledge of sounds. Pupils who need more help with reading receive extra support from well-trained staff. These times are used highly effectively and improve pupils' communication skills and reading confidence. Pupils enjoy visiting the school library. The environment invites them to be 'reading detectives.' They relish opportunities to select books for enjoyment and explore their interests.

Careers guidance is a strength of the school. Pupils gain meaningful qualifications that help to guide them in making choices about their next steps. They participate in interesting activities both in the community and at school. For example, pupils run a car valeting service that teaches them business and teamwork skills.

Pupils are given many opportunities to grow into active and responsible citizens. They have access to activities that develop their interests and talents, along with leadership roles such as being 'eco leaders' or on the school council. This helps to build their self-esteem and confidence. Pupils learn how to be independent. They organise and undertake travel using public transport or become confident ordering cakes and pizza in local shops. Pupils understand about difference. They willingly enter sensitive conversations, showing a developing awareness of their own needs and those of others.

Pupils follow clear routines through the school day. This helps to maintain the calm and orderly learning environment. Pupils are always ready to start their lessons on time.

Governors and leaders make excellent use of professional development to support the expertise of staff. Through regular training, staff have a strong understanding of pupils' needs. Staff feel well supported and their workload is managed well by leaders.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding. They ensure all required checks are made for those who work at the school. Staff are alert to any signs of concern about pupils' welfare. They regard any piece of information as valuable in building a picture about a pupil's safety and well-being. Staff receive regular safeguarding updates

and have a thorough understanding of every pupil's needs. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, ensuring that vulnerable pupils receive the support they need.

Pupils know that they can share any concerns with adults if they need to. Pupils learn about how they can keep themselves safe whether in or out of school. Pupils say that they feel safe.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in April 2014.

## 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.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137459
<b>Local authority</b>	Suffolk
<b>Inspection number</b>	10255264
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	159
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Dale Gowen
<b>Headteacher</b>	Thomas Ward (interim headteacher)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ashleyschool.co.uk">www.ashleyschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	15 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school has recently increased the number of pupils it can admit each year to 24 from Year 6 upwards.
- The current interim headteacher took up post in April 2023. The school also has an interim deputy headteacher who was appointed at the same time.
- All pupils who attend the school have education, health and care plans. The school caters for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties. Some pupils may also have associated needs, such as autism spectrum disorder and speech and language difficulties.
- The school makes use of two unregistered alternative providers, PLOT and Lapwing.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, two deputy headteachers, the school business manager and the leader of the pupil family support team.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading and reading, mathematics and personal, social and health education. Inspectors met with curriculum leaders, looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils and teachers.
- An inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also held discussions with leaders and reviewed curriculum plans in some other subjects.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents relating to safeguarding, including the school's single central register. Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leads.
- Inspectors met with representatives of the trust, including the chair of the trust.
- Inspector scrutinised 28 responses received through the Ofsted online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, as well as free-text comments. Inspectors also held phone conversations with a sample of parents. Inspectors considered 44 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the pupil survey.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour throughout the day and spoke to pupils while they were in class and at playtimes and lunchtimes.

### **Inspection team**

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sue Child

Ofsted Inspector

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