

Inspection of an outstanding school: Ashgate Croft School

Ashgate Road, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 4BN

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 February 2024

The headteacher of this school is Jennifer Dodds. This school is part of Learners' Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Matt Freeston, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Steve Welsh.

Outcome

Ashgate Croft School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Ashgate Croft School. They feel happy and safe. Staff treat pupils as individuals. Their positive and productive relationships with staff help them to thrive. Pupils talk to staff if they have any worries, and they are confident that staff would help them resolve any issues that may arise. Pupils know that Ashgate Croft is a kind school.

Pupils value their friendships and many relish opportunities to interact with different people. Staff help pupils make positive choices and pupils behave well in class and around the school.

Most pupils have excellent attendance. However, several pupils are absent for medical reasons. The school is using a range of strategies to continue to improve attendance.

Pupils benefit from a carefully designed curriculum that assists them to develop their independence. Staff provide pupils with rich experiences to help them prepare for adult life. These opportunities are purposely adapted to raise aspirations for individuals. Staff have extremely high expectations of all pupils and provide an exceptional quality of care and education.

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

The school identifies pupils' needs very well. The curriculum is carefully constructed to meet these needs. It helps pupils gain the knowledge, skills and experiences that they require for future learning and adult life.

Staff have created an environment that focuses on the pupils. The school prioritises communication and staff encourage pupils to make decisions and express their views in a variety of ways.

Staff and visiting professionals work well together. The school deploys teaching assistants well and they support and lead learning most effectively. Staff have secure subject knowledge and use this to help pupils know more and remember more. Teachers use assessment skilfully to adapt their delivery and shape the curriculum.

Staff help pupils develop a love of reading. Pupils handle books, listen to stories and use pictures and objects to gain a deeper understanding of what is being read. Staff deliver the phonics curriculum well. Where appropriate, pupils receive effective support to read regularly. All pupils make sustained progress across the curriculum.

Post-16 students build on what they have learned as they progress through the school. The curriculum promotes their personal development extensively. It also heightens their independence, encourages them to make choices and prepares them exceedingly well for their next steps.

Pupils and students benefit from high-quality careers education. They experience the world of work in a variety of appropriate ways. Over the last three years, almost all students have moved on to purposeful and sustained destinations, including college and supported internships.

The curriculum and the school's wider work to support pupils to become resilient and independent young people are exceptional. Pupils access a rich set of experiences, including those to develop their talents and interests, in a coherently planned way. The school provides a wide range of clubs and help pupils to attend them.

The school has embedded British values and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education throughout the curriculum. Pupils regularly interact with the local community so they can develop their social skills. Staff also take pupils to places they may not otherwise visit. Last year, some pupils went on a trip to 'Santa's Grotto.'

Staff help pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Movement, relaxation and swimming are part of the curriculum and staff encourage healthy eating. Pupils' emotional well-being is also promoted very well.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' conduct and pupils reflect this in their positive behaviour. Staff ensure that pupils follow appropriate routines and make reasonable adjustments when necessary. The school takes intelligent and fair action to help pupils succeed in their education.

Improving attendance is a high priority for the school. Staff have analysed the information that is available to them to implement a strategy to reduce absence. This is proving successful and attendance rates are moving towards what they were before the pandemic.

Staff are proud to work at the school. Leaders ensure that staff receive focused and highly effective professional development opportunities. They engage with staff at all levels and they are mindful of their workload. Staff report high levels of support for well-being issues.

The trust carries out its governance role effectively. Trustees visit the school regularly and hold leaders to account for all aspects of the provision, including the quality of education. They ensure that the school fulfils its statutory duties around equalities, safeguarding and managing resources.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 predecessor school (Ashgate Croft School) to be outstanding in September 2012.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years,

looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	147124
Local authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	10268596
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	154
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	34
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Steve Welsh
CEO of trust	Matt Freeston
Headteacher	Jenny Dodds
Website	www.thelearnerstrust.org/ashgate-croft
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Ashgate Croft School converted to become an academy school in June 2019. When its predecessor school, Ashgate Croft School, was last inspected by Ofsted, in October 2017, it was judged to be outstanding.
- Ashgate Croft School is a member of the Learners' Trust, which is a multi-academy trust.
- The headteacher and the deputy headteacher took up their roles in September 2021.
- The school caters for pupils with a wide range of special educational needs, primarily autistic spectrum disorder and severe learning difficulty.
- All pupils attending this school have an EHC plan.
- The school uses one registered and one unregistered alternative provider.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other leaders, the trust partner, and staff. The lead inspector had a meeting with the chief executive officer of the trust, along with two other trustees and a member of the local governing body, who joined the meeting virtually.
- The lead inspector had a telephone conversation with the proprietor of the unregistered alternative provider used by the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, personal, social and health education ('My Independence') and reading. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of work.
- Inspectors visited other lessons and observed behaviour in class and around the school. They also scrutinised a range of documentation provided by leaders.
- Inspectors considered responses to Parent View, including the free-text comments, and the staff survey. Inspectors also took into account surveys the school had conducted with pupils, parents and staff.

Inspection team

Simon Mosley, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Kathryn Hobbs	Ofsted Inspector

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