

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Ash Field Academy

Broad Avenue, Leicester, LE5 4PY

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Inspection dates:

2 and 3 July 2024

## Outcome

Ash Field Academy continues to be an outstanding school.

The principal of this school is Tracey Lawrence. This school is part of the Discovery Schools Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Paul Stone, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Richard Bettsworth.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Ash Field Academy is an inspirational school. All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They face considerable barriers to their learning and development. Staff are highly skilled in helping pupils and students in the sixth form to meet these challenges with confidence. As a result, pupils flourish. One student said: 'When I leave, I want to go to residential college alongside other people with disabilities. Having the confidence to be able to come out of the protective bubble of Ash Field and explore the world takes willpower. Thank you to Ash Field for helping me come out of the bubble.'

There are high expectations for pupils' achievement. All pupils achieve exceptionally well from their starting points.

Staff treat pupils respectfully and with kindness. They know each pupil extremely well. Pupils form trusting relationships with staff and strong friendships with their peers. Classrooms are calm places. As a result, pupils feel happy and safe at Ash Field.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities which enhance their life experiences. For example, collecting and delivering food to the local food bank. Students befriend adults in the local care home for people with dementia. They have a real presence in the local community.

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

Most pupils and students in the sixth form have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. There are three pathways that pupils may travel on once they have completed the 'Early

Primary' stage. Staff have clearly identified the key knowledge they want pupils to know, and the skills they want them to learn in each pathway. Pupils experience a highly personalised curriculum in all pathways, which seamlessly blends therapeutic and academic approaches.

Staff carefully consider what is set out in EHC plans when designing lesson activities for each pupil, including children in the early years and sixth form. They skilfully teach the curriculum. The school provides opportunities for pupils to attend lessons across different pathways within school, and at a local secondary school where appropriate. No limit is set on what can be achieved.

Class staff work closely with the specialist teams in school, such as the movement team and communication team, and medical professionals. They develop a strong understanding of each pupil's needs. The support for pupils with sensory needs is exceptionally strong. For example, pupils are taught how to use braille effectively, or to sign.

The school prioritises the development of pupils' reading, language and communication skills with a total communication approach. This starts from the early years. For example, nonverbal pupils use assistive technology in phonics lessons. Signing and symbols are commonly used. This helps pupils to engage in learning, find their voice and share their opinions. Their sense of humour shines through as their ability to communicate improves.

Pupils at the early stages of learning to read receive the help that they need to develop their phonics knowledge. They read from books that match the sounds that they already know. This helps pupils to become fluent readers.

Physical development is a priority. Pupils are enabled to be as independent as possible, and every opportunity is provided and used in doing so. Pupils take part in yoga, rebound therapy, soft play, hydrotherapy sessions and body rhyme. The movement team support staff well in ensuring comfort for pupils, and therapeutic interventions. For example, pupils enjoy 'touch-free' assistive music technology devices that turn physical movements into sounds.

Some pupils are unable to attend school for extended periods of time due to their medical needs. Staff provide for these pupils exceptionally well. The outreach specialist team visits pupils at home and ensure that therapeutic approaches are delivered alongside the curriculum. The wider world is brought to these pupils. For example, they explore the city of Marrakesh through multisensory stories and take virtual music trips to Ireland.

The school has placed the personal development of each pupil and student at the heart of the curriculum. For example, sensory stories are used to explore religious events, such as Holi, Diwali, and Ramadan. Pupils are sensitively taught about potential risks when learning online and about healthy relationships. Immersive days explore different cultures. There are lunchtime clubs for pupils and students to enjoy, including musical mindfulness. Pupils and students enjoy trips and residential, such as the recent residential trip to Stoke Mandeville to take part in competitive sports.

Students in the sixth form receive an education that strongly develops their social skills and independence. For example, students complete travel training. As a result, they are very well prepared for their futures. Work experience is a key feature of the sixth-form provision. Students value this and the opportunities it presents. One student recently gained employment through their placement.

Pupils learn to embrace their uniqueness and gain strength of character. They develop the self-belief that they need to tackle new challenges. Staff support pupils to do this. For example, one student wanted to run a marathon and was successful in doing so alongside the member of staff who completed it with them.

Trustees have a clear understanding of the priorities in this school. The school prioritises the well-being and workload of staff. Staff feel proud to work in the school.

## **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 school to be outstanding in June 2013.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	138094
<b>Local authority</b>	Leicester
<b>Inspection number</b>	10254973
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	165
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	37
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Richard Bettsworth
<b>CEO of the trust</b>	Paul Stone
<b>Principal</b>	Tracey Lawrence
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ashfield.leicester.sch.uk">www.ashfield.leicester.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 November 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Ash Field Academy is a special school for pupils who have complex needs, including: speech, language and communication needs; complex medical needs; and physical disability.
- The vast majority pupils and students who attend this school have an EHC plan. Places are commissioned by four different local authorities.
- Pupils access a pathway in school to meet their needs. There are three pathways that pupils may travel on once they have completed the 'Early Primary' stage. The pathways are categorised by need.
- The principal took up her post in April 2023.
- This school joined the Discovery Schools Academies Trust in March 2024. The trust kept the same unique reference number that has been in place since the school

opened in 2012.

- The chair of the local academy board was appointed in April 2024.
- The school does not make use of any alternative providers.

## 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading; mathematics; communication and language; and physical development. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work where available.
- To explore the wider curriculum, the lead inspector also reviewed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with the principal and other senior leaders, and a range of middle leaders. Additionally, inspectors met with a wide range of teaching, support and therapeutic staff.
- The lead inspector met with a representative of the trust and representatives from the local academy board.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation on the school website and documentation relating to the governance of the school.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents and records linking to attendance and behaviour.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, students, parents and staff through discussions and a consideration of their responses to the online surveys, including the free-text facility in Ofsted Parent View. The lead inspector also spoke with a group of pupils and students in the sixth form. Due to pupils' differing communication needs, other adults were also present to assist pupils' and students' communication with the lead inspector.

## Inspection team

Anne Maingay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Caroline Barton

Ofsted Inspector

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