

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Ashley High School

Cawfield Avenue, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 7HG

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 February 2025

Outcome

Ashley High School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school wants 'only the best' for its pupils. This aim is reflected in all aspects of the school's work. Pupils, who all have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are greeted with a warm welcome when they arrive in the morning. Staff are exceptionally encouraging and supportive.

A profound sense of care and positive energy permeates in all areas. The school is a calm and orderly environment. Well trained, skilled staff help pupils to manage their behaviour and emotions with increasing success. Pupils' respond remarkably well to staff's high expectations for their behaviour. They follow the school rules to earn 'credits' for their reward time.

The school has maintained exceptional expectations for pupils' achievement. It focuses its attention on pupils gaining the knowledge and skills to enable them to secure their independence and be prepared for adulthood. Pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

The school meticulously provides a wide range of experiences for pupils. This includes a range of trips, including visits to the cinema, galleries or visiting the orchestra. Older pupils have the opportunity to complete their Duke of Edinburgh award. For other pupils, they get to practise life skills which helps them to live as independent a life as possible.

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

The school has devised an exceptionally strong personal development offer for its pupils. Pupils and sixth-form students receive extensive careers information and highly effective support and guidance. This helps them to make highly informed choices about their next steps. The school give conscientious thought about how it manages carefully selected and adapted work experience placements to ensure that these are successful. Staff monitor what former pupils go on to achieve after they leave the school. This also helps to raise pupils' own aspirations about their futures.

The school has in recent times made sensible, well-thought-out changes to the curriculum. This is in response to the changing educational needs of pupils who attend the school. It is working through some of the changes, particularly at key stage 4 and key stage 5.

Despite this, the school has not lost its sense of ambition for pupils. For example, pupils still work towards recognised qualifications. They study a broad and balanced curriculum. Learning is precisely thought through and sequenced from pupils' individual starting points. Teachers use a variety of skilled and effective strategies to deliver the curriculum effectively. They successfully use their checks on pupils' learning to identify what pupils need to know next. Overall, pupils' achievement is impressive over time.

Governors know the school very well. They prioritise making sure that the staff have the skillset needed to meet the needs of pupils. Governors understand well the various strengths of the school. They, alongside more senior leaders, have a thorough understanding of the current curriculum development. However, a few curriculum leaders, have not had the opportunity to review their areas of responsibility in the same level of detail as other leaders. This restricts their ability to support the school to identify where any further refinement might be needed to the curriculum, as the school embeds its recent curriculum changes.

Pupils are highly positive in lessons. They engage well with their teachers and peers alike. Pupils concentrate on the tasks that they are asked to complete. Learning proceeds without any interruptions. Pupils have a strong understanding of what bullying might look like. They know how to report it to any adult if they are worried about anything. When bullying is reported, the school takes quick and effective action to sort it out.

The school carefully assesses the key gaps that some pupils have in their phonics knowledge. Staff use this information carefully to ensure that pupils receive appropriate support to catch up to their peers where possible. Pupils use their increasing knowledge of phonics to read more age-appropriate books.

The school ensures that it quickly identifies any additional needs which pupils may have. It works with a variety of specialist agencies to support pupils in all areas of their education. This includes members of the school's therapy team. Collectively, this helps the school to meet the needs of pupils with SEND effectively.

Staff appreciate the support that the school provides towards their workload and wellbeing. Staff receive ongoing professional development, which they value, as this helps them to meet pupils' needs effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- A few curriculum leaders have not had enough opportunity to develop their skills to oversee their areas of responsibility well. This means that, at times, they cannot support the school effectively to identify what is working well for pupils in these areas or where further refinements might be needed. The school should ensure that curriculum leaders have opportunities to check their areas of responsibility to identify where any improvements are needed.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 for overall effectiveness in March 2015.

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	111515
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	10348083
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	128
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Karl Ashton
Headteacher	Diane Wilson
Website	www.ashleyhighschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	12 and 13 November 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The headteacher, the deputy headteacher and two assistant headteachers are new to post since the previous inspection.
- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school caters for pupils with autism.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 consideration in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors visited lessons, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. They also listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with school leaders to discuss pupils' rates of attendance.
- The lead inspector met with members of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body. He also spoke with a representative of the local authority.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 observed pupils' behaviour at lunchtimes and as pupils moved around the school building. They scrutinised leaders' records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils about their experiences at the school. This included pupils' views around behaviour, bullying and how safe they feel in school.
- Inspectors spoke with staff about their workload and well-being. They took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and for pupils.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

Stuart Perkins, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Cath Cooke

Ofsted Inspector

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