



The Ashley School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124904
LEA SUFFOLK LEA
Inspection number 281832
Inspection dates 14 June 2006 to 15 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Steven Parker AI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	Ashley Downs
School category	Community		NR32 4EU
Age range of pupils	7 to 16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01502 574847
Number on roll	124	Fax number	01502 531920
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Mark Warren
Date of previous inspection	8 May 2000	Headteacher	Mr. David Field

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Ashley School provides day and residential education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties, many of whom have additional needs, such as social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. Around a third of the pupils access residential and extended day provision in a typical week. Learners join the school at any time from Years 3 to 10, and most are significantly underachieving because of the often fractured experience they have had of school up to that point. Many pupils are transported in to this coastal town from across North East Suffolk. There are twice as many boys as girls and very few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The overwhelming majority come from areas of social disadvantage. The school is under-going a comprehensive building programme that will extend and enhance its accommodation.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The Ashley School provides an outstanding education for all its pupils. Many parents wrote in glowing and supportive terms about the school. Typical of the comments were 'This is a super school, our son has thoroughly enjoyed the years he has spent there' and 'I fought very hard to get my child into this school and it has far exceeded all my expectations'. The highly experienced headteacher has provided visionary leadership for the whole staff team and, together, they have developed unusually wide ranging provision that makes a significant contribution to delivering the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. Staff are ambitious for their pupils and provide high quality teaching and extremely well focused pastoral support. As a result, all pupils enjoy their learning, often for the first time in their school career, make excellent progress across all areas of learning and achieve highly creditable results by the time they leave. Behaviour is excellent, and pupils cannot wait to get to school to meet their friends and benefit from the extremely relevant and engaging curriculum activities on offer. So attractive are these opportunities that pupils from neighbouring mainstream schools choose to participate in them. Parents are overwhelmingly appreciative of all that the school does for them and their children. Their views were well represented by the parent who wrote, 'my child has improved socially and emotionally, far more in 18 months than he did in the previous six years at his last school'. There have been very significant improvements since the last inspection, most particularly in the curriculum, assessment practice and the work of the governing body. The school has a very clear picture of its strengths, and inspectors were pleased to be able to confirm its evaluation of its own performance. Perhaps its most impressive characteristic is an exemplary desire and capacity to continue improving, particularly in relation to its involvement with main stream schools and in wanting to become a specialist school. When considering the Ashley school's highly productive involvement in the wider community, it provides excellent value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The residential element of the school makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' education by providing very high quality boarding provision for pupils up to four nights a week, and through the excellent extended day opportunities offered to a larger group. Regular Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) reports are highly complimentary of the care and support provided, recognising that all requirements of their regulations are fully met. Residence is fully integrated into the life of the school and many elements of its provision, very ably managed by the Pupil Services Manager, particularly in relation to child protection, benefit the whole school community.

What the school should do to improve further

- Pursue its planned bid to become a specialist school. - Further develop outreach provision and share good practice with other local schools across all key stages as identified in the school improvement plan.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Overall, pupils make very good, and in many cases outstanding progress across the school towards achieving ambitious and challenging personal and whole school targets. By the nature of their learning difficulties and earlier damaging school experiences, pupils' standards of attainment are often well below those of their mainstream peers when they join the school. However, as a result of excellent teaching, care and guidance they have made sufficient improvements to gain impressive results in Entry Level and GCSE exams by the time they leave. Some learners achieve national recognition in sport and outdoor education and there is stunning artwork displayed around the school. The excellent use of systematic assessment to inform teachers' planning is a key factor in the progress made by pupils over time. The school closely monitors records and analyses pupil data to ensure that no group of pupils falls behind in their progress. For example, in spite of their challenging circumstances, 'looked after' pupils perform just as well as others. This is because of superb support provided through residence, the extended day provision and additional, targeted pastoral work. Various test results at regular intervals focus staff effort to ensure that pupils are helped to overcome the difficulties that prevent them from learning. In this way, younger pupils make excellent progress in their behaviour and ability to engage in lessons productively and older pupils improve their knowledge and application of basic skills so well that virtually all of them go on to study successfully at college. Parents consider that their children are doing exceptionally well and one parent commented that her child was achieving things she never thought possible. Pupils often express similar amazement at their own unexpected progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. They feel safe and secure, enjoy coming to school and speak very highly of the wide range of activities provided for them by staff. Pupils are given lots to do, are rarely allowed to become bored and are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. They are exceptionally well behaved in class, when moving around the school and in the wider community. Their relationships with each other and with staff are excellent. They treat each other and adults with a high degree of respect and are rightly proud to talk about their school and their work. Pupils were seen to display exemplary attitudes towards their learning, during and after the school day, and the results of such a keenness to learn are amply reflected in the very good progress most achieve during their time in the school. Pupils' attendance is above average and is good for this type of school and locality. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is very well developed through the curriculum and enrichment activities. All staff provide very good role models for pupils and this whole school consistency, personalised in each of the classrooms and residential accommodation, provides a highly engaging and supportive learning environment, and clearly influences and complements individual pupils' learning experiences. All pupils know right from wrong and show respect and

acceptance for the school's systems for managing behaviour and rewarding good work. The school makes a significant contribution to pupils' awareness of healthy and safe life styles through an impressive range of sporting activities and inspired healthy eating initiatives. Of worthy note is the outstanding contribution of the catering staff, who provide imaginative, balanced menu choices, cultural theme days and excellent quality food products, all of which promote very well the benefits of healthy eating to pupils and staff alike. Pupils make a very good contribution to the community. The schools' very high quality vocational and recreational project, run jointly with neighbouring mainstream schools, careers guidance and excellent work-related experiences prepare pupils particularly well for life after school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent and they make outstanding progress because teaching and support is of such a high standard. Work is exceptionally well planned and matched to individual pupil's needs because of the gathering and imaginative application of high quality assessment information. Relationships are outstanding across the school, as is the sensitive management of any challenging behaviour, which enables pupils to become confident learners. As one parent observed, 'my son now feels that he is valued, and it is down to the extremely hard work and staff dedication to their jobs'. The very high quality team work between teachers, learning support assistants and residential care staff ensures that all pupils gain full access to all activities and can maximise their individual learning. There is regular, supportive monitoring of the work of all staff by managers across the school. This results in well focused feedback and very high quality training and development opportunities to help staff to improve their practice further. Teachers provide a wide range of relevant and engaging activities and learning materials and use information and communication technology (ICT) to very good effect. Very effective and continuous feedback to pupils helps them to think how they could improve their work further, and the highly positive ethos of reward and celebration of individual achievement proves to be highly motivating.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is excellent, highly relevant and caters for the full range of pupils' needs and capabilities. It is diverse and interesting and provides an appropriate focus on the needs of individual pupils. A particular strength is the 24 hour nature of the curriculum, which enables integrated pupil learning to take place between the school and the residencies. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on personal safety, social skills development and health education through an excellent personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme and outstanding physical education provision. Individual education plans and pupil care plans are used well to personalise the curriculum for each pupil, and these make a significant contribution to the overall

good progress in personal, social and independence skills achieved by pupils. Parents have a very high regard for the exemplary practice of involving them in furthering the learning and personal development of their children in the home environment. There are many significant success stories that result from close working liaisons between the school and home in terms of improved pupil attendance, attitudes and behaviour. Many parents contribute to the setting, monitoring and review of their child's individual targets. Excellent and wide ranging curriculum enrichment opportunities are provided to enhance pupils learning through visits out of school, highly productive partnerships with other schools and a comprehensive programme of lunchtime and after-school clubs and activities. Pupils' physical development is particularly well served through a commendable range of sport and leisure activities. Of note is the use of the Duke of the Edinburgh Award scheme, which is seen as a model of good practice, and a major contributor to pupil's social and personal development, as well as providing a relevant qualification, highly regarded by many employers.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding level of care, guidance and support. Staff know their pupils extremely well and work hard to ensure their welfare and safety. Child protection procedures are rigorous and training of staff fully meets recommendations. Highly effective arrangements are in place with social services and other agencies in relation to pupils overall development and pastoral support. Risks are carefully assessed and reviewed to ensure pupils are safe and that their individual needs are identified and addressed at all times. Individualised planning and well focused behaviour targets prove very effective in improving pupils' attitudes, behaviour and social skills. Arrangements for supporting more vulnerable pupils and their families are excellent. An outstanding feature of care and guidance is the school's unique nurturing support for younger pupils. Significant successes have been achieved through this innovative adaptation of the Nurture Group model to identifying and remediating specific aspects of individual pupils' learning difficulties. It is impressive that many pupils who had otherwise struggled to cope within a normal learning environment are now able to function more fully in their class lessons as a result of this highly effective provision. The school is right to celebrate the success of their nurture provision and plans are well advanced to extend this quality intervention service for access by those older pupils who could benefit from it. Beyond the school, a teacher and learning support assistant from the Ashley school have recently started to provide much appreciated outreach support for individual pupils with special education needs in mainstream schools. Working in successful collaborative partnerships with teachers and support staff, the outreach team provides focused assistance in creating suitable learning programmes and expertise in, for example, the development of pupils' emotional literacy.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are excellent. The inspirational headteacher has led his whole staff team very successfully through a significant period of change and development, always facilitating colleagues to reflect on how they do their work and what they could do to improve their practice even further. He encourages innovative thinking and provides challenge and support for individuals to transform their ideas into reality. His own unique take on how best to provide for children and young people with special needs, and willing contribution to the local debate on how to meet this challenge, has resulted in the school often leading the way in developing multi-agency working. He is very ably and energetically assisted by senior leadership colleagues who have a clear understanding of how to ensure his vision is effectively put into practice. Leadership responsibilities are being carefully distributed across the staff and individuals are rapidly improving their capability to meet the demands of their changing roles. This high quality of leadership and management has a significant impact on the achievement of pupils and the progress they make. Sophisticated self-evaluation processes are well established and the views of parents, pupils, governors, community and other professionals are carefully considered. Consequently, the school's view of itself is accurate and its prioritised areas for improvement are highly relevant. The continuous professional development of all staff, informed by thorough, supportive performance management procedures, is a significant strength of the school and pupils' learning benefits from the very high standard of specialist knowledge and support. In circumstances where finding suitably qualified staff is a real difficulty, the school is successful in recruiting experienced and well motivated staff. The 'home grown' nature of some the staff team is also an important contributor. For example a significant number of teaching assistants have trained or are currently in the process of training to be teachers. The quality of team-work across the school is exemplary and, not surprisingly, staff morale is very high. At the last inspection the school was encouraged to spend the very significant carry forward that it was carefully accumulating for school improvement. Currently, a massive building project is in train to upgrade the accommodation for design and technology, science, sports facilities, toilets and showers. As a result, the budget will be balanced by the end of the current financial year. The leadership team is working towards becoming a specialist school. Governors have played an important role in this process and they are highly supportive of the school's work. They continue to develop their capacity to provide an effective level of challenge. The school has made very considerable improvements since the last inspection and has an excellent capacity to improve in the future.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	1	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	1	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you all for making our recent visit to your school such a pleasurable experience. You made us feel very welcome. Special thanks must go to the members of the School Council who explained to us what was good about the school. We, too, thought your school was excellent and there were many things we liked very much: - You all receive an outstanding education and are cared for extremely well. - You are very well behaved, friendly and get on with everybody really well. - You enjoy coming to school, are happy in your lessons and make excellent progress towards meeting the challenging targets that you set for yourselves with the staff. - Your teachers and support staff make a great team and ensure your lessons are interesting and enable you to achieve your best. - Those of you that stay in residence or participate in the extended day activities, benefit enormously from the excellent care and guidance you receive. - The work you do with pupils from local mainstream schools, for example on the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, is very valuable for all of you. - Your headteacher and all the staff do their very best to make sure your time at school is the best you can have. - Your parents and carers really appreciate what the school does for you. - Your school knows what it is good at and how it can improve even more. - You are very well prepared for life after school. We have agreed that it would make your school even better if they asked to become a specialist school and develop their work in other schools in the area.