

Ashmead Combined School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110356
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	288644
Inspection dates	23–24 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Sean O'Toole

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	462
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Roger Axtell
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Loder
Date of previous school inspection	11 March 2002
School address	Cole Road Aylesbury HP21 8SU
Telephone number	01296 484434
Fax number	01296 393425

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashmead is larger than most primary schools. Pupils come from a wide range of economic backgrounds which are mostly disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and statements of special educational needs is average. Over 20% have English as an additional language and most of these pupils come from homes where Urdu and Panjabi are spoken. Attainment on admission is very low. There have been significant staff changes, and 10 teachers have been appointed in the last two years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

'I believe that Ashmead is much more than just a school, it is an experience. The and;quot;roots and wingsand;quot; motto applies to all children whatever their ability,' wrote one delighted parent, who reflected the views of many. Indeed, this is a good school with several outstanding features which contribute to the good achievement of the pupils and to their excellent personal qualities. The visionary headteacher has steered the school through the challenges of staff turnover and successfully maintained an excellent curriculum which inspires and enthuses the pupils.

Pupils love coming to this vibrant school where they thrive and contribute much to its success. Pupils grow in confidence and self esteem because of the school's excellent approach to developing personal qualities. They are outstanding ambassadors for the school and greatly appreciate the support they receive. Pupils say that they feel safe and happy. They take much delight in activities such as the jazz dance club, sports and the many varied visits and visitors. The 'befrienders' help to make everyone feel secure. Pupils speak positively about the ways they take responsibility.

The excellent start made in the Foundation Stage equips the children as learners and contributes much to their academic and personal development. The excellent way that staff link work in English to other subjects contributes much to pupils' enthusiasm and competence in writing. By the time they leave the school, pupils attain average standards in English and mathematics. Although pupils have secure basic skills in arithmetic they are less confident in using mathematical vocabulary and in solving problems. Teaching and learning are good. One girl said, 'Teachers make learning fun, they are the best thing about the school.' Lessons are thoroughly planned and resources are used very well to motivate learners although some lessons lack pace. Occasionally teachers go into too much detail and this limits the challenge and working time for pupils, hampering opportunities for them to develop their own ideas.

The outstanding headteacher is passionate about pupils' success and has built a team of staff and governors who are ambitious for the pupils. Much support is given to those new to teaching, and more experienced staff willingly take on responsibility. By analysing performance and tracking pupils' progress the headteacher and staff make good decisions about what to improve next. They have been successful in raising standards in writing and have a well-crafted plan which sets the correct agenda. Capacity for further improvement is excellent. The provision of high quality care and support contributes to pupils' successful learning and prepares them well for the future. One parent wrote, 'I don't feel my children would have advanced so well if they weren't at Ashmead.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend opportunities for pupils to learn new mathematical vocabulary and to apply their knowledge to solving problems.
- Improve the pace and challenge of some lessons so that pupils have sufficient time to complete their work and to develop their own ideas.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children make excellent progress in the Foundation Stage and thrive on the lively and challenging curriculum. Given their very low level of skills on starting school the children achieve exceptionally well in all of the areas of learning. Early reading and writing skills blossom because staff provide high quality opportunities for children to explore and investigate using their senses.

Progress and achievement in Years 1 to 6 are good. Those with learning difficulties make good progress because they receive well focused support. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well and communicate competently verbally and in writing. By the end of Year 2, most pupils are working at broadly average levels in reading, writing and mathematics. The extra support for reading and imaginative approaches to writing stimulate learning and result in pupils making good progress. By the end of Year 6, standards in English and mathematics are average. Pupils achieve exceptionally well in science. The school has robustly tackled the dip in English and pupils are on track to meet their challenging targets. Pupils are secure in arithmetic although they lack confidence in solving problems and using mathematical vocabulary. Pupils are highly motivated by the opportunities to illustrate their written work through the excellent quality of their art.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Because the school nurtures individuals, pupils' personal development and well-being are outstanding. Consequently pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils clearly understand the need for rules and keep them. Behaviour is good and relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Children in the Foundation Stage flourish in an atmosphere where they make choices and learn through doing. Throughout the school, pupils are eager to succeed and are proud of the contribution they make. Older pupils particularly enjoy being helpful. They take their responsibilities as school councillors, prefects and in supporting younger children in learning to read very seriously. Pupils sustain high levels of interest in activities such as drama, sport and music. They appreciate their role in the local and wider communities and are good at devising ways of supporting charities. Pupils have an excellent knowledge of how to keep healthy and participate enthusiastically in physical activities. Their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural qualities are seen in the ways in which they value different traditions and beliefs. Pupils are confident in sharing their feelings. In an excellent lesson in personal, social and emotional development pupils bravely shared their fears and worries. This is possible because as one said, 'This is a fantastic school and we all learn how to get on together.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good. Staff plan and prepare lessons thoroughly and make sure that resources are on hand so that pupils learn through practical experiences. This is particularly the case in the Foundation Stage where children develop a love of learning and respond to the

excellent teaching which includes a balance between direct guidance from adults and opportunities to explore and investigate.

Teachers know the pupils well and respond to their needs. They provide good guidance and the pupils respond enthusiastically. Several said, 'The teachers mark our work and this helps us to understand what we need to do to improve.' Teachers handle any incidents of inattention effectively. In some lessons the pace is too slow and teachers spend too much time on explanations which limits the time available for pupils to work. Some of the pupils' work shows that tasks are not always sufficiently challenging for the more able. Support staff are good at encouraging those with learning difficulties. Those who are at an early stage of learning English learn quickly because of opportunities to practise basic skills and to take part in role play and drama.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum makes an exceptional contribution to learning. Throughout the school, including the Foundation Stage, children bubble over with excitement because learning is fun. Pupils and parents are full of praise for the way that excellent links with the community, opportunities to visit a wide variety of venues and to join in national and local events contribute to enjoyment. Pupils take part in an excellent range of extra curricular activities, including sport, dance and drama which substantially enhance their personal qualities. The staff pay exceptional regard to promoting pupils' self esteem and this provides the foundation for successful learning. There is a good programme of teaching about relationships and the benefits and potentially damaging effects of drugs. A significant success has been the way in which staff link the teaching of English to other subjects. This approach has helped to raise standards and to inspire even the youngest to become effective writers. Another success has been the involvement of different community groups in helping pupils to read. As one pupil said, 'I didn't used to like reading but now I love it.'

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Outstanding levels of care, guidance and support are at the heart of the school's work. Staff believe that every child can achieve. There are many success stories among vulnerable pupils who have gone on to develop a good range of academic and personal skills. As one parent remarked, 'This is a place where the staff know and respect every child'. Robust procedures for child protection and regulations about safeguarding children are rigorously applied. Governors have ensured that there is well focused support for those with learning difficulties and for those at an early stage of learning English. Excellent use is made of outside agencies. The school regularly assesses the pupils and tracks their progress. The information is used to plan the next steps in learning. Parents are kept well-informed of their children's academic and social progress and are highly appreciative of all the staff do.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

This is a purposeful school and the quality of education is highly valued by pupils and their parents. Staff and governors take full account of pupils' and parents' opinions. They use the

information to guide developments. Outstanding leadership and management underpin the school's success. The headteacher provides incisive leadership and has built a competent and well focused team. Staff changes have been managed well and areas for development have been tackled. There is no complacency here. Staff have an accurate picture of the school's effectiveness, what needs to be done and have the skills and vision to carry out their plans. Governors share the vision and make an excellent contribution. Through regular visits and much involvement in classrooms they have a clear view of the school and are involved extensively in checking on its performance. The school complies with all requirements including those in racial equality legislation. Staff are called to account for their work. They are supported exceptionally well through training and courses and have opportunities to try out new ideas and approaches. This has proved to be very successful in the Foundation Stage where staff have adopted a different approach to developing children's communication skills which is contributing to rising standards.

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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
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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashmead Combined School, Cole Road, Aylesbury, HP21 8SU

Thank you for all the help you gave us when we came to visit your school. We enjoyed our visit very much, especially talking to you and looking at your work. We were very impressed with your lovely artwork and good writing. We agree that yours is a good school and there are several things which are outstanding.

It was good to see how well you play together. The 'befrienders' do a great job of making sure that everyone is included. The school council and prefects also are really good at helping you. We are sure that your teachers and parents are very proud of you. The staff make lessons interesting. You said that the ways that teachers make learning fun was especially good. Lots of you said that you enjoy school and are very fond of your teachers.

It was good to see that during lessons you worked hard, listened to other children and also made suggestions. You are not afraid to ask questions and to have a go at some quite difficult work. Due to the teachers' and your hard work you improve much while you are at Ashmead. We were most impressed by your enthusiasm and really enjoyed watching the gym club and finding out about all of your interesting visits and visitors.

Even in such a good school there are things to do. We have asked the teachers and governors to find more ways of helping you to solve problems and to learn more mathematical words. We also think that some lessons should be a bit more challenging. You can help the school to get even better by continuing to work hard and in some cases working a little more quickly.

We wish you well in the future and hope that you will always be as happy in school as you are now.

Sean O'Toole

Lead inspector