

Ashley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111515
Local Authority	Halton
Inspection number	310613
Inspection dates	12–13 December 2007
Reporting inspector	Arif Hussain

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	8–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	100
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs M Constantine
Headteacher	Mrs L King
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2004
School address	Cawfield Avenue Widnes Cheshire WA8 7HG
Telephone number	0151 4244892
Fax number	0151 4245980

Age group	8–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Ashley School provides for students with mainly moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All students have social and emotional difficulties and many have communication and language difficulties. Some students have additional needs including attention deficit, autism, sensory impairment and behaviour. All have statements of special educational need. Many students are from socially and economically disadvantaged areas with over a third eligible for free school meals. A few students are in the care of the local authority. The great majority of students come from White British backgrounds. The school has gained the National Schools Curriculum Award, Arts Mark, Information Communication Technology (ICT) Mark, Investors in People status, the National Healthy Schools Award, a lifetime achievement award for promoting environmental education and a Football Association Charter Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Ashley is an outstanding school. Representative views from parents include, 'My son loves school, it's like one big family, everyone knows and looks out for each other and there is always laughter to be heard.' Standards are low owing to students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities, but their achievement is outstanding because students overcome their substantial difficulties to become successful learners. The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and this enables students to make exceptional progress as they move through the school. In lessons students are especially well involved, for instance, in evaluating their own work. Staff expertise in supporting complicated learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially in communication and language, has been a key factor in students' outstanding progress. The school has developed an imaginative and stimulating curriculum that meets students' needs especially well. By the time students leave they have gained many qualifications. This includes success in gaining a wide range of entry level GCSE accreditations with distinctions in subjects such as science, ICT and food studies. A good number gain full GCSE passes including science, art, drama, physical education and ICT. Several of these are passes at grades B to D.

Personal development is outstanding because students receive exceptional care, guidance and support. Students are treated with great sensitivity and consideration for their personal, social and emotional needs. As a consequence, attitudes to learning are outstanding. Students work very hard in lessons and show great pride in their work. Behaviour is excellent and attendance is good. However, a very small minority of parents and carers do not follow the school's very good procedures and explain absence promptly. Students adopt healthy lifestyles extremely well. There is a very high level of participation in sports and students make healthy choices at lunch-times. Students adopt safe practices very well. They say that bullying is not a problem and their awareness of the dangers of drugs, alcohol and smoking is very strong. The school council system is a model of good practice and the impact on personal development is astounding. The school has created arrangements that resemble the best traditions of committees in the Houses of Parliament, a result of excellent links with national politicians. The health and safety committee's sterling work towards identifying problems is but one example of how useful these committees are.

Leadership and management are outstanding at all levels. The headteacher leads by example. Representative views from students include, 'She is friendly, funny and sorts out our problems. We know she cares about us because she always says we are all equal and are all the same.' Student's progress is monitored rigorously. Any underperformance is identified quickly and addressed. The governing body is very supportive and holds the school to account very well, leaving no stone unturned regarding performance. The school was judged as very effective with excellent features at the last inspection. In addressing the single weakness at that time about the attainment of the more able students and improving other areas of work extremely well, the school demonstrates excellent capacity for improvement. In view of the exceptional outcomes, value for money is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that all parents and carers explain students' absence more quickly.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Parental comments include, 'My son has made amazing progress because he is now more confident. He's doing really well in all his subjects and his reading and writing have really come on because he loves the school and teachers.' All students make equally impressive progress, regardless of their learning difficulties. For instance, those with the more complicated difficulties move forward in small steps but their achievements are just as outstanding as others. Speaking and listening skills development are often a strong focus in lessons and so students make very good progress in these areas. Every opportunity is taken to encourage students to learn independently through using computers. This has enabled students to develop very good ICT skills. Accreditation includes sport and leisure, home management, health and survival, expressive arts and number handling. Outstanding links with colleges enable many students to pursue their vocational interests. For instance, all Year 11 students attend taster days in the vocational area of their choice. A small number of older students are attending long term courses at a vocational training centre to gain experience in painting, decorating or construction skills. A good majority of school leavers moved on to further education last year.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils mature into very well-rounded, sensitive and considerate young citizens. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students develop very strong values about justice, fair play, care, respect and avoiding conflict. They have a remarkable ability to relate to the needs and feelings of others. For instance, in a discussion with members of the 'Anne Frank' Committee, students were able to speak with passion about the atrocities during the Second World War and the persecution of Jewish people. They expressed very thoughtful views, not only on persecution at other times in history, but also identified where they see it today. Students have just produced a video promoting peace which they intend to present at memorial events, both regionally and abroad. Students also speak with feeling about freedom of expression. They say that people of any faith should be able dress in a way that reflects their faith and wear religious clothing or symbols if they wish. Students have developed a very good awareness about the rich diversity of cultures in society. Students form excellent relationships with others.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Excellent features of teaching include the promotion of basic skills in literacy and numeracy, effective use of learning resources and lessons that capture interest and move along quickly. Consequently, students are engaged exceptionally well in learning. Teaching and support assistants are highly trained and always active in supporting learning. A drama lesson showed teaching and learning at its best. All students used their initiative exceptionally well, working in pairs to plan dialogues and role-plays relating to a story they were reading in English. Students gave stunning performances and made excellent progress in their communication and language as they considered the motivation of a fox in stealing food for his family. Finally, at the end of the lesson, students made insightful predictions about what might now happen in the story

when they returned to it in their next English lesson. Assessment and marking of work are good. The information collected is used very well to set challenging learning targets in later lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Students enjoy their education and achieve so well because of the excellent curriculum, which ensures their personal development. The curriculum is responsive to students and the school knows that they prefer learning through practical experiences. For instance, in a design and technology lesson, students were itching to get on with their work. Their planning, art work, ceramics and glazing were extremely professional as they produced very attractive pendants. Outstanding provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT helps all students to gain basic skills and to prepare especially well for the future. The vocational curriculum includes special events to develop enterprise skills and carefully organized work experience placements for students in the community. Visits out of school include art galleries, theatres, museums and residential trips that make a very strong contribution to personal development. Visitors also make a significant contribution to learning. For instance, coaches from a football club often work with students and contribute very well to physical education.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Every child matters at this school. Induction is very effective and students settle in quickly because of a family atmosphere where peer support is remarkable. Pastoral support and guidance systems are very strong. Students respond very well to rewards for good behaviour and achievement. Academic guidance is very effective and so students have a very good awareness of their starting points in learning, what they should aspire to and how to improve. Inclusion is excellent. The achievements of different groups, including those in the care of the local authority and minority ethnic groups are carefully monitored. Very good support is provided to ensure that all students achieve as well as they can. Many excellent partnerships in the community support students. For instance, the local authority's inclusion services, including therapists, often work with students to ensure full integration. Arrangements to ensure child protection, health and safety are in place and regularly reviewed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The leadership of the school is focused very successfully on achievement and promoting the personal development and well-being of all students. There is a common sense of purpose throughout the school. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses very well. The school has firm plans to simplify performance data in order to inform governors even more effectively about the progress and targets for different groups. Resources are used exceptionally well to support learning. Students benefit from electronic whiteboards in all classrooms. Communication aids, for instance, in the school council's 'chamber' are particularly helpful for students with sensory impairments. Overall, the school has very strong relationships with parents although a very small number of families do not let the school know when students are going to be off school. Office staff are very efficient and ensure that the school runs smoothly on a day-to-day

basis. The school deservedly has an excellent reputation in the community and parents are very appreciative of the school's work.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
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

Inspection of Ashley School, Widnes, WA8 7HG

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I really enjoyed meeting you and you were all very helpful. This letter is to tell you some of the things I found out about Ashley School. Your parents and carers think Ashley is a brilliant school and I agree with them. It is outstanding. What a lovely family feeling there is in school. The care, support and guidance you get are excellent. No wonder you are so happy. You all make excellent progress in your learning because teaching is outstanding. You work so hard in lessons and are right to take such pride in your achievements. I liked the way that adults work together to help you to achieve your best. The school gives you excellent chances to learn and develop as young citizens. Your behaviour is excellent. The school council and its committees do marvelous work for the community. Senior politicians and other Members of Parliament that have worked with you so often are going to be really proud of you.

I was also very impressed with what you know about healthy and safe lifestyles. The oldest students gain lots of certificates and qualifications which really help when they leave school. The headteacher, staff and governors all work very hard indeed to make sure you all keep learning so quickly. I have made only one suggestion to improve the school. A very small number of families are not letting the school know when students are going to be off school. I have therefore suggested that the school ensure that parents and carers keep the school in the picture.

Thank you for making my visit so enjoyable. It was wonderful to see your fantastic achievements. May I wish you all a happy new year.