

Ashmount School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120352
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	313585
Inspection dates	14–15 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Blackband

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	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	50
6th form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jean Lewis
Headteacher	Sue Horn
Date of previous school inspection	29 September 2003
School address	Beacon Road Loughborough LE11 2BG
Telephone number	01509 268506
Fax number	01509 231605

Age group	3–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashmount School provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). A quarter of the school's population have additional autistic spectrum conditions or other complex learning needs. Many pupils, because of their disabilities, have the potential to display very challenging behaviour. Most pupils are of a White British background, with a minority from other ethnic backgrounds. A very small number of pupils are at the earliest stages of English language acquisition. There are presently five pupils in the care of the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where every pupil achieves well. All pupils make outstanding gains in their personal development because teachers know them very well and are able to set them challenging targets to improve their skills. This underpins their academic achievements. Pupils with additional needs are successfully helped to overcome the barriers to their learning through the school's exemplary provision to help pupils to communicate more effectively. Children in the Foundation Stage provision quickly learn routines and soon begin to make good progress as they settle into school. Older students in the post 16 provision successfully build on the good progress they have made throughout school as they prepare for the next stage in their lives.

Pupils thrive within the caring and supportive ethos of the school. The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils is excellent. They feel very secure and well supported. They learn to be healthy, to keep safe and to behave well. They value the school and this is evident through the very good relationships they have with staff and their high levels of attendance. Pupils love coming to school and parents are almost without exception very happy for their children to attend, knowing they will be safe and happy and that the school has high expectations of their success. One parent's comment was typical, 'This is a school where the needs of pupils are always put first.'

The pupils enjoy their lessons and respond by trying their best. The teaching is good because lessons are interesting and well managed. Teachers throughout the school take great care to adapt learning activities to the differing abilities and interests of the pupils. However, this is made more difficult for them because the assessment procedures used in school are not sufficiently precise to allow teachers to record effectively every small step in the pupils' progress. As a result, the pupils' targets occasionally are not sharply focused enough and this slows down the pace of their learning. The senior team are well aware that systems need to be improved and that procedures to collect and evaluate data should be simplified to make better use of the information. In contrast, however, the pupils' communication and personal development targets are extremely clear and precise and this plays a significant part in helping pupils to improve their verbal skills, to make appropriate choices and to interact successfully with others. Teachers take every opportunity to tell pupils how well they are doing and how to improve their work further and this gives pupils the confidence to try their best. The curriculum provision is enriched by the many well-planned opportunities to interact with the community and by good programmes in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Pupils are supported, where practical, to take part in activities with mainstream pupils in local schools. This has a great impact on the pupils' confidence and motivation to learn.

The appointment of the headteacher in 2006 has successfully brought the leadership team to full strength after a period of uncertainty. The school has moved forward significantly since her appointment. She receives good support from competent senior managers and in particular from the experienced deputy head teacher. The governing body is supportive to the school and provides a good and improving standard of strategic leadership. The school evaluates its own work extremely effectively and accurately and there are excellent procedures for development planning, for instance in reviewing procedures for the assessment of pupils' progress. Together with the drive and enthusiasm of the senior team, the school has an excellent capacity to build on the good progress made since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress, in gaining basic literacy and numeracy skills, in their life skills training and in their work related learning. The students make excellent progress in their personal development because of outstanding procedures to help them moderate their behaviour and to reflect on and evaluate their learning experiences. The curriculum is excellent and it has been improved significantly since the previous inspection. It is broad and balanced and places an appropriate emphasis on helping students gain understanding of their own health and safety and of their role in the community. The students have very good opportunities to develop their learning about the world of work, for instance in their access to a range of vocational courses at a local college. The staff effectively promote an adult ethos and mature behaviour. Good teaching results in all the students achieving their potential through nationally accredited qualifications. The leadership and management of the provision are good.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage is well led and managed. All the children make good progress in their knowledge and understanding, and excellent progress in their personal development. Teachers and support staff know the children very well. The assessment of the childrens' developing communication skills is clear and focused. As a result, most pupils make good progress in speaking and listening and some achieve highly. The classroom is a calm, happy place because the children feel safe and routines are well established. The staff maintain excellent relationships with children. They are warm and encouraging while managing children's behaviour very well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review assessment systems to ensure teachers effectively record each small step in the pupils' progress and create sharp learning targets for each individual pupil.
- Simplify the collection and recording of performance data to make it easier for teachers to monitor the progress of each pupil.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

All the pupils achieve well and a few make outstanding progress. All the pupils make excellent progress in meeting challenging targets in their personal skills. Although many pupils enter the Foundation Stage with low levels of attainment, they make good progress and this gives them a solid start to their school career. The pupils' attainment remains generally well below national standards, but they make steady progress throughout their time at the school. There is no evidence of underachievement by any individual or group of pupils. The pupils with autistic spectrum conditions make particularly good progress in their communication. Other pupils with profound and multiple difficulties make good progress in very small steps across a range of personal skills.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils' excellent progress in their personal development reflects the school's strong emphasis on moral and social values and the high level of challenge in pupils' individual targets. Pupils have well-planned opportunities to learn about their own and other cultures. They develop a very good understanding of the importance of healthy lifestyles through the many opportunities to take part in physical activity. They make outstanding gains in their social skills especially in their tolerance of less mobile or articulate children because all staff provide excellent role models. Pupils contribute to the well-being of everyone at school through, for example, making decisions in the school council. Encouraged by staff, they practise their personal skills in all their activities. Pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy and this helps them to develop better independence skills.

Pupils feel safe and confident within the school's calm and supportive atmosphere. This helps them to settle to learning and has a very strong impact on their progress. Teachers manage each pupil's behaviour outstandingly well. Staff deal positively with the occasional incident of challenging behaviour and give excellent support and consideration to the distressed pupil. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying or intimidation at school. Parents confirm that their children really enjoy their learning. This is reflected in their positive attitudes to school, which have a substantial impact on their achievements.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers know pupils very well and this enables them to plan interesting well-paced lessons which meet their needs. Pupils gain confidence to learn new things because they receive a high level of individual tuition from well-trained teaching assistants. Pupils with communication difficulties and those with profound and multiple difficulties are able to take a full part in classroom activities because staff provide good visual clues and make good use of facilities to enable the pupils to learn through sensory experiences. The management of behaviour is excellent and has a significant impact on pupils' achievement. Classroom staff play a full part in assessing and recording the steps in pupils' progress. The assessments, however, do not always consistently capture the small steps in learning, which would enable teachers to sharpen pupils' learning targets further to extend their achievements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The outstanding curriculum is significantly enriched by frequent trips and events. This adds considerably to pupils' enjoyment of school. All pupils, including those with additional difficulties, are fully included in activities. Programmes in personal, social and health education have a significant impact on pupils' achievement in their personal skills, their knowledge about the advantages of a healthy lifestyle and about their own safety. There are well-managed

programmes in basic skills. Provision for supporting pupils' progress in communication is a strength of the school. Each pupil with communication difficulties has the benefit of a specific programme with clear targets for improvement. All staff are trained in appropriate techniques in signing and the use of symbols and teachers are particularly proficient in strategies to overcome the barriers to understanding especially those faced, for instance, by pupils with autism. The quality of this provision plays a very important role in enabling pupils to gain access to a much wider range of learning opportunities and so to make better progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The physical and emotional care of pupils is good. There are rigorous safeguarding procedures and these help to ensure the school is a safe and happy place. Parents find this reassuring and pupils greatly appreciate it. Pupils make outstanding progress in their social and moral skills and in developing their confidence to make independent choices. Pupils have very good relationships with staff and look to them as trusted providers of guidance and support. Pupils are made aware when they have produced good work and teachers help them to understand how to improve their work further. They would have an even better understanding of how to make progress if their learning targets were sharper.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher and senior staff have restored consistency after a period of change. Senior staff have a clear overview of pupils' progress because the review and tracking of pupils' achievements at the end of each term is very thorough. Excellent communication and a strong team spirit within the school enable staff to feel fully consulted, involved and valued. The quality of professional training is good and clearly linked to the high quality of monitoring and performance management of teachers and other staff. There are challenging targets for all staff members. This has made a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching and pupils' good achievement. Resources are well used and the school gives good value for money.

The school rigorously monitors and evaluates every aspect of provision. Managers at all levels have a very good grasp of the school's strengths and where there needs to be improvement. The quality of the school's self-evaluation is therefore outstanding. For instance, the weaknesses in the assessment process have been identified and appropriate development planned. Because of the quality of this self-evaluation and the decisive leadership by the headteacher supported by senior staff, there has been a rapid improvement in provision in a short time.

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Inspection judgements

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

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	2

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Not long ago my colleagues and I came to your school to see how you were getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make the school better. You made us very welcome and we enjoyed meeting some of you in the classroom and at lunchtime. Thank you and well done.

I was with you for two days and my colleague for only one day. That was long enough, however, for us to realise that you go to a good school. We could see that you all enjoy school very much. Here are a few of the good things we found.

- You work hard and make good progress in your work and excellent progress in learning how to behave and how to treat other people.
- Your teachers and the many different people at the school look after you well.
- Your teachers make sure your lessons are interesting and you get lots of support. This means you enjoy learning and do your best.
- Lots of staff help you to tell people what you want and to ask questions. They also teach you to listen carefully to what other people say.
- Your school is well run because everyone is constantly looking for things to improve so you can learn better.

I think the school could improve even further if the staff were to make some of the information they collect about you a bit easier to understand. They should also make sure that they write down very clearly every thing that you learn so they can help you to learn faster.

You can help too, just by going on working as hard as you have been doing!

Please thank your parents for the helpful comments they made on the questionnaires.

Best wishes to you all.

16 April 2008

Dear Pupils and Students



Inspection of Ashmount School, Loughborough, LE11 2BG

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Mel Blackband
Lead inspector