

Ash Lea School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122957
Local Authority	Nottinghamshire
Inspection number	340243
Inspection dates	1–2 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Susan Lewis

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
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	71
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Sheila Colman
Headteacher	Mrs Dawn Wigley
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2006
School address	Owthorpe Road Cotgrave Nottingham
Telephone number	0115 9892744
Fax number	0115 9893878
Email address	office@ashlea.notts.sch.uk

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester M2 7LA

T: 08456 404045

Textphone: 0161 618 8524

E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors spent the majority of time looking at learning. Twelve lessons in whole or in part were seen and nine members of staff observed. Inspectors held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. Data on pupils' progress was analysed and reports from the school improvement partner were scrutinised. Fifty-one questionnaires from parents and staff were also examined.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well pupils of different ages and with different needs achieve during their time at the school
- the richness of the learning opportunities pupils have at different stages and whether the accommodation restricts these in any way.
- how effectively leaders monitor and evaluate school improvement, especially teaching and progress in different classes.

Information about the school

Ash Lea is a special school for pupils aged three to 19 years with a range of moderate, severe and complex learning difficulties, including autism. Each pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Pupils come predominantly from Nottinghamshire but also from adjacent local authorities. Increasingly, pupils are joining the school with more complex needs, including challenging behaviour. Most of the school's pupils come from White British backgrounds.

Since the last inspection the school has had some staffing difficulties. The senior leadership team has changed considerably, although the headteacher has been in place since September 2009. The assistant head teachers have taken on additional responsibilities while the school awaits the arrival of the newly appointed deputy headteacher. Three unqualified teachers are now in post, all studying for qualifications. The school is due to extend its accommodation in the next academic year. The school holds many awards including the International Schools, Investors in People, Healthy Schools Gold, Eco Schools Bronze Awards and Careers Mark, Active/ Sports Mark and Arts Mark silver.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Ash Lea is an outstanding school, which cares exceptionally well for its pupils. It lives up to its belief that there is no 'ceiling on achievement' by ensuring pupils have the very best opportunities for independence and real life choices when they leave the school. Pupils say they love the school and they are clearly very happy and feel exceptionally safe. Every member of staff says they are extremely proud to work at this school and parents are unstinting in their praise of its achievements and the level of care and concern, not just for their child but for the family as a whole. Inspectors agree that the care, support and guidance provided to children and families, the attention paid to safeguarding pupils and to their well-being are outstanding.

Pupils' academic and personal development are excellent overall. This is because the teaching in lessons is good and because every opportunity is taken up in and out of school to help pupils to apply their learning in practical situations. Sometimes, however, the accommodation limits the range of ways that teachers can make lessons interesting and engage pupils or activities that can be carried out at any particular time. This is particularly the case for the youngest pupils, who have no immediate access to an outdoor learning environment. The school has become adept at managing such restrictions so that their impact is minimised, and also uses the local community facilities extremely well.

All pupils' achievement and progress in subjects is good, whatever their age or their learning needs. It is outstanding in areas such as life skills and personal development, including their spiritual, moral, cultural and social development; this is because the school is so focused on the whole child. Progress is good and improving even further in areas such as communication, reading, writing and numeracy. This is because the school has put in place highly focused programmes based on its analysis of the data it now has about pupils' needs, progress and teaching in these areas.

Excellent partnership with parents and carers and other services and schools mean that courses and learning opportunities are extremely well matched to pupils' needs and abilities. An exceptional range of accredited courses, and of opportunities for pupils to experience life beyond the classroom are in place and are always being extended. By the time pupils leave the school, usually at the end of their time in post-16, they have developed excellent workplace and other life skills that support their smooth transition into other educational programmes and adult services very well indeed. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, because all staff are so skilled at helping them to manage themselves. Relationships are excellent because lessons and playground activities keep pupils so well involved.

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Managers and leaders at all levels have very high expectations and are hugely ambitious for the education and care of pupils. They manage the school extremely well and, despite the staffing instabilities have strengthened its organisation and built its capacity further by the excellent attention to training staff at all levels and to regular and meticulous review of the school's work. Senior staff know the school very well indeed, but the school's own evaluation is a little cautious. However, the school improvement plan identifies exactly what needs to be done to improve further. Governance is good. Governors are very committed, hugely supportive and know the school well. They hold the school to account and have started to play a more prominent part in determining the school's strategic direction. All this means the school has excellent capacity to improve even more, providing excellent value for money.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to improve the accommodation further, particularly in relation to outdoor learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils really enjoy their learning. Their attendance is good and most attend very well, despite many having medical and other needs. The nature of pupils' severe and complex learning needs makes it inappropriate to judge their attainment against national expectations. However, from their individual starting points in the different subjects, pupils make good progress overall, because the teaching is good and teachers plan with pupils' individual learning needs in mind. All pupils leave the school with a range of accreditations and awards that represent significant achievement for them at Entry Level 1,2 and 3, including those in the core subjects and in areas such as citizenship, home management, and preparation for working life. A few pupils each year complete GCSE courses at the foundation levels, through partnerships with other schools. Others take additional qualifications for example Duke of Edinburgh Bronze and Silver and sports leaders awards. All this and activities such as the Youth Parliament help them make excellent contributions to the school and to local community life.

The school's data demonstrates almost all pupils reach, and many exceed, their learning targets, making good progress and sometimes better in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Pupils are improving their skills in writing, letters and sounds work and teachers' increased use of signs and symbols is helping pupils' further development in communication. Pupils love learning, are highly attentive during lessons and have such positive attitudes. Particularly strong is the pupils' progress in self-help and life skills, for which a considerable range of opportunities occurs throughout the school day. This is particularly capitalised on by the Key Stage 4 and post-16 departments in their vocational learning so that progress and achievement in these areas is outstanding.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lives and keep safe and the school misses no opportunity to reinforce these. For example, secondary age pupils

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were seen compiling a book for e-mail friends overseas about how they keep themselves healthy at Ash Lea. Pupils say there is no bullying. High expectations and careful attention through group and other work to support pupils' awareness of their own behaviour and others' needs and rights means pupils feel very safe. Pupils behaviour is excellent. Staff vigilance, excellent relationships and the highly consistent application of the pupils' behaviour management plan ensure excellent progress in this area.

Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is also outstanding. Throughout the school pupils make great strides in their confidence, independence and self-esteem and have a very strong sense of what is right and wrong. Those with the most complex needs and with autism become much more socially aware and aware of their own achievements. A huge range of visits, visitors and of enrichment experiences and national and international contacts promote pupils' awareness, understanding and enjoyment of different cultures.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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How effective is the provision?

Teachers have high expectations of themselves and of pupils and think very carefully about how to make their lessons interesting and relevant to each pupil. All teaching seen was good or better and in several lessons was outstanding. Features included highly effective team work with support staff and therapists, excellent use of technology, such as communication aids or interactive whiteboards and of signs and symbols so that each child was fully involved. Teacher talk and more practical approaches to learning were well balanced and kept all pupils involved all of the time. Staff's excellent knowledge of pupils' needs, interests and learning targets means they tailor the learning to this and build in opportunities for assessment to their lessons. Occasionally, however, staff's use of signs and symbols is not entirely consistent. Sometimes support staff do not have a clear role in a whole class activity or are not proactive enough when those with the most complex needs start to lose interest in a lesson.

Pupils benefit hugely from the outstanding curriculum and care, guidance and support. The curriculum is delivered in 'themes', covering all the required subjects. The many enrichment experiences ensure pupils are learning what is right for them and help them to be more outgoing and positive about new experiences. Extensive clubs and partnerships with other schools and organisations, including international projects such as the Comenius Project, really enrich and support pupils' understanding. Excellent work-related learning and work experience opportunities include such initiatives as 'Step Up', which the school is now helping other schools to take part in.

Excellent multidisciplinary team work, both within the school and with other agencies ensure that the school and the family secure the well-being of the pupils and contribute to the outstanding care provided. This is a school which goes the 'extra mile' to help pupils and their parents. The systems for dealing with pupils' emotional and health needs work outstandingly well, as the school draws on and follows through any advice and support available.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Everyone in this school is ambitious for the pupils within it and clear about their own responsibilities within that. Senior leaders are a unified and dedicated team and are well

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supported by governors. Despite the relatively recent challenges and changes to leadership and management at all levels, the school has gone from strength to strength. Senior staff have improved the work of the learning coordinators who have been very well trained to ensure that learning moves forward consistently and progressively at every phase of the pupils' school life. The leadership of teaching and learning has been strengthened through the involvement of leaders at every level and the exemplary emphasis on staff training through courses, coaching and mentoring. Detailed analysis of the pupils' progress data means the school targets help promptly where it is needed. Safeguarding procedures meet all requirements and are rigorously applied across all areas of the school's work and routinely reviewed. Equality of opportunity is highly emphasised. Every learning experience, whether it be a residential journey or a classroom lesson, is carefully thought through to ensure every child can take a full part and achieve fully. The school's community cohesion audit and plan and its many activities in this area support community cohesion well across all dimensions. The school has good evidence of the ways in which these are supporting understanding of disability, particularly locally, but has not yet formally analysed its contributions nationally and internationally.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Only a very few children attend the school's Foundation Stage provision, which is in a mixed class with Key Stage 1 pupils. Judgements are based on evidence of past provision as well as current attendees. The school provides well for its youngest children

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because of the joint expertise and leadership of the teachers and the teaching assistants and because teaching in this class is always at least good and well tailored to individual need. Lesson planning is carefully informed by individual learning and behavioural plans and the work systematically targeted on the important things children need to learn, as well as on the Foundation Stage curriculum. This all helps them to make good progress in all areas of learning and particularly in their language, communication and personal development because of the strong emphases here.

Accommodation is satisfactory overall. The indoor space and the school grounds are used well by staff to support learning. However, there is no readily accessible covered outside area and this limits how easily learning can take place outside. Appropriate systems are in place to monitor children's experiences, development and progress, although some of this is still new. The attention to personal safety and children's well-being is excellent. Leadership of this area is good. Staff know what needs to be done and are determined to achieve it, but the small and unpredictable number of children entering the Foundation Stage mean that sometimes improvement is a little slower than in other areas of the school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

The post-16 provision is outstanding. Students benefit from a curriculum highly tailored to the needs of each individual both for life and for the next stage of their education. The new vocational programme links closely into both home management and the world of work, preparing students extremely well for their future lives. Teaching is good. It is sometimes outstanding, particularly when students are enabled to complete work with just the right amount of help and when questions are well targeted to make them problem-solve for themselves. An excellent range of accreditation allows each student's talents and skills to be recognised, developed and affirmed. Students are excellent ambassadors for the school both in the way they welcome and talk with visitors and in the many activities they carry out in the local community. These all add to their self-esteem and contribute to outcomes overall being excellent. All students for example achieved at least an Entry Level 2 in Life Skills last year, as well as a range of other appropriate vocational qualifications; students are, similarly, on target to achieve excellent outcomes this year.

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These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers say this is a 'marvellous' and 'fantastic' school and have huge confidence in its leadership and management. No negative comments were received about any aspect of the school's work, although a very few did comment on the 'poor quality' of the accommodation. Parents are confident that their children are safe, well cared for and are achieving well. They feel that the teaching is of a high quality and that their children make remarkable progress in areas such as their self-esteem. Inspectors agree with these views. They also find that the accommodation, though satisfactory, does affect how teachers can organise their lessons and what the school can offer on site.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ash Lea School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 35 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 71 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	32	91	3	9	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	34	97	1	3	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	29	87	6	13	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	74	9	26	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	33	94	2	6	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	77	8	23	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	30	86	4	11	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	30	88	4	11	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	28	80	7	20	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	97	1	3	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	26	74	8	23	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	31	89	4	11	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	97	1	3	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



3 March 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ash Lea School, Nottingham, NG12 3PA

It was lovely for me and my colleague to meet and spend time with you when we visited your school. Thank you so much for making us so welcome. We think your school is an excellent school and there were lots of things we really liked about it. These are some of them:

- the ways in which you are helped to do more and more things for yourself
- we like the way your teachers try to make sure that what you are taught is just right for you
- the different courses that older students do and the many activities that you have besides, such as visits and trips
- that you know about the importance of a healthy lifestyle and do lots of healthy things like sports, including being sports leaders.
- the way everyone works together, including with your parents and other people.

There is one thing I have asked the school to do. This is to find ways to improve some of the school buildings and the outside areas, particularly for the younger children. This is so that it is easier for teachers to teach all of the different things and groups they have to in them. You can help, too, by continuing to behave as well as you did when we visited.

Thank you for helping us find out about your school. I hope you all continue to enjoy school as much as you clearly did when we were there.

Yours sincerely

Susan Lewis

Lead inspector

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