

The Ashley School Academy Trust

Ashley Downs, Lowestoft, NR32 4EU

Inspection dates 1–2 April 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- This is a school in which pupils thrive and are able to do as well as they possibly can.
- While standards in English and mathematics are low pupils' progress across the school is outstanding. They acquire the basic skills of literacy and numeracy exceptionally well.
- Teaching inspires pupils to do their best. Teachers ensure that pupils understand how well they are progressing and are clear about what they need to do to improve further.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding and their behaviour is exemplary.
- Arrangements to ensure that pupils are safe are excellent.
- Pupils benefit greatly from an excellent range of opportunities that capture their interest and support their learning and progress exceptionally well.
- The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the efforts of staff to raise pupils' confidence and self-esteem are highly effective.
- The work of the headteacher, senior leaders and the governing body to ensure that outstanding teaching and pupil progress are sustained is also highly effective.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed parts of 23 lessons. They were accompanied by the headteacher or a member of the school’s senior leadership team during 14 of the observations.
- Meetings were held with governors, the headteacher, teachers with additional responsibilities and pupils.
- The inspectors looked at the work in pupils’ books and heard some pupils reading.
- The inspectors took into account the school’s information about pupils’ attainment and progress, its evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses and the resulting plans for improvement. The inspectors also looked at a range of documents and policies concerning school management and keeping pupils safe.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted’s online survey (Parent View) to trigger an analysis. However, the inspectors considered the responses to the school’s own survey of parent views undertaken in February 2014. They also considered 17 questionnaire responses submitted by staff.

Inspection team

Godfrey Bancroft, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Lewis

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is a smaller than average sized special school.
- The proportion of pupils entitled to benefit from the pupil premium, the additional government funding for those known to be eligible for free school meals, looked after by the local authority or from service families, is almost twice the national average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups and the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language are much lower than found in most other schools.
- All pupils have a statement for their special educational needs. These statements are mainly for moderate learning difficulties. However, many pupils have associated disabilities, such as speech and language difficulties, autism and behaviour difficulties. An increasing proportion of pupils are being admitted who have more complex needs.
- The school converted to become an academy in September 2011. When its predecessor school, Ashley School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding. This is the first inspection of the academy.
- The school's boarding provision was the subject of a separate inspection in February 2014. It was judged to be outstanding.
- The school has formal links with Lowestoft College and Otley College to provide pupils with work-related courses. The governing body also manages the Oulton Broad Water Sports Centre.
- The headteacher joined the school in September 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In order to sustain pupils' outstanding progress school leaders and teachers should:
 - fully secure the teaching methods introduced to enhance pupils' understanding of the sounds made by letters and words
 - create more opportunities for younger pupils to write about a wider range of interests and topics.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils join the school with attainment that is very low. All face significant challenges to learning and many join having experienced significant difficulties at other schools. Others have missed large parts of their education through poor attendance at their previous schools.
- Pupils' progress throughout the school is outstanding. Standards in English and mathematics are well below average, but this is linked to pupils' very low starting points and to the challenges to learning which they face. Even so, the proportion of pupils who exceed the progress expected of them is far higher than found in most other schools.
- The excellent progress that pupils make in Years 3 to 6 is against a background of a rising number who have increasingly complex learning needs and disabilities. Many pupils also join the school mid way through this period of their education. For example, in the current Year 6 almost half the pupils joined within the last twelve months, giving the school significantly less time than it might otherwise have to influence pupils' progress.
- Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 sustain the pattern of outstanding progress. Pupils are prepared as well as they possibly can be for later life. Many are successful in gaining work-related qualifications and all either continue their education at one of the local colleges or manage to get a job.
- Teachers are excellent at identifying any pupil who many have particular gifts or talents. A small, but increasing number are gaining A*-C grades in GCSE examinations and many do well in their chosen sports. Several of the school's former pupils are training to compete internationally in a range of sports with some hoping to represent Great Britain in the 2016 Paralympics.
- Younger pupils acquire and apply their knowledge of the sounds made by letters and words (phonics) well, while older pupils are enthusiastic readers. Pupils also make significant strides in developing their communication skills, especially their speaking and listening. Pupils also acquire the basic skills of mathematics exceptionally well.
- Pupils who are entitled to benefit from the additional pupil premium funding, which is close to half of all pupils in the school, do every bit as well as their fellow pupils and make progress that is better than that made by similar pupils in other schools.
- In addition to the pupil premium funding, with its positive impact on pupils' progress, the primary school sports funding is also being used to build on pupils' already excellent progress in terms of their coordination and their ability to participate confidently and often very successfully in a wide range of sports.
- There is sometimes year-on-year variations in attainment and progress across different subjects. For example, in the current Year 6 progress in English, while outstanding, is lagging a little behind that in mathematics. Nevertheless the school's assessment information, the progress seen during lessons and the work in pupils' books all paint a convincing picture that outstanding progress is on course to be sustained in the future.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teachers are highly effective at identifying and providing precisely the help that pupils need in

order to learn and progress exceptionally well.

- Everything possible is done during lessons and during additional learning opportunities to modify activities so that they appeal to pupils' interests, capture their enthusiasm and provide them with the confidence they need to become successful learners.
- For example, some pupils do not find learning in the classroom at all easy. Some pupils much prefer to learn out of doors and teachers involve them in activities such as construction and horticulture. This invariably gives pupils the confidence to know they can succeed, manifesting itself in their subsequent success as learners in a classroom setting.
- Relationships between teachers, teaching assistants and pupils are excellent. Every opportunity is taken to recognise and celebrate pupils' efforts and successes. Even so, teachers are not afraid to challenge pupils. They have high expectations of what pupils are capable of and do not hesitate to let them know if there is any indication that they are not doing their best.
- Teachers and teaching assistants are remarkably good at raising pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Response is prompt to supporting any pupil whose rate of progress, for whatever reason, slackens. Teaching assistants often provide work for individual pupils or teach them in small groups, which often results in remarkable progress. An example of this is the highly effective use made of the pupil premium to support the learning of eligible pupils.
- Teachers' marking is of an exceptionally high quality. Marking consistently identifies what pupils have done well and ensures that they are very well informed about the progress they are making and how to make it even better.
- The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught very effectively and pupils make massive strides in improving their speaking and listening. Even so, the progress of some younger pupils in English, while outstanding, is not currently as rapid as their progress in mathematics. This is because the methods used to teach the sounds made by letters and words have not been in place long enough to impact fully on pupils' progress. Similarly, the range of topics used to capture pupils' interest in writing is sometimes not sufficiently wide or varied enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Their enthusiasm and commitment to learning in lessons is exemplary and their behaviour around the school is excellent. Pupils are proud of their achievements and those of their classmates. They relate well to adults and are caring and courteous. Staff manage pupils' behaviour exceptionally well, providing consistent support so that the behaviour of each pupil becomes as good as it can be.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is also outstanding. This view is supported wholeheartedly by parents and by pupils. Pupils are also well informed about how to stay safe at school and when they are out in the community.
- Pupils say they enjoy coming to school and this is evident in the enthusiasm with which they talk about their work and about the activities they enjoy. Attendance is rising, although it is already higher than found in the majority of similar schools.
- Pupils are proud of their school and very appreciative of the support they receive. They also appreciate and embrace opportunities to take responsibility. Being part of the school council is a role that is taken very seriously. Pupils are pleased to be in a position of trust from which they

can influence what happens in the school.

- Pupils' participation in business and enterprise activities is typical of their entrepreneurial spirit. The 'Ashley Shiners' make a decent profit from cleaning cars and the 'Ashley Growers' are currently producing high quality hanging baskets. Pupils also have a nationally recognised reputation for their high quality work as Sports Leaders, through which they often organise sports events and provide help for pupils in other schools.
- Pupils are sensitive and supportive of each other and understanding of the challenges they each face. Pupils are very clear about the damage that bullying in its various guises can inflict. They are also very knowledgeable about the potential dangers posed by misuse of the internet and social media. Pupils' understanding of this has recently been given a high profile by the school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher, the leadership team, staff and the governing body are all committed to sustaining the excellent provision and outstanding pupil progress. They are dedicated to doing everything they can to make sure that each pupil can thrive and do their best.
- Checks to ensure the quality of teaching is as good as possible are frequent and thorough. Staff willingly embrace new approaches to ensure that high quality is maintained. For example, they are enthusiastic about the current project to update the provision for information and communication technology, designed to further enhance pupils' communication skills and help to prepare them for the world of work.
- The school's arrangements to evaluate its performance are accurate and rigorous. Plans to sustain high quality provision are tied in closely with challenging targets for pupils' progress. Arrangements for the performance management of teaching and to reward good teaching are also linked closely to challenging targets for pupils' progress. Morale is high and staff value the excellent opportunities for their continued professional development.
- Parents, as revealed by the school's recent survey, are full of praise for the school's work and for the support that is provided for their children. Parents particularly appreciate the help they receive from the Family Support Team.
- Pupils benefit greatly from an excellent range of learning opportunities and additional activities. Provision for their personal, social and emotional development and for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptionally effective. A highly effective range of work-related courses and links with local colleges help to prepare pupils for the world of work.
- Outdoor learning makes an excellent contribution to raising pupils' confidence and self-esteem. This includes frequent use of the nearby water sports centre, managed by the school, and a residential visit to Wales. Performing arts, including music, also have a high profile. Some pupils are highly skilled at playing instruments, such as drums and trumpets. This year's 'Cinderella' pantomime was very well received and enjoyed by all, as was the recent performance by some of the school's musicians at the highly regarded Snape Maltings concert hall.
- No one is complacent about the challenge of sustaining the high quality of provision and outstanding pupil progress. The school makes regular use of external expertise to evaluate its performance. Recent evaluations and those in preceding years are unanimous in agreeing the school is outstanding in all respects.

- The outreach work provided by the school is greatly appreciated by those who benefit from it. This includes providing training for those managing and teaching special needs in mainstream schools and providing guidance to maximise the progress of pupils who have special needs in mainstream schools and other special schools. An additional, well received, dimension to the outreach work is undertaken through the primary school sports funding, with local primary schools drawing upon the significant expertise provided by the school's subject leader for physical education.

- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors fulfil their duties exceptionally well. They are knowledgeable about all aspects of the school's work and great advocates for everything that it provides. They are well informed about the quality of teaching and about the progress of the various groups of pupils. They know chapter and verse about the beneficial impact brought about by the highly effective use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and the primary school sports funding. In fact, governors are meticulous in ensuring that all available funding is used wisely. They also understand fully how teachers and school leaders may be rewarded for the quality of their work. Governors are fully involved in measuring the impact of the school's work on pupils' progress and are well placed to hold school leaders to account for the quality of this work. Arrangements for safeguarding and child protection meet current requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137459
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	434587

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dale Gowen
Headteacher	Sally Garrett
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
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