

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



3 January 2018

Ms Sally Garrett
Headteacher
The Ashley School Academy Trust
Ashley Downs
Lowestoft
Suffolk
NR32 4EU

Dear Ms Garrett

Short inspection of The Ashley School Academy Trust

Following my visit to the school on 15 November 2017 with Kerry Grubb-Moore, HMI, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in April 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Those who responded to Ofsted's survey said they would recommend it to others. In discussion, and in your own recent survey, parents said they felt their families were supported well. One parent typically said: 'This school is amazing. It is always a joy to visit and see how polite and courteous the pupils are, and also to see how professional and dedicated the staff are. My child loves attending school and has made huge progress.'

It is clear you always work very closely with families. In doing so, you make sure parents are well informed about their children's progress, through the website, transition evenings, home-school contact books and regular reports home. This level of communication is having a very positive impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and attendance. A few parents said they would like their children to receive homework, as they feel this would help them to do even better.

You are promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development exceptionally well, through your well-conceived celebration assemblies, excellent opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and the sharing of different cultural traditions. Pupils volunteer as helpers, as sports leaders and act as transition ambassadors helping younger pupils join in at playtime and stay safe. We saw that pupils participate in activities with great enthusiasm and enjoyment, so much so

that they want to attend school even if they are not feeling well. Pupils' behaviour was equally outstanding in the playground and on arrival and departure from school. Their attendance is high compared with other special schools and you promote good attendance extremely well through your system of football league awards.

You, senior leaders and subject leaders have a very clear and accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement in the school. I saw the strong teamwork you have successfully developed among your dedicated staff to promote the highest standards of teaching, behaviour and pupils' well-being. You are rightly regarded as a 'thinking school'. You have established an excellent reputation across the county in the field of special education and are continually at the forefront of innovation, such as assessment. Your staff are very proud of their school.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team and executive board have ensured that all safeguarding procedures are fit for purpose and that records are suitably detailed and of high quality.

The school continues to develop a strong culture of safeguarding. All staff are dedicated to ensuring the safety and welfare of pupils. All parents, staff and pupils believe pupils are safe in school. There is a named safeguarding member of the executive board who is briefed regularly about safeguarding. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding ensure that all training is up to date. They also make sure that the checks made on the suitability of staff to work with children meet requirements, although a few entries on school records were updated during the inspection.

Pupils learn how to stay safe through well-chosen topics such as: the safe use of the internet; safe travel; safe cycling and how to call the emergency services. Pupils spoken with said bullying is rare. These pupils had a good awareness of cyber bullying and how to prevent it. During the inspection, pupils were observed playing football safely at breaktime and carefully using equipment, such as potato peelers, to prepare carrots for carrot and coriander soup in food technology.

Staff assess all activities in school and in the community for any potential risks to pupils' safety. Leaders ensure that effective strategies are in place to minimise any risks identified.

Inspection findings

- I wanted to find out how effectively leaders are ensuring that the standards pupils achieve and the quality of teaching remain outstanding. You have sustained a culture of high expectations for teaching and learning across the school. Teaching quality is consistently good and is often outstanding, as measured in terms of pupils' progress. Your records of the monitoring of teaching over time show that teaching overall has improved further since the last

inspection. Teachers set high expectations for pupils' learning; they ask probing questions to deepen pupils' thinking, and they ensure that learning support assistants are effective. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of each pupil's prior learning. They make good use of this and well-chosen resources to plan stimulating activities, which are carefully matched to each pupil's needs.

- Consequently, all groups of pupils, including the disadvantaged and the most able pupils, make outstanding progress from their different starting points. Inspectors saw pupils' excellent attitudes to learning in visits to lessons. They also noted the great pride that pupils take in the presentation of their work.
- The youngest pupils make rapid and secure gains in reading and writing because you have rightly focused on improving the teaching of phonics, and have extended the range of opportunities for writing since the previous inspection. The oldest pupils build on this progress and so leave school with a wide range of relevant qualifications. These include GCSE entry level qualifications, arts awards, sports leadership awards, functional skills in information technology and vocational qualifications.
- Another focus was how well pupils at key stage 4 are prepared for leaving school and how many have moved on to further education, training, or employment. The oldest pupils are thoroughly prepared for leaving school. Not only do they have very good opportunities to take a wide range of qualifications, but they have excellent chances to develop their independence, self-confidence and skills for living. These include successful participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, sports leadership awards, roles as transition ambassadors, work experience placements such as Saxmundham Angling and Engraving centre and travel training. A few pupils also gain part-time work in motor mechanics and a catering outlet.
- The school provides pupils with good-quality careers guidance and advice which is consolidated through the City and Guilds Skills for Working Life programme. This enables them to make informed choices. Staff work closely with parents in familiarising pupils with their preferred college. As a result, they transfer smoothly to the next stage and follow their desired courses. Consequently, since the previous inspection, all pupils have successfully progressed to college and continued their education.
- I also wanted to find out if the school was providing opportunities for pupils at key stages 2 and 3 to return to mainstream school. It is clear that the school makes every effort to enable pupils to rejoin mainstream school where appropriate, but only if parents agree. Where this is not possible, the school moves pupils to higher year groups in order to accelerate their learning. A small number of pupils were recently moved up from key stage 3 classes to key stage 4 to prepare them for GCSE. These pupils not only achieved five A* to C grades but also prepared for A-level mathematics in Year 11. They are now studying for A levels in a local sixth form.
- A further line of enquiry related to how well the executive board is monitoring the work of the school to ensure that the website meets requirements, and that all policies are up to date and are implemented effectively. Executive board members are closely monitoring the work of the school, focusing on outcomes.

They receive reports from subject leaders, look at samples of pupils' work and the school's assessment information. They ask challenging questions about whether pupils are working at the right levels and they ensure that additional funding for pupil premium, Year 7 catch-up and the primary sports grant is used effectively. However, they are not rigorous enough in checking that the website complies with requirements, that updated policies are published on the website and that all safeguarding checks are properly recorded. All of these issues were rectified during the inspection.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they sustain outstanding teaching and outcomes by providing pupils with suitable homework to consolidate and extend their learning
- they rigorously check that the website and safeguarding checks are routinely updated and meet requirements.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the executive board, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Suffolk. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Declan McCarthy
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

We met with you, your senior leaders, subject leaders and two trustees to discuss the progress since the previous inspection. We talked to staff and pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work during our visits to lessons. My colleague heard pupils read and I looked at the school's tracking information showing the progress pupils make. I spoke with eight pupils and my colleague met with six parents to seek their views. There were seven Parent View questionnaires completed, which was too few to produce a return. Nevertheless, I looked carefully at the four free-text responses to Parent View. I also considered the responses from 62 of your parents in the recent national NFER survey. I looked at the 26 staff responses to their questionnaires. We examined a range of documentation including: your safeguarding procedures and policies; your procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children; records of staff training; your attendance figures and records of incidents of behaviour. I also looked at your self-evaluation documents, your school improvement plan and minutes of executive board meetings.