

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Ashley High School

Cawfield Avenue, Widnes, Cheshire WA8 7HG

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Inspection dates:

12–13 November 2019

## **Outcome**

Ashley High School continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

This is an exceptional school where every pupil is supported to achieve their full potential. Pupils speak with enthusiasm about their school. They enjoy their learning and are proud of their many achievements.

Pupils feel valued and listened to. They have warm and friendly relationships with the staff and each other. Staff know and understand the needs of every pupil extremely well. Consequently, pupils feel settled, happy and safe at the school.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Parents and pupils who gave their views agreed that bullying is rare. One pupil's comment typified many: 'We don't get bullied here and if there are problems, staff sort them out quickly and effectively, so we can resolve it, shake hands and move on.'

By the time that pupils are ready to leave Ashley High School they have the skills, knowledge and confidence to take their next steps in life, education or work. One parent's comment echoed many others, when they said: 'The school is without doubt the best school any of my children have attended. The school has helped my child not just academically but socially and emotionally.'

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Pupils study a broad and varied curriculum. Leaders are ambitious and expect all pupils to achieve highly. Pupils in the secondary school study the full national curriculum and are immersed in the academic, creative, physical and technical subjects from Year 7 to 11. Of equal importance is the development of pupils' personal and social skills. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 8 and the sixth form made and served food in the school snack bar and cyber cafe. They learned important skills for the workplace by serving customers, managing money and cleaning up.

Teachers are expert in their subject knowledge. They know pupils' needs and plan carefully so that pupils learn and remember information in a logical order. Pupils explained how teachers help them to understand where they have made mistakes and how they can improve their work. Staff use literacy activities well in the curriculum to help pupils improve their vocabulary and spelling skills. Real-life situations are used in numeracy and mathematics to develop pupils' understanding of number as well as their reasoning and problem-solving skills. Pupils are motivated and confident learners with aspirational goals for their future. Pupils consistently achieve nationally recognised qualifications that range from entry level up to GCSEs.

The school has a rich and exciting mix of opportunities for pupils and students to extend their learning beyond the classroom and understand the wider world. Residential trips to Germany, China and South Africa have allowed pupils to meet children from other cultures, share experiences and understand their similarities and differences. Visits to local museums and industrial Widnes have brought their study of history to life. Visits to London and the Houses of Parliament helped pupils to understand the role of government and democracy.

Each year staff plan an 'international week' so that pupils can experience the music, food, dance, costumes, religion, sport and language of other cultures. Each classroom represents a country. Pupils visit each 'country' and have their own personal passport stamped. After-school clubs allow pupils to enjoy sport, information and communication technology (ICT), Zumba, music and board games.

The sixth form prepares students well for their next steps in education and life. The core curriculum is focused on English, mathematics and ICT. Students also experience a range of vocational, work and independent living options. Leaders have recently introduced supported internships which are having a positive impact and some students are now in paid employment. An independent living space that replicates a small flat allows students to learn skills that will enable them to live independently. Students showed how they were learning to cook food and keep their flat tidy and clean.

By the end of key stage 4, pupils are supported to make their choices for their lives post-16. Some choose to remain at Ashley High School, whilst others choose alternative colleges or training providers.

Leaders are highly effective in their work to improve the school. Their focus on training for staff has developed several strong and able leaders throughout the school. Staff work as a team to ensure that the school's values, ethos and procedures are consistently followed in all their work. All staff are highly skilled at meeting pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities so that pupils flourish in their studies, achievements and personal development.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The culture of safeguarding in school is very strong. The safeguarding team works effectively together to respond quickly to any concerns. Staff are highly vigilant and quick to spot any change in pupils' behaviour or emotions that may show that something is wrong. Through a range of extra help, including from a school counsellor and pastoral support, pupils feel confident to talk to adults about any worries or concerns they may have.

## Background

When we have judged a special school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding on 24–25 March 2015.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	111515
<b>Local authority</b>	Halton
<b>Inspection number</b>	10082115
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	104
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	25
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Karl Ashton
<b>Headteacher</b>	Linda King
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ashleyhighschool.co.uk">www.ashleyhighschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	24–25 March 2015

## Information about this school

- This is the first section 8 inspection since the school was judged to be outstanding in March 2015.
- Pupils who attend the school have autism spectrum disorder and/or social communication needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school links with two local schools, The Bridge School and Ormiston Chadwick Academy. Staff go with pupils and students who can undertake a range of vocational courses, including hair and beauty, and construction.

## Information about this inspection

- We held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, other members of staff, the local authority and members of the governing body, including the chair. These discussions considered the quality of education, the wider experiences of pupils at the

school, aspects of pupils' behaviour and leadership and management. An inspector also met with a group of parents.

- In considering the quality of education, we concentrated on English, mathematics, history and physical education. We discussed the arrangements for the curriculum and teaching with the headteacher, senior leaders and teachers. We visited lessons and then talked with pupils about what they had been learning. We looked at pupils' exercise books in these subjects. We also looked at pupils' achievements in examinations and school's records of pupils and students' destinations post-16.
- We spoke with staff, governors, parents and pupils about how the school keeps pupils safe. An inspector examined the single central record of the checks undertaken to make sure that staff are suitable to work in school. Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding policy and procedures.
- Inspectors also spoke with pupils, parents and staff about the wider curriculum including the school's work to enhance pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### **Inspection team**

Julie Bather, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Dawn Farrent

Ofsted Inspector

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