

Ashley School

Cawfield Avenue, Widnes, Cheshire, WA8 7HG

Inspection dates 24–25 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Sixth form provision		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- The headteacher's leadership is very effective. She constantly ensures the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of the curriculum are embedded. Her sensitive approach and determination results in as much success as possible for all students.
- The very able deputy headteacher has a crystal clear overview of strengths and weaknesses at the school. She is well supported by senior and middle leaders who have a range of diverse skills.
- Together, leaders ensure that teaching and students' achievement continue to improve. They recognise that a consistent approach to the analysis of all data is the next step for the sixth form provision.
- Governors are extremely supportive of the school and challenge leaders to constantly provide exemplary practice for all.
- Students' behaviour is outstanding and their attitudes are exemplary. Very effective arrangements are in place to ensure all students are safe and all safeguarding requirements are fully met.
- The new sixth form provision has got off to a good start with a smooth transition for all those students who joined in September.
- All staff are experienced and highly trained in different aspects of special educational needs or specialist subjects. This, along with exceptionally high levels of care ensures students achieve extremely well from their starting points.
- The support staff are a huge strength of the school. They are extremely well trained and focus constantly on students' well-being, personal development and academic achievements.
- Some students gain outstanding personal achievements due to the targeted support that they receive to recognise their talents in sports, poetry, music, drama, textiles and art. As a result, some students' personal achievements are exceptional considering their starting points.
- Students make rapid and sustained progress over time. As they move up through the school, students are consistently well supported to achieve the very best they can in Key Stage 3 and 4.
- Lunchtime clubs, Cyber Café, trips, visitors, residential visits and sport are all particular favourites as students say they are learning to interact socially which is a skill they need for later life, especially in the world of work.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching and learning in many different lessons, taught by 16 different teachers across all the key stages. There were a number of joint observations carried out with the deputy headteacher in Key Stage 3 and 4. The headteacher accompanied the lead inspector on walks around the school and observations were conducted and learning was observed in the sixth form provision and Key Stage 4. The inspectors observed students reading in lessons and heard readers from Years 8 and 10. The inspectors observed support for students in whole-class sessions and with individual students. One inspector visited the IPAD, (independent living accommodation for the sixth form provision) which is off-site.
- The inspectors looked in detail at the work in students' books, files and online from across the school. Three meetings were held with groups of students where they talked about their work and their perceptions of the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy and assistant headteacher, teachers and support staff, and different groups of students and individuals. A meeting was held with a group of parents and carers of the students. Meetings took place with administration staff and the examinations officer. The inspector interviewed the Chair of the Governing Body and other members of the governing body. Two phone calls took place with representatives from the local authority and an external School Improvement Partner.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation including: the school's summary of its view of its own performance; the school development plan; policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding; information about students' attendance and behaviour; records of the monitoring of teaching and learning; information about students' achievement; and minutes of meetings of the governing body.
- There were not enough responses to the online questionnaire for parents (Parent View) and therefore, the inspectors looked at summaries of school questionnaires sent out to parents and students recently. The inspectors also took account of the 34 responses to the staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Jean Tarry, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Ashley School caters for day students aged 11- to 19-year-olds with high functioning autistic spectrum condition, aspergers syndrome and social communication needs. Almost half have autistic spectrum conditions, often in combination with other learning difficulties. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school serves students from all over Widnes and Runcorn. There are some out-of-borough placements which include Warrington and Liverpool.
- In 2013, there was a redesignation of the school to include provision for students aged 16 to 19. New staff were employed from April 2014 to work on designing the new curriculum provision for this key stage.
- The alternative provision is the new sixth form department which has been created and students started there in September 2014. This is known to parents as the Ashley Sixth Form and Enterprise Zone. These students are taught in purpose-built accommodation which has been built in the last 18 months. Some students have transferred from other schools and others are from Ashley School.
- The headteacher now works four days a week since January 2015, with the deputy headteacher now in post as acting headteacher for one day a week.
- The school works closely with the local Teaching School and is a strategic partner within the Innovative Enterprise Teaching Alliance, delivering a range of special educational needs training to local mainstream schools and other settings.
- There are some students who enter the school at other times during the school year and during this year this number has risen due to the redesignation and the new sixth form provision.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported through the pupil premium, is well above the national average. The pupil premium is funding to support those students known to be eligible for free school meals and those who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school has received a number of awards over the past three years, including the International School Award, NAS Autism Accreditation, Information, Communication and Technology Mark, Maintaining Health & Wellbeing Healthy School Award, Green Tree School Bronze, Silver and Gold Award (Woodland Trust) , Fair Trade Awards and Speaker's School Council Award. The school is currently working towards achievement of the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the provision in the sixth form by ensuring all staff more effectively use the data they have about students' prior achievement to ensure even better outcomes for students, especially those who join from elsewhere.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher provides very effective and purposeful leadership. Her continuous drive and ambition to provide a high quality of education for all students are impressive. The deputy headteacher supports this work extremely well and has been instrumental in monitoring and evaluating curricular provision. Leaders recognise the need for a more consistent approach in the sixth form to the analysis of data so all staff take full ownership of tracking students' progress in order to enhance students' achievement even further.
- The senior leadership team continually shares ideas and looks for ways to improve the school's work. The school is very well placed to maintain and improve standards reached at the end of Year 11 in 2014. Leaders demonstrate students' progress has improved since the last inspection.
- Leaders' checks of the school's performance ensure that they have a good understanding of what is working well and what requires further attention, particularly when looking at students' work. Plans to make improvements are discussed regularly at leadership meetings.
- Teaching has improved significantly across the school because leaders make regular and meticulous checks on its quality. Senior leaders look carefully at the plans for lessons, the lessons taught and the pupils' progress in their work. A typical staff comment was, 'Leaders are very clear about the direction of the school and listen to our views. It's a great place to work and the students are at the heart of everything we do.' Any weaker aspects of teaching are tackled very quickly and effectively through targeted support. The management of teachers' performance through setting targets linked to pupils' performance is excellent and has a very positive impact on students' learning.
- The work of middle leaders is highly effective. They ensure that there is much that enriches the curriculum and strive to make it as exciting as possible. Students experience a range of activities during their residential work such as outdoor pursuits, working on a narrow boat, history tours in York or learning about democracy in the House of Parliament. The school website has many examples of how students learn about life in a multicultural society and our British values.
- The school develops students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness outstandingly well. Students are taught to be reflective and to persevere with their writing and reading tasks, and with reasoning in their mathematical development, especially when they have to solve challenging problems. The school's individual learning plans help students to target improvement in their work on a regular basis.
- Equality of opportunity is promoted very well and leaders and managers are committed to tackling discrimination of any kind. Leaders ensure that very positive relationships are established, particularly with parents and outside agencies. A typical comment from parents, 'The conditions our children have are really understood by all the staff here and that in itself means so much. Staff really listen to us and realise what we experience as parents.'
- Outstanding leadership ensures the pupil premium funding is used exceptionally well to ensure those eligible students make as much progress as others in the school.
- Leaders are starting to monitor the alternative sixth form provision very well, by looking very carefully at the attendance, behaviour and students' progress on a regular basis.
- Leaders provide students with excellent advice and careers guidance to help them make informed choices about the next stage of their education or training.
- Procedures and policies for safeguarding students are fully in place and are outstandingly effective.
- The local authority provides light-touch support for this school. The school works with a number of local schools in the authority. The authority and outside agencies continue to seek places at the school because of successes in the past with other students. The deputy headteacher works very closely with other providers to share some of the exemplary practice from the leadership and management of the school. The school is held in very high esteem by the local authority and often supports staff in mainstream settings, holding training courses for staff across the authority.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body knows the school really well and uses the information and data about students' progress effectively to compare the school's performance with that of other similar schools locally and nationally. Governors provide excellent support and challenge in a quest for ongoing improvement. The school is increasing in popularity and is exceptionally well thought of in the local community. Governors know how good the quality of teaching is. Governors know the importance of focused school performance management and its link to pay progression. They always ensure the pupil premium is used appropriately to make a significant difference to individual students resulting in good or better progress. The governing body checks on the impact that funding has on students' progress in all

subjects and has made a positive impact on the improvements made in many areas.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is outstanding. Their attitude to work is excellent and this makes a very positive contribution to their outstanding progress. In all subjects, including English and mathematics, students respond to different marking codes and this helps them give their full attention to improving their work. For example, in physical education and drama pupils can clearly see from their own charts their achievements and what they need to learn next to improve. This helps to alleviate any anxiety, as they know exactly what is expected of them to achieve their very best in lessons.
- Students are very proud of their achievements and of their school. A typical comment was, 'This school teaches us to recognise that everyone has the right to say what they think and to have their views listened to. The adults make a difference to us as they listen to us and value our views.' Overall, students agree that Ashley School is helping them significantly to improve their academic achievement, behaviour and social well-being.
- The behaviour policy is clear and regularly updated. Students are very clear about what is and what is not acceptable behaviour. Adults are excellent role models for students to follow, particularly in relation to manners and attitudes.
- Students enjoy the competitive nature of the awards and events, such as in sports, as this develops their teamwork skills and supports them with their social anxiety and emotions. When asked what was special about the school, students said, 'We enjoy coming to school because of worthwhile relevant lessons, trips, visitors and learning new things. Adults help and support us to achieve the best we can. They understand our needs, help us to address them and learn how to manage our feelings and thoughts.'
- Students are extremely polite and very well mannered to each other, to staff and visitors. They help and support each other in lessons, in the dining room or as sports leaders or buddies. Some students organise clubs to help others who are finding it difficult to cope such as being involved in Lego club. The range of lunchtime clubs such as chess, gym, computer and art, all help and support students to interact at lunchtime. Sometimes students are directed to clubs to help them develop their social and communication needs.
- The students have a range of committees such as; The Anne Frank, Eco, School Council and Health and Safety. All these committees ensure students develop their skills in debating, speaking, listening and valuing others opinions. They also listen really well to each other in their pastoral form groups first thing in the morning. Here, they practise their basics skills or discuss issues that concern them.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. There are many aspects of this work which are exemplary, for example, the individual plans and meetings which ensure all staff have an overview of each student, to ensure they are kept safe and well. The exercise equipment outside classrooms is a particular favourite for students who say they feel safe and secure in the knowledge that they can access this provision by excusing themselves from their lesson to alleviate stress and anxiety. This provision is seamless and allows students to continue with their work really well.
- The students are well able to recognise the difference between bullying and falling out. They inform inspectors that bullying very rarely occurs and when it does staff are vigilant. Students are very confident about approaching adults in school if they need help to resolve any issue. Aspects, such as learning about different types of bullying, are exceptionally well covered in assemblies, in lessons and in therapy sessions. Students learn about cyber-bullying and its affect on mental health issues in young people.
- Students always know how to ask for help from the different staff. Some students work closely with different support staff, therapists or mentors to achieve the best that they possibly can. The school has various programmes to support students if they are underachieving. This work, for example in sports, music, drama, speaking and communication is extremely effective. They have the opportunities to learn about safety issues when taking part in disability sports, such as boccia.
- Attendance issues are addressed very quickly. Staff have regular contact with parents and this establishes excellent attendance at school. The school has effectively impressed upon parents the need for their children to attend school regularly and this has paid dividends. Students unanimously enjoy coming to school. They enjoy receiving awards and praise for good attendance and realise the need for good attendance, linked to work placements.
- The student council and student voice initiatives ensure that staff listen regularly to their views about

matters such as safety. Students say they feel extremely safe and very well cared for in school. They are aware of safety issues in the mini-bus, on their residential trips such as on a narrow boat, or visits to the Houses of Parliament. They very much appreciate the wealth of support they receive when they have an issue in their life or are given help by staff.

- Students attending alternative provision in the sixth form say they feel safe and behaviour is good.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The impact of the quality of the teaching over time is outstanding. This is because activities given to students very clearly build on what they already know and can meet students' varying needs and abilities exceptionally well.
- Expectations of what students are capable of achieving are exceptionally high in Key Stage 3 and 4. For example, students are expected to solve mathematical problems linked with physics and show the correct working out. They are moved on expertly as soon as they need more challenge. Teaching ensures more rapid progress, when students are taught to understand dependent and independent variables, continuous and catagoric variables in connection with a bouncing ball.
- The teaching of mathematics is strong throughout the school because of well-matched provision, particularly for the most able and the higher functioning students with autistic spectrum disorder. Students are involved in relevant practical mathematical activities, such as cracking codes, measurements to make wooden boxes, using the 'filter by form' button to obtain required information or calculating speed, time or calories used in the gymnasium.
- Teaching of English has improved strongly in Key Stage 3 and 4, especially in writing when linked to other subjects, such as history or philosophy. Work always meets the needs of the students because they are motivated and interested in their writing tasks, because they find them fascinating. A demonstration of how Henry Box Brown escaped from a box makes students reflect on the horrors of the slave trade. In addition, the quality of marking is consistently strong across the different subjects or classes, meaning students are clear about the next steps needed to improve their writing.
- The improvements in the teaching of the linking of letters and the sounds that they make (phonics) have had a positive impact on students' standards in reading across the school. The students, and particularly the most able students, are challenged with their reading tasks and enjoy the range of material on offer in the school library.
- Learning support assistants are exceptionally well trained. They have the necessary skills to support students in English and mathematics fully. They are crucial in building very important relationships with students. They are also kept sufficiently well informed of what students are expected to learn and to help to promote rapid progress. Students appreciate the valuable input of the support staff, which enables most of them to make outstanding progress, in both their academic and personal development.

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- Students achieve extremely well during their time at the school. Students often enter school with significantly below average attainment. The education of some of the students has previously been disrupted over a period of time before arriving at Ashley. This includes attending a number of different educational establishments. For some students, absence from school or disaffection has resulted in very low attainment and a significant lack of progress.
- Students' progress is outstanding overall in reading, writing and mathematics considering their low starting points. All students spoken to during the inspection said that they thoroughly enjoy their lessons and thought that they were making significant progress at the school due to the lessons and teachers help and support.
- Students' efforts in lessons and individual group work are helping them to make rapid progress and to compensate for any previous gaps in their learning. In a food technology lesson, for example, younger students were engaged and motivated to complete their tasks of making breakfast snacks to be sold to other students. They knew exactly what it was that they had to achieve during the lesson and over time. Their efforts were recorded and students' instant feedback about their achievements.
- Achievement in reading is outstanding. Students often talk about how they follow their own interests with their different books, comics or internet research work. All students make significant progress with their reading skills as a result of very effective teaching and support. Students use the school library effectively to extend their reading skills and to encourage a love of reading and enjoyment of books. Those who find

reading difficult are well supported through individually tailored programmes to make rapid progress.

- Achievement in mathematics is excellent, especially when linked to other subjects. Students solve mathematical problems, such as gathering the relevant information independently, and learn to work together well by discussing the different ways to accomplish a set task.
- By the end of Year 11, students' attainment is usually below average. However, all students make at least good and very often outstanding progress. All students leave with some qualifications; these are often at the lower end of the GCSE grade scale. Most students now go on to further education in the sixth form or to training. This reflects the determination of the school's leaders and managers to ensure students succeed beyond Ashley.
- Those students who enter the school at other times during the school year make at least good progress.
- At Ashley there is very little difference between the performance of different groups of students. The number of students in each group is so small that an analysis of their comparative performance does not generate meaningful statistics. However, inspection evidence, along with students' work, confirms that all groups of students are making at least good progress and often outstanding progress. For example, the disadvantaged and the non-disadvantaged students achieve equally well.
- The most able students make excellent progress as their work often provides an extra level of challenge so that students are stretched and achieve their full potential in all subject areas and particularly in English and mathematics.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form provision only started in September 2014, so it is still in its early stages of development. However, it is clear from inspection evidence and by looking at students' work, that overall they are making good progress. This key stage is building on the firm foundations that have been built on further down the school. Other students who start in the sixth form, from other settings are also making good progress. Currently, not all progress data are used consistently by all staff, especially for those who join from other schools, to ensure students' best possible progress.
- The arrangements for transition into the sixth form ensure students settle quickly. The new staff have worked successfully to ensure all students are well prepared for the sixth form, and provision ensures their good, if not outstanding achievement.
- Students further develop their personal skills at a rapid rate. They use and apply them in a wide range of situations, such as cooking meals, shopping, ironing, going to the gym, gardening, working in shops, disabled sports, cycling or helping other people with special educational needs. They are particularly proud of their new independent living accommodation, which they named themselves as IPAD.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are good. They always try their best to meet the high expectations of all staff. Some students are proud to be involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.
- Teaching is good because staff encourage students to confidently express their views, explore choices, to reflect, ask questions, and answer in a sensible way. Students are proud of Ashley Travel Agency, which they use to help them gain their BTEC Travel and Tourism qualification.
- The arrangements to prepare students for their move to post-19 provision are currently being developed but are in their infancy. Students integrate slowly into their new situation, as well as experience the world of work in areas, such as with Mersey Link in the construction industry, building, working with animals, caretaker qualifications, teaching assistant work, catering or sound engineer projects.
- Sixth form provision is well led and managed by a knowledgeable senior leader. Students feel safe and safety and welfare requirements are met. As a result, students are settled, secure and confident. Teamwork is a considerable strength and has a significant impact on students' good achievement. A typical comment from students was, 'The new building is great, especially the Cyber Café where we all get to have a go at cooking our own food in an industrial kitchen. We are learning to become independent.'

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	111515
Local authority	Halton
Inspection number	447787

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	11–19
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 sixth form	11
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	M Constantine
Headteacher	Linda King
Date of previous school inspection	31 October 2012
Telephone number	0151 4244892
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