

# Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Ash Lea School

Owthorpe Road, Cotgrave, Nottinghamshire NG12 3PA

---

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 February 2025

## **Outcome**

Ash Lea School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

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

Ash Lea is a warm and welcoming school. Pupils enjoy coming to this friendly school. They know that staff care for them. Pupils feel safe here.

Expectations of behaviour and academic success are high. Staff strive for pupils across all pathways and in the sixth form to be successful in all they do. The school skilfully helps pupils to regulate their own behaviour and manage their emotions. Staff are expert at identifying when pupils experience distress or discomfort. They respond quickly and sensitively.

Staff have a thorough understanding of pupils' unique and complex needs. This, along with an aspirational curriculum, ensures that pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education. A personalised approach to teaching and carefully targeted interventions help pupils gain a deeper understanding of themselves. As a result, pupils are increasingly able to let adults know their preferences and what they understand.

The school's provision for pupils' personal development plays a major role in preparing them effectively for the future. Staff carefully plan rich experiences for pupils which help them to grow in their understanding of the local area and beyond. For example, regular visits to local cafés, shops and residential trips. Pupils relish these and thrive as a result.

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

Since the last inspection, the school has made refinements to the ambitious curriculum. Effective transition into the school ensures that pupils are placed on the most appropriate curriculum pathway to support their development. This, alongside precise targets based

on pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, results in a personalised curriculum for each pupil as they move through the school.

A strength in each pathway is the blending of pupils' learning of the curriculum with provision for their therapeutic needs. This maximises the time pupils spend learning, whilst receiving care and support from skilled and kind staff.

Across subjects, staff typically design purposeful activities underpinned by their deep understanding of pupils' precise communication or sensory needs. Teachers carefully adapt their approach to teaching to build on the specific steps that pupils require. This helps pupils to remember important learning. In a small number of subjects, teachers' use of assessment to check pupils' understanding of the curriculum is sometimes not precise enough. As a result, gaps in pupils' learning or misconceptions are not identified as swiftly as they could be. This can hinder learning.

Pupils enjoy learning the foundations for reading. The curriculum prepares pupils for phonics through sound recognition, rhymes and songs. Pupils who are ready to learn phonics are expertly taught to develop early reading skills. In the sixth form, students continue to learn phonics or progress to reading fluently. Over time, they build their vocabulary well. This helps them in working towards recognised entry-level accreditations.

Teachers and learning support staff work together skilfully to enable pupils to overcome challenges they face and participate in learning fully. Staff create calm, purposeful environments focused on learning. As a result, pupils behave very well. They are keen to learn. The school provides effective support to help those who find regular attendance difficult. It works closely with families to overcome issues that may prevent pupils coming to school.

Pupils receive rich experiences beyond the classroom. Pupils enjoy residential opportunities, such as trips to Derbyshire to take part in outdoor pursuits, and London to visit the Tate gallery and the West End. Pupils learn to cook and woodworking in the school's woodland provision. These opportunities provide pupils with the chance to develop independence and resilience, as well as making fond memories. The wide-ranging creative opportunities offered to pupils develop their musical and artistic talents, and their love of learning. They enjoy singing and signing together in mixed-class groups.

Pupils are well prepared for their futures. They learn to travel with increasing independence and communicate with a range of people with ever-growing confidence. Pupils engage in enterprise activities, such as running the school tuck shop. Many pupils take part in work experience. These experiences, alongside the school's careers programme, help prepare pupils for life after Ash Lea. Students leave the school at the end of sixth form following a well-designed transition programme. This means that all pupils go on to placements that are well matched to their individual needs and aspirations.

Leaders carefully consider staff workload when making decisions. Staff feel valued and well supported. Leaders are ambitious for the school's future. All their decisions are made

in the best interests of the pupils and their precise oversight ensures continual school improvement and consistently high standards of education. As a result, the school has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the last inspection.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In a small number of subjects, teachers' use of assessment to check pupils' understanding of the curriculum is sometimes not precise enough. This means teachers do not always have a clear picture of what pupils know and can do, and misconceptions are not identified and addressed well enough. The school needs to continue its work to develop and embed an approach to assessment that routinely informs teaching across the curriculum, so that pupils' learning develops securely over time.

## **Background**

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the third ungraded inspection since we the school to be good for overall effectiveness in October 2019.

## **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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

## **Further information**

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	122957
<b>Local authority</b>	Nottinghamshire County Council
<b>Inspection number</b>	10347491
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 18
<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>	99
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	15
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Chris Hankinson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Kate Davies
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.ashlea.notts.sch.uk">www.ashlea.notts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	3 and 4 July 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Ash Lea is a special school catering for pupils aged three to 18 years who have complex learning difficulties. Many pupils also have significant physical, medical and mental health difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school has developed a curriculum structure which has four learning pathways known as pre-formal, informal, semi-formal and formal. Most pupils work at the informal and semi-formal learning stages which are based around the early years curriculum as a framework for learning.
- The school uses no unregistered or registered alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The school caters for children from three years of age. However, during this inspection, no children of early years age were on roll.
- The inspectors discussed the continued impact of the COVID 19 pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, assistant headteachers and a range of other school staff. The lead inspector held a meeting with members of the governing board and held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including information published on the school website, attendance and behaviour records, records of governing board meetings, school development plans and the school's self-evaluation document.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View, and Ofsted's online staff survey.

## Inspection team

Anne Maingay, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Karen Hayes

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2025