



Ashgate Croft School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113032
Local Authority DERBYSHIRE
Inspection number 289489
Inspection dates 11–12 September 2006
Reporting inspector Alan Lemon

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Ashgate Road
School category	Community special		Chesterfield
Age range of pupils	2–19		Derbyshire S40 4BN
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01246275111
Number on roll (school)	144	Fax number	01246556440
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Peter Carver
		Headteacher	Mr Michael Meaton
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Ashgate Croft School caters for pupils with a wide range of learning difficulties and disabilities. Their attainment on entry is very low and varies considerably depending on the severity of their needs. Most have moderate or severe learning difficulties. There are small numbers of pupils spread throughout the school who have, in addition, sensory impairments, physical disabilities and autism. There is also a significant number of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) most of whom are taught in separate classes in the primary and secondary schools. This presents the school with the complex task of meeting the needs of a full age range and pupils' widely different needs. At present there are very few children in the Foundation Stage and 19 students in the further education department. From September 2006, those pupils with PMLD who are old enough are being admitted and integrated with the other students in the further education department. The school has links with local primary, secondary and special schools and colleges. It has Investor in People status and is pursuing recognition as a Health Promoting School. It is also currently bidding for Specialist Sports College status.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's effectiveness is good and it provides good value for money. The strong commitment to pupils demonstrated by staff and governors has been instrumental in successful and on-going implementation of a wide range of effective provision. This is greatly appreciated by the majority of parents. The planning of improvements is highly focused, drawing effectively on rigorous monitoring of the school's work and pupils' performance. The school is led and managed well through good governance and a strong direction from senior management. The curriculum offered to pupils is good. The school has broad horizons which include several productive links with local mainstream and special schools and colleges, which add greatly to pupils' learning opportunities. The school has won an award for staff development and is actively pursuing more awards such as the promotion of pupils' health. It is also determined to achieve specialist status as a sports college. To this end a very substantial fund has been raised some of which is designated for building a swimming pool. Whatever their learning difficulties and disabilities, pupils throughout the school learn effectively, make good progress and achieve well, as a result of good teaching. The good relationships and rapport in classrooms brings enjoyment in learning for all pupils. They behave well and work hard to achieve success. The very few children in the Foundation Stage make good progress. By the time pupils leave Key Stage 4 they, and the students in the further education department, achieve good results in relation to their starting points in the many useful accredited courses they follow. Most students are prepared well for their future by learning effectively to manage as independently as possible and by having good opportunities to experience work and enrol on further education courses at college. However, the extent to which students with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) are involved in work related learning is currently limited. Across the school a sharp focus on pupils' personal development, especially through individual targeting to develop personal skills ensures they have substantial opportunities to learn to be self-sufficient and active participants in the life of the school and beyond its gates. Pupils are continually involved in helping charities by raising money for many good causes. Pupils are well cared for, guided and supported, especially through the good partnerships with many agencies. They are kept very secure while they are with the school. The good management of behaviour instils in pupils the need to stay safe and show respect for others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Plan and implement a range of work related opportunities for students with PMLD.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Achievement is good throughout the school. The great majority of pupils make good progress as a result of effective teaching, support and guidance. This is clearly evident in the information the school gathers about progress and in the good examination

results achieved by Year 11 pupils and students in the further education department. There are no significant variations in this positive picture in relation to different groups of pupils or their learning difficulties. The very few children in the Foundation Stage are effectively provided for and taught well in a primary class and make good progress. In the two classes for pupils with PMLD their learning difficulties and disabilities are thoroughly understood and catered for, especially in the primary school. These pupils achieve well in communicating and learn to take an interested and active part in their activities. In some of the lessons seen at Key Stage 3 and in the further education department the rate of progress is too slow. The school anticipated this as very recent staff changes in classrooms would mean some teaching early in the new school year would not be of the usual good quality. In these few instances, pupils' work has not been matched closely enough to their needs and capabilities. However, in the longer term this is not impairing pupils' overall progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They develop a clear sense of right and wrong, and demonstrate their concern for others by enthusiastically raising funds for charity and entertaining senior citizens. Pupils enjoy school as they have good opportunities to share in all activities and benefit from the warmth and care staff provide. Attendance is satisfactory and there is very little unauthorised absence. Pupils' behaviour is good as they understand and respect school rules, largely because they contribute to making and agreeing codes of conduct. The few pupils with challenging behaviour make good progress towards their targets for behaving well. Bullying is not a feature of the school and pupils are tolerant and respectful towards others. Pupils are safe and eat healthily at school. Many enjoy exercise and participate in sporting activities. They are co-operative and attentive in class, and work successfully in groups and pairs. Most older pupils develop good skills and understanding of the world of work, although those with PMLD have a limited awareness, as they do not yet fully experience workplace environments. Work experience providers report that pupils are a credit to the school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is good. Rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching means there is a good level of consistency across the school. A good understanding of pupils' needs means lessons are organised carefully to ensure that whatever pupils' learning difficulties are, they can benefit from the activities planned. Assessment is thorough in finding out each pupil's capabilities and this is informing most lesson planning with clear learning objectives matched to each pupil's needs. The quality of planning in the primary class for pupils with PMLD is skilfully focussed, on what pupils should learn.

Teachers and their assistants work together effectively ensuring pupils learn well. Relationships are warm and friendly and this gives pupils confidence. A good rapport is struck encouraging discussion, enjoyment and interest. This means lessons proceed at a good pace and expectations are high. Very occasionally, teachers or their assistants talk too much with pupils merely listening. This limits useful opportunities for pupils to be more active in their learning and as a result progress in some lessons is not fast enough. Pupils in Key Stage 4 and students in the further education department are challenged appropriately by their accredited courses and learn effectively to achieve good results.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is very broad and effectively supports pupils' academic progress and personal development. It has been made very relevant to pupils' various needs. Parents' wishes are taken into account and there is a good element of choice for older pupils. There are opportunities for pupils of all abilities to follow accredited courses. A strong emphasis is placed on those areas that are priorities for the pupils. For instance, good opportunities for pupils to communicate and acquire personal skills are planned into the whole school day. The school intends to do more to promote pupils' independence skills and plans are well advanced for investing in new accommodation for this purpose. There is good enrichment of the curriculum. A wealth of visits and visitors bring learning to life and effective links with mainstream schools and colleges mean that pupils learn alongside and socialise with their peers. Students in the further education department have a residential school excursion, which they greatly enjoy, but similar experiences are not given to younger pupils and many of these are ready to benefit in this way.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

High levels of care and support are provided by well-trained staff and external professionals, who work in an effective partnership. There is a strong, shared commitment to the pupils, who feel safe in the school and secure in the knowledge that they have someone to turn to if they have a problem. The school nurse provides counselling to pupils seeking help. Much has been done to ensure that pupils have a voice. The School Council influences school life and pupils who choose to attend annual reviews are constructively involved in the process. Guidance for pupils is good. They all have individual targets and although this inspection was early in the school year, a few already knew these. The Connexions officer supports pupils well in making decisions about their future career options and transitions at each key stage are carefully planned. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are good. Suitable checks are carried out on staff, risks are carefully assessed and appropriate action taken to minimise these. Staff are well trained and vigilant in matters of child protection.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and his deputy work effectively together in giving the school a clear direction and setting it high expectations. A broad vision has led to many active partnerships with schools and colleges allowing pupils good access to a wide range of experiences and opportunities beyond school. This has helped spread leadership roles widely such as in the effective management of the work with other schools. Positive leadership is emerging in the management of subjects and initiatives like the personal skills programme. Governors provide good support to the development of the school and to ensuring there is continued improvement. They are well informed and update their knowledge and skills through regular training. They are actively involved through making frequent visits to the school. Their extensive commitment has gone as far as raising substantial funds for further development of the premises, much of which will help the school in its bid for specialist sports college status. Effective leadership and school improvement is sustained by rigorous monitoring of the school's work and pupils' performance. The school makes a good evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. It uses this effectively for planning improvements which gives the school a good capacity for further improvement. The close attention paid to judging the quality of teaching and provision for all pupils supports their good progress and personal development. Whilst monitoring is managed principally by the headteacher and his deputy, the delegation of responsibilities is widespread. This creates a strong sense of direction and purpose across the school. Many staff evaluate their work and all take account of the school's evaluation as it informs their performance objectives and priorities for improvements.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Dear Pupils Many thanks for giving us such a warm welcome and for all your help. We really enjoyed visiting you in your classrooms and talking to you. Special thanks goes to the School Council for telling us so clearly and enthusiastically what you think about school and all the things you enjoy about it. We found out many pleasing things about your school. Most of all we found out that you go to a good school. The governors, headteacher and all of the staff have worked hard to bring together the many things that make the school good and they have plans for a lot more. Importantly, they keep you safe and encourage you to behave and be responsible. We appreciated finding out about your considerable efforts in raising money for people in need. We were impressed by how well you manage by yourselves and make friends. It was good to see that you are concerned to be healthy by eating the right food and keeping fit. It all adds up to you enjoying school a lot, so in lessons you are keen to listen, co-operate and try your best. Not surprisingly therefore you are making good progress and when you get into Senior 5, Stars and Planets the examination results are good. We were impressed that so many of you are so well prepared to leave school. There was not much we could ask the governors and headteacher to do to improve the school that they did not already know about and were doing. However we did say that Senior 6 pupils moving up into Stars and Planets need more help to prepare them for when they will leave school. The School Council might like to think about ways in which the school could do this. Yours sincerely Alan Lemon and Susan Aldridge Inspectors