

Ashgate Croft School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113032
Local Authority	Derbyshire
Inspection number	338073
Inspection dates	21–22 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Trevor Watts

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	141
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Alex Rowlands
Headteacher	Michael Meaton
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2006
School address	Ashgate Road Chesterfield Derbyshire
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. Approximately half of the time was spent observing lessons, of which 19 were seen, involving 15 teachers. Meetings were held with pupils, governors and members of staff. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school policies, pupils' work and records of pupils' progress and development planning. The 44 inspection questionnaire returns received from parents were analysed, and taken into consideration.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- whether or not all groups of pupils make the good progress that the school evaluates
- if the curriculum is challenging enough to prepare pupils for the wider world
- whether the leadership and management team are all equally committed to school developments
- whether or not care, guidance and support are as outstanding as the school asserts.

Information about the school

All pupils have a statement of special educational need. These range from profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, physical and sensory impairments and autism. Almost all pupils are White British although there are a few pupils who do not have English as their home language. Although the school admits pupils aged 2 years and above, there are very few children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There are almost twice as many boys as girls and a very small number of pupils are in the care of the local authority. The school has Health Promoting Schools status. A club organised by a local authority partnership for pupils aged six years and older operates after school and during the summer holidays.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The school successfully provides a broad and balanced education. Experienced staff teach confidently and flexibly in effective class teams. They plan activities on the basis of their thorough tracking of pupils' progress, and senior leaders regularly monitor the effectiveness of all the staff. Pupils gain many experiences, learn well and make good progress in lessons, in other linked schools, and in many activities in places away from the school. They are extremely well cared for, and staff have a very good awareness of the child protection policies. Pupils behave outstandingly well, and have an excellent understanding of what a healthy lifestyle involves. The vast majority of parents and carers are very supportive of the school. Pupils are well prepared for the next phase in their lives.

School leaders constantly seek to develop new strands to pupils' education, such as through environmental and sporting initiatives, a new swimming pool and a proposed unit to help pupils to become more independent. They maintain good quality teaching and curriculum development and their close teamwork ensures accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Consequently leaders have detailed plans to further develop some aspects of the school such as the provision for information and communication technology and increasing partnerships with other agencies and schools. The developing role of middle managers for key stages and subjects is becoming well embedded in the leadership structure. There is thus a good capacity to continue this trend of improvements.

Although the great majority of staff and parents are extremely supportive of all that the school does, a few reported some shortcomings in aspects of the school's communication strategies. These shortcomings included not knowing who the governors are and how complaints are dealt with. Some staff also said they did not understand their involvement in school evaluation and development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve communication with staff and parents in order to make sure that everyone is fully informed and aware of developments by:
 - ensuring all staff know that the regular meetings they attend are a valuable part of the evaluation and development cycle
 - raising the profile of the governors
 - ensuring that all interested parties are fully informed about how the occasional complaint has been resolved.

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils make good progress in lessons, gaining skills, knowledge and a wealth of experiences each day. Staff's careful analysis indicates that pupils' long-term progress and achievements are good, regardless of their gender, cultural background or if they are in the care of the local authority. In lessons, pupils with profound learning difficulties or autistic tendencies also make progress that is as good for them as other pupils with different learning needs. Whilst some pupils develop their speech, signing, mathematical understanding and cookery skills, others are achieving well if they can make eye contact or consistently press an electronic switch for 'yes' or 'no' when making a choice.

Pupils enjoy school very much, 'I love it here,' said one. 'It's the best school ever,' said another. In lessons they are interested in their learning. They concentrate well and work with their classmates in friendly fashion. Their behaviour is outstandingly good, whether in lessons during an exciting games activity or when moving around the site. Pupils feel safe and the great majority say that there is very little bullying, and staff 'get it sorted quickly!' if it does occur. Almost all try hard to eat sensibly and to have plenty of exercise. Pupils' good contribution to the community is seen in the multitude of jobs they carry out in school. These include their role on the school council and their links with other schools, one of which involves pupils giving sign language tuition to other pupils. They develop good 'workplace' skills such as punctuality, cleanliness, the ability to get on with others, and to follow instructions. Despite the long or frequent absences of a few pupils with very demanding medical needs, their above average attendance overall is helped by strong encouragement from the school and local authority staff. Pupils develop a clear sense of what is right and wrong in different situations, and they learn to value other peoples' opinions and beliefs regardless of their background.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teachers' planning is good and practical, with clear aims for each lesson and well-chosen activities to aid each pupil's learning. Staff work together effectively as class teams. Each person knows their pupils and their needs well, including how to avoid or defuse possible problems. Staff prompt, encourage and praise pupils warmly. Generally, they are good at asking the right questions to get pupils thinking more, although sometimes the review at the end of a lesson can be too rushed or skimped. Teachers often teach with an enthusiasm that is very motivating for pupils, and their effective use of resources, including electronic equipment, valuably boosts many pupils' learning. Pupils' progress is assessed carefully and the information is used well in planning future activities, lessons and class projects.

The curriculum is adapted to be relevant to the needs of each pupil. The focus on communication and personal skills is very effective in ensuring pupils' good development as learners. Other aspects are not ignored, whether in mathematics, science, art or sports, for instance. Pupils have many activities outside the school, from regular lessons in mainstream schools and a college, to visits to a local cafe and the shops to increase their independence skills. There is a very valuable partnership with the local authority which provides additional clubs and activities at lunchtimes and after school. Many visitors enrich the curriculum to provide Tai Chi, road safety and first aid. All older pupils have a work experience opportunity, whether shadowing staff in school or outside in a pet shop, supermarket or garden centre, for instance. Older pupils successfully study courses that lead to nationally recognised qualifications through organisations such as the Award Scheme Development and Assessment Network (ASDAN) and the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA board (OCR). These accredited courses are wide-ranging, and include basic subjects as well as the learning of independence and personal skills.

The outstanding support for pupils takes many forms, including a counsellor, nurture group, nurse and family resource officer on site. Specialists are available for positive play, speech and language, physical and occupational therapy needs. School procedures, a careers teacher and the Connexions partnership are very effective in preparing pupils for their transition to their next college or centre and their future life.

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Staff are well trained in child protection and behaviour management and have thorough awareness of the procedures to adopt in different situations. The school's Healthy School Status, its sports partnership and its 'Food for Life' project are examples of how seriously the school takes its responsibilities for raising pupils' health awareness.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

School leaders have successfully brought staff together in a common goal for the development of initiatives such as the improvement of teaching and learning, the development of accredited courses and organic and environmental projects such as 'Eco-Schools'. Within this overall picture of unity and clear direction a minority of staff expressed some lack of understanding about several aspects of their role and that of some school leaders. The governors challenge proposals and are very supportive of the senior staff. Some are regular volunteers in school, and they have a very clear view of safeguarding matters, which are outstandingly well organised and thorough. School leaders ensure that all pupils, regardless of their abilities, needs, gender or culture have equal access to all aspects of what the school offers. The school's place in the community is reinforced well by positive links with many local agencies and schools, including those which use the school's swimming pool, as well as activities taking pupils into the neighbourhood. School leaders encourage pupils from other schools and colleges to come to Ashgate Croft to do community work as part of their courses, and others have their work experience placements here. Pupils frequently raise funds for charities across the country and around the world. They have work experience links at local businesses, lessons in several schools, visits to cafes, shops and local places of interest. Lessons, regular events and many assemblies are used to teach pupils to understand and value the opinions and cultures of others in Britain and abroad.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms	
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Very few children attend the school at the moment. They are integrated well into a class of slightly older pupils with similar learning needs. They make good progress in lessons, achieve well and enjoy their activities. Staff are experienced, know their children and their needs well and make every effort to ensure that they receive a full range of curriculum opportunities. This stage of education is well led and managed, in the same way as the rest of the school.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Sixth form

Students make good progress in lessons and achieve well in each aspect of their learning. There is a particular emphasis on developing their independence skills through several accredited courses, particularly ASDAN modules. These are often practical, such as woodwork and cookery, but they also include living skills, communication and mathematics in practical situations such as having an interview or opening a bank account. Students enjoy their learning very much, whether it is a lively physical education session, for instance, or using the computers to find information on the internet. The curriculum meets their individual needs imaginatively and the unit is well organised and managed. They are fully supported in their present needs and in preparation for their possible future requirements.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Less than a third of eligible parents returned the questionnaires. Of those who did, the vast majority supported the school in every aspect they were asked about. 'My son hates it when he's not there,' wrote one, whilst several said they were pleased with their children's progress. Hardly any parents were negative about any of the questions. This largely reflects other surveys made by the school, although in the most recent survey a few said they did not know who the governors were or what they did. Others felt that they were not sufficiently informed about how their occasional queries or complaints were resolved. The inspectors looked into these concerns and suggest that the school makes extra efforts to ensure that all parents are kept well informed about such matters.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Ashgate Croft School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspector received 44 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 141 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	30	68	13	30	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	28	64	16	36	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	25	57	18	41	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	20	45	19	43	2	5	2	5
The teaching is good at this school	26	59	15	34	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	22	50	20	45	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	22	50	21	48	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	17	39	24	55	1	2	1	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	50	19	43	1	2	2	5
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	41	23	52	1	2	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	41	22	50	1	2	2	5
The school is led and managed effectively	23	52	17	39	0	0	2	5
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	24	55	16	36	1	2	2	5

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



24 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Ashgate Croft School, Derbyshire, S40 4BN

I'm sure you will remember when the inspectors visited you recently to see how things were going for you all. Thank you for being so friendly and polite with us, and for showing us your work and saying how much you enjoyed all the things you do. Also, our thanks go to you and your parents for sending us the questionnaires. They said a lot that was useful to us, and we agree with much of what was said.

We found that you go to a good school where your teachers and other staff teach you well and are very good at taking really good care of you all. You learn well in lessons such as English and mathematics, as well as the communications, independence and personal skills work you do. The headteacher, senior staff and governors are good at their jobs and work hard to see that things are always getting better for you. There are also some really good extra things that you can do, such as going to other schools for some lessons, having work experiences, swimming, gardening and having trips out to interesting places nearby and far away.

There are three things we are asking the school to think about doing better. They are all about how the school lets people know about things. They came to our attention because some staff and your parents said they weren't sure how some things happen, or who some people are in school.

Although the governors do a good job in helping the headteacher, not everyone knows who they are, so we would like them to find ways to let more people know.

Some staff feel that they are not part of new developments in school, so we would like the school to show them how all their meetings are an important part of changing things.

Some of your parents say they have told the leadership about things they thought were wrong, but did not find out what happened. So we are asking leaders to make sure that everyone is told how these matters are sorted out.

Thank you again for your help and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Trevor Watts

Lead inspector

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