

Inspection of Ashcroft School

The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 1JE

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 October 2023

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Inadequate

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

No

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils do not receive an acceptable quality of education at this school. Since the previous inspection, most aspects of the school's provision have declined. Pupils' academic achievement has suffered as a result.

The school's expectations for pupils' achievement are low. All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, the curriculum does not take sufficient account of pupils' needs. Pupils frequently receive work that they find too difficult or does not motivate them to learn. By contrast, expectations for the small number of students in the sixth form are much higher. These students thrive and learn successfully from the well-organised sixth-form curriculum.

Pupils lack clear and consistent guidance about how to behave in school. Some do not show respect to staff, to each other or occasionally to school property. Pupils sometimes disengage from learning, especially when it does not interest them. These poor attitudes hamper pupils' readiness for adult life. At times, the poorly managed behaviour of some pupils makes others feel unhappy in school.

There is an appropriate range of activities to promote pupils' development beyond the academic curriculum. Pupils learn about diversity and difference within their community. They enjoy visits and trips to places such as museums and galleries. However, they receive only limited information, advice and guidance relating to careers.

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

Since the last inspection, the quality of education at the school has declined considerably. A period of turbulence in leadership and in staffing have made this situation even worse. As a result, almost every aspect of pupils' experiences at the school has been adversely affected.

The proprietor body has now resolved the turbulence in staffing and stabilised the school's leadership arrangements. Some recent action has been taken to address the school's many weaknesses. However, this work is at a very early stage. It has come too late to make any real difference to pupils' learning. Consequently, the achievement of pupils in key stages 2, 3 and 4 is weak.

The school has not ensured that pupils benefit from an ambitious, well-organised curriculum in key stages 2, 3 and 4. In almost all subjects, there is little information about the most important knowledge that pupils need to learn at each stage of their development. In addition, the order in which pupils should learn subject content has not been considered carefully enough. This prevents pupils in these key stages from building securely upon what they already know and can do. Pupils are ill-equipped for the next stage in their learning.

The weaknesses in the school's curriculum make it difficult for staff to know what to teach pupils. Pupils are frequently given learning activities that do not meet their needs. Many pupils become frustrated because they do not understand or enjoy their work. When this happens, pupils lose focus. Sometimes, they disengage from lessons altogether and valuable learning time is lost.

Leaders have provided an appropriate range of books and materials for pupils at the early stage of reading. These pupils receive support to help them develop their knowledge of phonics. However, the quality of this support is variable. Where it is most effective, pupils learn to read with greater success. However, as with other subjects, the help that some pupils receive does not meet their needs effectively. As a result, pupils do not gain the knowledge that they need to read with confidence and fluency. This hinders their access to the curriculum further.

The school does not make effective use of assessment strategies to check that pupils are learning as they should. This prevents any necessary adjustments to teaching that might improve pupils' understanding.

Students in the sixth form have a much more positive experience in comparison to pupils in the rest of the school. Sixth-form students are able to study for a range of academic and vocational qualifications. The curriculum for each subject is broken down into well-ordered steps that build their knowledge securely. Students in the sixth form have confident, positive attitudes to learning. They achieve well. Students are well prepared for their next steps.

Prior to joining this school, most pupils have experienced exclusion or long periods of absence from education. All have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) for their SEND. However, other than in the sixth form, these plans are not used effectively to ensure that pupils' learning needs are fully understood. This prevents the school from making appropriate adaptations to enable all pupils to access the curriculum and to achieve as well as they should. The proprietor body has taken steps to improve pupils' access to a range of therapies such as speech and language. However, this provision is at too early a stage to have had an impact for pupils.

Pupils' behaviour is typically poor. The proprietor body has not ensured that the school's behaviour policy is consistently and successfully implemented by leaders and staff. Pupils frequently elect to leave lessons without permission or explanation. Too often, they use inappropriate language when speaking to staff or to each other. Some pupils disrupt lessons. When this happens, it prevents other pupils from learning.

Pupils have opportunities to engage in activities that promote their personal development. For example, pupils receive professional football coaching, take part in singing activities and play board games. The student council represents pupils' views on aspects of school life such as lunches and uniform. Pupils learn to cook and to launder clothes in preparation for life beyond school. However, pupils in key stages 3 and 4 do not receive an appropriate programme of independent advice, guidance

and support in relation to careers. This prevents them from understanding the choices available to them for future education, training or employment.

The school, including the proprietor body, engage with stakeholders, including the local authority, parents and carers. The school works well with parents to promote their child's regular attendance. Leaders consider the impact of their decisions on staff's workload. Most staff welcome the support that they receive from leaders for their well-being.

The proprietor body has not ensured that the independent school standards (the standards) are consistently met. It has not ensured that the quality of education provided by the school is acceptable. Moreover, it has not met some of the standards required to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. For example, the proprietor body has provided an appropriate health and safety policy, but it has not ensured that this policy is consistently implemented. The hazards identified in some risk assessments, such as for the storage of science materials, have not been managed appropriately. Furthermore, although the proprietor body has a programme of maintenance for the school's three premises, some hot water supplies pose a scalding risk for pupils.

The proprietor body and governors have ensured that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. The proprietor body has put in place a suitable safeguarding policy. This policy is published on the school's website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor body has not ensured that all of the standards relating to pupils' health, safety and welfare, or to the school's premises and accommodation, are met. For example, daily checks on the safety of playgrounds and on the storage of chemicals for science are sometimes omitted. This potentially puts pupils' welfare at risk of harm. The proprietor body must ensure that all appropriate checks are carried out regularly as intended so that risks to pupils' safety are minimised.
- The proprietor body has not ensured that the school's curriculum is sufficiently ambitious. The schemes of work in each subject for key stages 2, 3 and 4 contain too little information about the specific knowledge that pupils need to learn. Furthermore, the order in which subject content should be taught has not been considered sufficiently well. This prevents staff from knowing what pupils should learn, and it hampers pupils from gaining a secure body of knowledge over time. It also contributes to pupils' lack of engagement and enthusiasm for learning. The proprietor body must ensure that the curriculum in each subject sets out this important information that pupils must know and the order in which it will be

taught. This is so that pupils achieve well and are ready for the next stage in their education.

- The school has not ensured that the curriculum takes account of the range of pupils' differing needs. This makes it difficult for staff to adapt their delivery of the curriculum to help pupils access the curriculum. This limits their achievement. The proprietor body must ensure that in each subject, the curriculum for pupils in key stages 2, 3 and 4 reflects the range of pupils' SEND so that pupils can learn the curriculum effectively.
- The school does not make effective use of assessment strategies to check learning or to adjust teaching in order to meet pupils' needs. This hampers pupils' learning and development. The school must ensure that in each subject in key stages 2, 3 and 4, assessment information is used regularly and effectively to ensure that pupils learn and achieve as they should.
- The proprietor body has not ensured that there are suitably high expectations for pupils' behaviour nor has it made sure that the behaviour policy is implemented consistently well. Pupils do not receive the clear and consistent guidance that they need to help them to behave well. Consequently, the behaviour of some pupils is poor and disrespectful. This makes other pupils anxious. It affects their learning and spoils their enjoyment of school. The proprietor body must ensure that pupils' unacceptable behaviour is eradicated so that learning time is not wasted.
- The school has not ensured that pupils in key stages 3 and 4 receive suitable careers information, advice and guidance. This prevents them from building up a clear understanding over time of the choices that are available to them in the next phase of their lives. The school should strengthen their programme of careers guidance so that pupils can prepare more effectively for future life.
- The support that is on offer for those pupils at the early stage of reading is variable. This means that some pupils do not read with confidence or accuracy. This limits their access to other curriculum subjects. The school should ensure that all pupils who find reading difficult receive effective support to help them build their reading knowledge over time.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	106162
DfE registration number	356/6025
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10267595
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	5 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Proprietor	Together Trust
Chair	Giles Gaddum
Headteacher	Paula Tankard
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,470 to £98,880
Telephone number	0161 283 4832
Website	www.togethertrust.org.uk
Email address	ashcroft.school@togethertrust.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 February to 1 March 2019

Information about this school

- The school's previous standard inspection was 26 February to 1 March 2019.
- The school operates from three separate sites, each with a separate name. The main school is named Ashcroft School. This is located at The Together Trust Centre, Schools Hill, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 1JE. Ashcroft School House is located at Hanthorne House, Church Street, Droylsden, Manchester, M43 7BR. The sixth form, Ashcroft College, is located at 154 Stockport Road, Guide Bridge, Ashton-under-Lyne, OL7 0NW.
- Since the last inspection, a new chair has been appointed to the school's governing body. Since April 2022, the school has shared an executive headteacher with the proprietor body's two other schools. A new, substantive headteacher was appointed to the school in May 2023.
- Leaders currently make use of one registered alternative provider and three unregistered providers.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. All the pupils have EHC plans.
- The school is registered for pupils aged five to 18. There are currently no pupils in key stage 1.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school has failed to meet the independent school standards. These are the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, the executive headteacher and other school leaders.
- The lead inspector spoke remotely to the chair of the proprietor body. She met with members of the proprietor body. She also met with members of the governing body.
- The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the local authority.

- The inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, with a focus on early reading, mathematics and history. For each deep dive, the inspectors met with subject leaders, discussed the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also observed some pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors discussed the curriculum in some other subjects with leaders.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector 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.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the school. Inspectors also reviewed documentation to check the school's compliance with the standards.
- The inspectors considered the views expressed by parents in their responses to Ofsted Parent View. This included free-text comments.
- The inspectors spoke with some pupils about school life. They took account of the responses to the pupil survey.
- The inspectors spoke with staff to discuss leaders' support for their workload and well-being. Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

Inspection team

Mavis Smith, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school failed to meet the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if-
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
 - 2(1)(b) the written policy, plans and schemes of work-
 - 2(1)(b)(i) take into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan.
- 2(2) For the purposes of paragraph (2)(1)(a), the matters are-
 - 2(2)(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that-
 - 2(2)(e)(ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and
 - 2(2)(e)(iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential;
 - 2(2)(h) that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
- 3 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school-
 - 3(a) enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught;
 - 3(b) fosters in pupils self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves;
 - 3(c) involves well planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time;
 - 3(d) shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons;
 - 3(g) demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress;
 - 3(h) utilises effective strategies for managing behaviour and encouraging pupils to act responsibly.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that-
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

25 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.

28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that:

- 28(1)(d) the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

■ 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school-

- 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
- 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
- 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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