

Astley Park School

Harrington Road, Chorley, Lancashire, PR7 1JZ

Inspection dates 14–15 November 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Astley Park has improved since the previous inspection so that the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements, from their starting points, are now good.
- Pupils benefit from consistently good teaching. Teachers provide activities that are well planned to match the needs of individuals. Pupils enjoy school and want to learn because lessons are fun.
- Teachers and teaching assistants provide outstanding care and support for pupils so that they make especially good progress in their personal development.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Pupils feel exceptionally safe in school because of the highly supportive relationships they enjoy with staff.
- Relationships with parents are outstanding. Parents feel well informed about their child's progress and involved in the life of the school.
- The high expectations of the headteacher and leadership team, including the governing body have improved the school since the previous inspection. Staff are committed to being part of a team which continuously strives to and succeeds in improving pupils' achievement.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough teaching is outstanding and not all staff are clear enough about what makes the quality of teaching outstanding to enable pupils to make consistently outstanding progress.
- Sometimes, teachers do not make it clear enough what each pupil is expected to learn in all lessons to be sure that more-able pupils, in particular, always achieve as well as they can.
- Information and communication technology is not always used well enough across the curriculum subjects so that pupils can find out things for themselves.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 lessons taught by all of the teachers in the school.
- Four of the lessons were observed jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the deputy headteachers and other members of staff, a representative from the local authority, members of the governing body and a group of pupils from the school council. The inspectors also talked informally with pupils and staff around the school.
- Many documents were reviewed including those relating to safeguarding, pupils' progress, the school's evaluation of its own performance and improvement planning, behaviour management of pupils and performance management arrangements for staff.
- The inspectors took account of the school's surveys of parents and pupils' views, 19 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View), together with two letters submitted by parents. They analysed the responses in 48 completed staff questionnaires.

Inspection team

Hilary Ward, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Nell Banfield

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Astley Park provides for pupils who have a range of special educational needs including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders and speech, language and communication needs. A small number of pupils have sensory and physical disabilities or behaviour, social and emotional difficulties in addition to their learning disabilities.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs.
- Almost half of the pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium. This is well above the national average.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage.
- Pupils often join the school at ages other than at the usual time particularly at the end of Key Stage 2.
- Pupils in Key Stage 4 access vocational courses at Lisieux Hall and taster courses at Runshaw College. Pupils also regularly visit Twinkle House, a charitable organisation offering sensory facilities.
- The school holds a number of awards, in particular several awards for sustainability and environmental issues and Healthy Schools. It won Lancashire's Sustainable School of the Year Award this year. It has also recently achieved the Parent Partnership Award.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to be more consistently outstanding so that pupils make outstanding progress by:
 - making sure that teachers' planning always makes it very clear what each pupil is expected to learn in every lesson, especially the more-able pupils
 - making sure that all staff understand exactly what makes the quality of teaching outstanding.
- Improve the range of modern, up-to-date information and communication technology equipment and allow pupils to explore and investigate information for themselves in all subjects.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils' attainment on entry is low and sometimes very low due to their complex needs which make learning difficult for them.
- Children who start at the school in the Early Years Foundation Stage are often not ready to learn. The individualised approach to meeting their needs, together with opportunities to participate in group sessions, gets them off to a very good start, particularly in developing their communication skills.
- A significant amount of training has been put in place to make sure that teachers use a range of approaches to meet the increasingly complex needs of the pupils. As a result, all pupils are able to learn quickly and the rate of progress has increased since the previous inspection.
- Those pupils who have the ability to read, build a good understanding of letters and the sounds they make. Many pupils are able to find out information and read for enjoyment. The school has identified reading as an area for development for some of its pupils and has put measures in place to accelerate their progress even further.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives when they leave school because teachers and teaching assistants provide outstanding support for pupils' personal development and well-being. All pupils are given equal chance to achieve in whatever way they can, including those who are eligible for the pupil premium and this is at the heart of all the school does.
- The school has extended the range of courses available for older pupils, including through access to off-site settings, so that all leave with external awards which match their abilities. They develop good self-help and independence skills, for instance, through learning how to make simple meals and to budget for the ingredients they need to buy.
- Pupils' progress in communication is outstanding because staff always use a range of communication methods, such as sign and symbols, very effectively to support pupils' learning. This, for example, helps pupils to understand the order of the day, when to start and finish activities and to express their needs and wishes.
- The vast majority of parents are extremely positive that their children are making at least good progress. In responses to the school's own questionnaires to parents, many commented on the progress their children make in their self-esteem and confidence. As one parent commented, 'My son was an anxious child, now he's a learning child.'

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching across the whole school is consistently good and has improved since the previous inspection. The recent grouping of pupils by learning needs and by stages of development, rather than simply by age, has enabled teachers and teaching assistants to create classroom environments which help pupils to be ready to learn.
- Teachers pay particular attention to developing pupils' communication skills by providing lots of sensory experiences and practical activities.
- Frequent team meetings ensure that all adults contribute to checking pupils' day-to-day progress and to plan what they need to learn next. Teaching assistants are very knowledgeable about the learning needs of the pupils so that they provide high quality support.
- Teachers set challenging work to help pupils develop the essential skills they will need in their future lives. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, pupils were learning how to manage bank accounts, how to pay money in and get their money out.
- Teachers are skilled at preparing activities which are well matched to the learning needs of groups of pupils. However, they do not always make it clear in their planning, or to individual pupils, what they want every pupil to learn in each lesson to support assessment more closely and identify each pupil's next steps of learning. This occasionally results in the most-able pupils making less progress than they might be able to.

- In the best lessons seen, work matches the needs of individual pupils very well. For instance, in a class of primary pupils with autistic spectrum disorders, each pupil was engaged in a numeracy activity about shape patterns, but adapted to their individual interests, so that all remained on-task for a good period of time.
- Teachers use questioning well to extend learning and to check that pupils understand what they need to do and what they have learned.
- Pupils know their targets. Good examples of marking and feedback to pupils, and of pupils evaluating their own understanding and the quality of their work, were seen in all lessons and in workbooks. As a result, pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work.
- Although teachers use computerised technology well in their teaching, the development of pupils' skills in researching and finding out things for themselves in all subjects of the curriculum, is hampered by a shortage of the most modern computer equipment.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Behaviour in lessons is outstanding. All staff have recently received training in how to manage pupils' behaviour in positive ways, to reduce anxieties and to develop pupils' communication skills, particularly for those with autistic spectrum conditions. This has had a positive result in improving the learning environment for these pupils so that they enjoy school.
- Parents are confident that their children are safe in school and that behaviour is managed effectively. Pupils, themselves, say that bullying is rare and is dealt with well.
- The 'restorative justice' approach and counselling service recently introduced, are equipping pupils with the skills they need to reflect on their own and others' behaviour and to be able to manage better in social situations they often find difficult.
- Although the nature of some pupils' disabilities mean that they tend to be rather solitary, most pupils learn to help each other and are very respectful of their peers and adults. They appreciate the extremely supportive relationships they enjoy with staff.
- The number of exclusions has reduced since the previous inspection and is now rare.
- Attendance has improved and is above that typically found in special schools because pupils really enjoy coming to school. The appointment of two higher level teaching assistants to support attendance and to link with families to support problems such as behaviour, sleeping and eating at home, is having very positive results for both the school and families.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is focused on raising the quality of teaching and improving pupils' achievement. He has secured significant gains over the last three years and his eyes are fixed firmly on continuing to raise standards even further so that the school becomes outstanding. As a result, the school has a very good capacity to continue to improve.
- Teaching is now consistently good because of the thorough performance management of teachers and teaching assistants. Targets for staff are clearly matched to the school's improvement priorities and to providing them with training to develop their skills even further. However, although teaching is consistently good, there is not a clear, shared understanding about what is needed to improve the quality of teaching to outstanding.
- The leadership team has been recently reorganised with the intention of improving the way that quality of teaching pupils' progress is checked. Subject leadership teams, which manage and monitor different aspects of learning, are new and yet to demonstrate their impact. Even so, all staff are highly motivated and share in the ambition and drive for improvement. The vast majority of staff feel they are valued as part of the whole-school community and well supported in their own professional development.
- Pupils' progress is analysed well and clearly demonstrates that all pupils, regardless of age, ability or background, make equally good progress and for some it is outstanding. Pupils who

achieve less well are quickly identified and measures taken to address the problem.

- Pupils are enthusiastic members of the school council and make an effective contribution to the achievement of school awards, particularly on environmental issues. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through all aspects of the curriculum. The school is currently working towards achievement of the Race Equality Mark.
- The curriculum has been recently revised and is now well matched to the more complex needs of the pupils. There is access to a broader range of external awards for leavers since the previous inspection. The school strives to ensure that it meets the needs and interests of all of its older pupils in work placements and through partnerships with other schools and settings.
- The local authority provides support and advice to the school on a regular basis and has been involved in many of the school's developments.
- Partnerships with parents are outstanding. Many parents in the school's questionnaire commented on the exceptional support that has been given both to their children and to themselves and their families.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body evaluates itself regularly and has improved its contribution to school improvement since the previous inspection. Governors bring a good mix of business, education, managerial and community skills. They come into the school regularly and since the previous inspection have developed their knowledge and understanding of the school's work. They now effectively support school improvement and challenge the school's leaders and managers. This shows in their good understanding of pupils' achievement and understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. Governors ensure that the pupil premium funding is used wisely and is making a difference for those pupils.

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	119877
Local authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	401880

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	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	145
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Wendy Blundell
Headteacher	Kieran Welsh
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2010
Telephone number	01257 262227
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