

Chorley Astley Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119877
Local Authority	Lancashire
Inspection number	339541
Inspection dates	13–14 January 2010
Reporting inspector	Terry McKenzie

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	114
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Kim Pope
Headteacher	Mr Kieran Welsh
Date of previous school inspection	24 January 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at assessment and tracking information, teachers' planning, safeguarding documents, key policies and 69 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

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

- the effectiveness of teaching and assessment on pupils' achievement
- how well the curriculum promotes future economic well-being and develops pupils' basic skills
- the impact of the new school leadership and management team in making changes and improvements
- how well pupils are cared for, safeguarded and supported and whether there are equal opportunities for all.

Information about the school

Astley Park educates pupils with moderate and other learning difficulties. In recent years it has admitted pupils who experience problems with communication including autistic spectrum disorders. Pupils join the school at different times of their school lives and Astley Park has a wide catchment. Some travel for more than an hour each day. All have a statement of special educational needs and many use communication aids such as Signalong that is a system based on British Sign Language. Pupils come from a wide variety of social backgrounds, three are looked after by the local authority and most are White British. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is significantly higher than the national average.

The headteacher and the other members of the leadership team were appointed in September 2009. In the last three years Astley Park has gained accreditations in the Healthy Schools Flagship Status together with the associated Quality Mark in both Healthy Schools Community and Partnership, and Physical Activity. It has also gained the Activemark, the Woodlands Trust Gold, Silver and Bronze Awards and the Royal Horticultural Society Growing Schools Levels 2 and 1 Awards.

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?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Astley Park provides satisfactory education and outstanding care for children in the Reception class and throughout the school. The new headteacher is already demonstrating effective leadership. High morale is evident among the staff who voice their support. Pupils attend school very willingly and their good behaviour indicates appreciation of the facility. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the outstanding support that they and their children receive. One representative comment was, 'All staff have the well-being and individual needs of each pupil as their main concern.' Others were keen to praise the excellent work that Astley Park has done to encourage their children to adopt healthy lifestyles and make excellent contributions to communities. Pupils feel safe in school and safeguarding procedures are managed appropriately.

The governing body supports the headteacher, who has already implemented many improvements since being appointed. For example, new and more robust assessments strategies are in the process of being developed with the aim of helping teachers to set lesson targets and, consequently, helping pupils to make better progress. Teachers' use of assessment is satisfactory, overall, but staff do not always use assessment information effectively to set targets for pupils or to make sure that work is set at the right level for individuals. This means that pupils' progress, overall, is satisfactory rather than good. Other initiatives, such as strategies to ensure equality of opportunity, are planned but remain in the early stages of development. Overall, these early successes in planning and implementation demonstrate the school's good capacity to improve further.

Outstanding relationships exist with external agencies such as the therapists. This helps pupils to access the curriculum. All are very carefully guided through entry into the school and subsequent transitions. For example, the leavers' unit prepares students very well for moving on to the next stages of their lives and forms an important bridge to the wider community. An outstanding range of opportunities thus exist for pupils to enjoy working in partnership with a variety of local schools, colleges and other agencies. However, opportunities for pupils to gain external accreditation are limited, and the school has rightly identified this as an area for development.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make better use of assessments to improve teaching so that:
 - better targets are produced for pupils

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- staff are able to ensure that work is consistently at the right level for individuals
- pupils improve their learning, make more progress and know how well they are doing.
- Improve the curriculum so that pupils have a wider range of experiences and greater access to external accreditation.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Because of their learning difficulties, the attainment of pupils is well below that expected for all schools but their progress compared to those in other similar schools is satisfactory. Progress is shown through the regular recording of outcomes by teachers and by the work done in lessons. Learning and progress are consistent throughout the school and no groups or individuals are disadvantaged. Pupils settle quickly into lessons, behave well and often show enjoyment, wanting to please the adults with whom they work. Staff work hard to ensure that a safe environment is maintained for all. Pupils understand about right and wrong and what is acceptable. The calm atmosphere of the school fosters good relationships between all. Those with communication difficulties, therefore, have opportunities to develop good social skills and to learn how to interact with others.

Since gaining Healthy Schools awards the school has not relaxed efforts and pupils have developed an excellent understanding of healthy lifestyles. School lunch menus deliver healthy options. Pupils all enjoy at least two hours of physical activity each week and a great deal of thought goes into making physical activity interesting and meaningful for each individual. Pupils benefit from excellent interactions with a wide range of communities, including other educational institutions, work places where work experience is done and members of the adjacent community who are kept informed about the school through well-produced newsletters. There is a strong sense of togetherness as is demonstrated each day at lunchtime when pupils eat together in family style groups and help each other at the table. The vibrant school council makes its views known and has contributed to the organisation of Christmas events and the development of activity afternoons.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching varies in quality but is satisfactory, overall. In the best lessons, where teaching is outstanding, teachers are very aware of pupils' abilities through accurate assessments. Here they plan in very small steps so that progress can be quickly and efficiently evidenced. Some consideration is given to adjusting the classroom environments to the needs and tolerances of pupils and new technology systems including interactive whiteboards are used very effectively in some classrooms. Classroom assistants understand what is expected of pupils and support them well. A few teachers use exemplary skills and experience. However, except in literacy, close attention to assessment is not uniform throughout the school, so learning targets are not always set accurately. The school is beginning to use assessments more effectively. For example, scrutiny of assessment data by senior managers is now undertaken to identify any groups that might be in danger of falling behind. While more is yet required to be done, this demonstrates an improvement in practice since the last inspection. The school places much emphasis on providing therapeutic support for pupils to develop their communication skills. Pupils can thus take part in lessons and access the curriculum. This also helps to reduce incidents of negative behaviour because pupils are better understood and become less frustrated in their dealings with adults and with each other. Some teachers make good use of Signalong and other communication aids. Much improvement has occurred since the last inspection in the use of technology and every classroom now has an interactive whiteboard that enables some pupils to participate in activities from which they might otherwise be excluded. The satisfactory deployment of resources thus supports teaching and learning.

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The satisfactory curriculum provides a framework for teaching and learning that is beginning to meet the individual needs of pupils. Some aspects are good, such as the development of literacy skills. Most subjects encourage the use of literacy and numeracy in lessons. There are opportunities for groups to share tasks together but also to undertake individual work. Astley Park uses a range of curriculum sources, including the National Curriculum and the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Different areas of the curriculum help pupils understand about cultures and religions from around the world. Between the ages of 14 and 17 many students gain a variety of accreditations but there remains scope for further development. Astley Park is working towards further development of the curriculum in order to allow pupils an even wider choice through studying more vocational courses and enabling some to gain qualifications such as adult literacy and numeracy.

The high staffing levels and skills of the adults ensure that all needs are attended to so that pupils can maintain their classroom presence. Astley Park provides outstanding care and support throughout the day but pupils also rely on strong and positive links with outside agencies to support their medical and other needs to enable learning to be maximised.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Astley Park is an improving school because of the new and inspirational leadership of the headteacher and senior team. Managers provide clear direction and sense of purpose to the school and they are held to account by the challenging and well-organised governing body. They ensure that staff understand priorities for development and the part that each can play in helping the school to improve through, for example, setting challenging targets for pupils. All at Astley Park have opportunities to succeed and none are discriminated against. The satisfactory deployment of resources confirms that the school provides sound value for money.

A great deal has been done to ensure that very good links with pupils' homes are maintained. For example, a 'chill and chat' session for parents and carers occurs every two weeks and is very well attended. High-quality newsletters are sent home and younger pupils use daily diaries to aid communication between home and school. The innovative use of contact with home is effective in maintaining the very high levels of attendance by pupils. Astley Park has adopted satisfactory practice in its safeguarding

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work and all required documents including policies, fire practice evacuation records, training records and risk assessments were in place at the time of the inspection. A great deal of planning has gone into improving aspects of community cohesion through, for example, providing visits for pupils and inviting visitors from different backgrounds into school. This is becoming more embedded into the curriculum through citizenship and personal, social and health education.

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
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall, the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and the effectiveness of leadership and management is good and improving. Children start in Reception at a very low stage of development in relation to typical expectations for their age. Their individual needs are identified and provided for and, as a result, they make good progress in their social, emotional and personal development. Children become increasingly ready to learn and, consequently, make steady progress in other areas of learning and in their ability to work alongside others. Clear strategies for identifying children's specific communication and language needs do not yet extend to all other areas of the curriculum and the processes of identifying and planning the next challenges are not always as clear as they might be. However, provision for children's welfare is good. Staff work hard and are very watchful over children's physical and emotional needs. They ensure that the classroom is safe and they build trusting relationships with the children and their parents and carers, all of whom hold the school in high regard. There is an appropriate balance of activities for children to choose from in both the outdoor and indoor classrooms. Leaders share a clear vision with staff and

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encourage productive teamwork. There is a well-defined action plan and assessment is becoming more effective in setting developmental targets for children.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

Questionnaires were received from 69 parents and carers and the responses were overwhelmingly positive. Many parents and carers took the trouble to write additional comments on the questionnaires. The comments emphasised support for the school and many were keen to identify the good start made by the new headteacher. Many parents and carers drew attention to the very good pastoral aspects of the school's work and the support that staff give to families. They clearly appreciate the very good communications that have been established and maintained.

The great majority of returns indicated that pupils enjoy school, are safe and happy, and that parents and carers believe their children make much better progress than in previous mainstream placements. A few would like their children to have more homework.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Chorley Astley Park 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 inspection team received 69 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 114 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	46	67	21	30	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	44	64	23	33	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	46	32	46	5	7	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	40	58	25	36	3	4	1	1
The teaching is good at this school	43	62	23	33	2	3	1	1
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	57	26	38	4	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	34	49	31	45	3	4	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)	43	62	25	36	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	46	67	21	30	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	44	64	22	32	1	1	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	40	58	29	42	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	46	67	21	30	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	49	71	18	26	2	3	0	0

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.



15 January 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Chorley Astley Park School, Chorley, PR7 1JZ

Thank you for welcoming Mr Johnson and me when we visited Astley Park recently. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting you and seeing you at work in your classrooms and around the school. We were impressed with your discussions when we met the school council members and thought that your behaviour was always good.

These are some of the things that we found out during the inspection from watching your lessons, talking with your teachers and reading comments from your parents and carers.

- You enjoy school and your attendance is outstanding.
- Astley Park keeps very good links with your families.
- The adults look after you very well indeed and help you to be fit and healthy.
- There is excellent support for you and your parents and carers.
- You get on very well together and with the staff.
- You have exciting opportunities to learn with others in the community.
- The headteacher, managers and governors are doing a good job.

I have asked the school to make sure that clear targets are set for you during lessons. This should help you to make better progress and know how well you are doing. We have also suggested that the school finds more courses for you to study so that the older students can gain even more qualifications in time.

Best wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Mr Terry McKenzie

Lead inspector

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