

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

INSPECTION REPORT

**INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A
OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002**

Name of school:	Ashton Park School
DCSF number:	938/6262
FOCUS number:	502
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Mrs M A Buckingham Supporting Inspectors: Mr Ted Cohn Mr Peter Jones Lay Inspector: Mr Mike Thomas
Dates of inspection:	9 – 12 February 2009

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Ashton Park School

Address of the school: Ashton Park School,
Brinsbury College Campus East,
Stane Street, North Heath,
Pulborough, RH20 1DJ

Telephone number: 01798 875836

Fax number: 01798 875827

Proprietor: South Downs Education Trust

Name of Chief Executive Officer (CEO): Mr Richard Cowley

Name of Senior Teacher: Mr Peter Woodage (secondary)
Mrs Denise Renson (primary)

DCSF number: 938/6262

FOCUS number: 502

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust

Age range of pupils and students: 7 – 18 years

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll: (Full time) Boys: 52 Girls: 53
(Part time) Boys: 0 Girls: 0

Number of post-16 students: Boys: 10 Girls: 11

Number of pupils with statements of special educational need: None

Annual fees: No fees charged

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Mrs M A Buckingham
Supporting Inspectors: Mr Ted Cohn
Mr Peter Jones
Lay Inspector: Mr Mike Thomas

Dates of inspection: 9 – 12 February 2009

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Focus Learning Trust and agreed with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Focus Learning Trust (FLT). His findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school

Ashton Park School was established by South Downs Education Trust, and moved to the present site near Pulborough, West Sussex in 2004. It is an independent day school for boys and girls affiliated to the FLT. Opened as a secondary school for pupils in Years 7 to 12, it was later extended to include Year 13 students. In September 2008, a primary school with Key Stage 2 pupils was added. The school is now registered for pupils aged from seven to eighteen years. Key Stage 2 pupils are organised into two mixed aged classes, one for Years 3 and 4 and the other for Years 5 and 6. The motto of the school is '*we live through learning*'.

Summary of main findings:

The school is characterised by its objective to have a strong Christian ethos which is governed by the detail of the Holy Bible. It provides a good quality of education with aspects that are outstanding. Overall, good teaching and learning in the majority of areas and excellent relationships enable pupils to make good progress in their academic work and their personal development. The broad curriculum throughout the school is well planned and pupils are very well cared for.

What the school does well:

- it provides a good quality of education with aspects that are outstanding so enabling pupils to make good progress overall and to enjoy their learning;
- it enables pupils to grow in confidence and maturity;
- it is pursuing coherent initiatives that focus on teaching and learning and pupils' personal development; and
- through its dedicated leadership good strategies are in place for moving the school forward and sustaining its development.

Next steps:

Although not regulatory requirements, the school might consider the following for further development:

- review the provision for art in the secondary school; and
- develop further the quality of teaching in the primary school so that it is all of an equally high standard.

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

The school meets its responsibilities for DDA.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

Ashton Park School provides a good quality of education with some outstanding features. The curriculum from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is broad and well planned to meet pupils' needs and capture their interest, so they enjoy their learning and make overall good progress. The curriculum includes all the required areas of experience: linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative. Extensive use of information and communication technology is not in keeping with the ethos of the school. However, the use of laptop computers is beginning to be effective in helping several pupils in the secondary school with recording their work.

At Key Stage 2 the curriculum is broad, with appropriate emphasis given to literacy and numeracy, which, together with science, constitute the core. All other National Curriculum foundation subjects including geography, history, music, physical education (PE), design and technology (D&T) and art are taught. Bible studies and French further extend the primary curriculum. Planning is based on the approved schemes of work and support materials from FLT. These are followed through into good lesson planning. Even at this early stage of the primary school, imaginative ways are being sought to enhance the use of these materials and the curriculum; for example, termly visits to places of historic interest related to a topic. This is giving pupils valuable first hand experience and helps them to make links across the curriculum in their knowledge and understanding. During the inspection, pupils in the Year 3 and 4 class greatly enjoyed a day visit to a Tudor exhibition at the Weald and Downland Museum.

The breadth of curriculum is continued and extended in Key Stage 3 with Bible studies and similar core and foundation subjects of the National Curriculum, except for art. While subjects such as D&T, textiles, food and nutrition, music and poetry make a valuable contribution to pupils' creative and aesthetic experiences, pupils currently do not benefit from the broader opportunities of art lessons. Displays around the school show that, previously, pupils have achieved high standards of painting and drawing, but as a consequence of a lack of staffing, art is not now on the timetable. French is taught to all pupils and there are plans to introduce Spanish as a second modern foreign language. The curriculum is further enhanced through all pupils in Years 7 and 8, learning to touch type in office skills. An enrichment programme in Years 7 to 9 of additional physical activity and the 'learning to learn' study skills lessons for pupils when they arrive in Year 7 also provide enhancement of the curriculum.

An excellent feature is the thoughtful way in which the secondary school has introduced the new curriculum at Key Stage 3. Careful auditing of what already exists is enabling teachers to begin to look across the curriculum and see how individual subjects can support and extend pupils' skills, as well as knowledge. This strategy complements the excellent focus on pupils' learning that is developing through the work of the learning enhancement department to underpin the school's approach to the curriculum, its planning and execution, as well as to pupil support.

At Key Stage 4, pupils study a broad range of subjects preparing for General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) in English, mathematics, science, French, history, geography and D&T (resistant materials) as well as studying PE and games, music, accounts and Bible studies. In addition, all pupils study a GCSE short course in

citizenship. Teachers use the National Curriculum and FLT materials for their schemes of work and lesson plans across each key stage; these vary in detail but provide an appropriate framework for teaching and learning.

The school is in its second year of post-16 provision and is striving to provide a range of courses that meet the aptitudes and interests of students. Consequently, Year 12 and 13 students study examination courses at various levels. These include GCSE, AS, in some cases leading to A2, and more vocational and business orientated City and Guilds and Business and Technology Council (BTEC) courses. All students are taught Bible studies, PE, music and current affairs. Other options available include English, Business English, mathematics, food and nutrition, construction and culinary skills together with those courses available through the distance learning virtual classroom (VC) link with three other Focus schools. This is an exciting part of the secondary and post 16 curriculum. It is being used very effectively in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13 to broaden pupils' opportunities with courses in accounts, bookkeeping, business studies, law, government and politics and applied business. Pupils affirm that they thoroughly enjoy this way of learning.

All pupils follow personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programmes which reflect the school's ethos and use FLT materials. In Key Stage 4, work experience is part of careers education. Year 13 students undertake one day a week of work placement as part of their applied business studies course. Worthy of note are the plans underway to further develop this within PSHE and citizenship, involving, for example, Year 13 applied business studies students, to lead mock interviews with Year 10 pupils. Visiting speakers and educational visits are an established feature of the whole school curriculum. Increasingly, ways are being found to provide extra curricular activities that enrich pupils' learning. Topics have been brought alive with activity based days. For example, pupils, staff and parents recently entered into the spirit of a day by dressing in period costume to reconstruct aspects of life during World War Two. It is planned to extend this approach further. The breadth of the curriculum contributes to pupils' good personal development and well-being and prepares them for adult life.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection and several lessons were observed where the teaching was outstanding.

Teaching in the secondary school is good, with some outstanding features. Lessons are planned carefully, taking close account of pupils' prior learning. Teachers have a good command of their material and use a variety of well chosen teaching strategies, which ensures that pupils' learning proceeds at a brisk pace during lessons. Class management is effective, and relationships between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils themselves are always good and often excellent. These factors contribute to consistently good collaboration between pupils during small group and individual work, which makes an important contribution to the success of the distance learning video conferencing (VC) lessons, in particular. A notable feature of the teaching is the high quality of the questioning by teachers, which is used effectively to engage pupils, encourage them to explore issues, consolidate knowledge and assess understanding. This is also a feature of the VC lessons, where pupils engage in helpful dialogue with a teacher some 300 miles away in book-keeping and business studies lessons.

Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and make encouraging and supportive comments. These are diagnostic in identifying strengths and areas for future development and set

clear and sharply focused targets for improvement. Recently, the school's learning enhancement department has developed a detailed framework for assessing and tracking pupils' progress, drawing on the attainment targets of the new Key Stage 3 National Curriculum and the concomitant cross-curricular skills. Ways of using this framework have been introduced to staff through staff development training sessions, and this strategy is encouraging more effective assessment of pupils' learning and the setting of more specific targets for improvement.

In the primary school, teaching is satisfactory overall. Lessons in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are well planned, with clear and appropriate learning objectives. Lessons in the foundation subjects are not always as well planned to ensure progress in learning. Consequently in subjects such as geography and history pupils' progress in knowledge, understanding and skills is more uneven than it is in the core subjects. Class management is generally successful in ensuring that pupils make good progress in their learning, and this results in some interesting and lively lessons. In a Year 5 and 6 science lesson pupils were successfully learning the skills they needed to carry out independent scientific investigations and were challenged through good quality questioning. In a minority of lessons, class management is less effective, a number of pupils are inattentive for some of the time and the progress of learning is slow. The assessment of pupils' work is conscientious, encouraging and often helpfully diagnostic. An excellent example of this was evident in the comments made and targets set as a result of a writing task assessment.

Support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is good across the school. It has been made more effective in the secondary school through the careful analysis of pupils' particular difficulties, combined with helpful practical advice to teachers about their nature and how to plan for them in the classroom, together with appropriate support where necessary and regular reviews. This comprehensive and effective system of support is being introduced into the primary school. Support for those pupils identified as able, gifted and talented is not yet as comprehensive. However, the school is developing strategies to make it so, and what is already done ensures that these pupils make satisfactory to good progress in their learning.

The assessment of pupils is directly related to the attainment targets of the National Curriculum or other assessment requirements, where appropriate. The school also uses a nationally recognised assessment scheme for tracking the progress and achievement of pupils in the secondary school, which provides a comprehensive means of judging the individual and relative success of pupils against national norms. The development of a tracking system is a clear priority identified in the primary improvement plan.

Pupils make good progress overall in their learning and achieve good standards of work throughout the school in the core subjects and more generally in the secondary school. In the primary school, progress in the foundation subjects, such as history and geography, is more variable. In the secondary school, test and examination results provide clear evidence of good levels of achievement by pupils, in particular with regard to GCSE results over the last two years, where results in mathematics and D&T: resistant materials have been excellent. At the end of its first year of offering post 16 academic courses, the school's AS level results were satisfactory.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils throughout the school is excellent. The self-esteem and self-confidence of pupils is successfully developed through the school's Christian ethos, the generally excellent relationships that staff have with pupils and the constructive and supportive manner in which teachers approach teaching and learning. Increasingly, pupils are learning how to evaluate their own progress and achievement as part of the assessment process in the secondary school and this has been identified as a future target within Key Stage 2. The new academic review process, just introduced in the secondary school, is building this formally into assessment. In the interviews observed, pupils were helped skilfully to identify their strengths and areas for development, leading to a joint identification, by teacher, parent and pupil, of targets to progress learning. One Year 7 pupil indicated that he had gained in confidence at the school and was able to say for himself in the interview what he needed to do to improve.

Pupils come to the school with a well-developed understanding of the difference between right and wrong and of respect for the law from the strong Christian ethos within their families. The school enhances and supports these values through its high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes, its code of conduct and various parts of the curriculum, particularly PSHE, citizenship and Bible studies. Pupils learn to accept responsibility for their behaviour from an early age in their school life. Various examples of this were evident during lessons, particularly through the manner in which pupils work cooperatively in groups. Through PSHE, citizenship, and for older students, current affairs, pupils gain a sound knowledge of the major public institutions and services of the country.

The school combines with the parental community to inculcate in pupils a strong moral code, which will guide their adult lives, and encourages self-respect, social responsibility, courtesy and respect for other cultural traditions. The development of economic understanding in pupils is an excellent feature of the school's provision. This is done through a number of curriculum areas. PSHE makes a valuable contribution and helps pupils to understand the advantages and pitfalls of various forms of finance available to individuals. Geography gives pupils an understanding of the changing nature of British industry and factors influencing the location of particular industries. Older pupils also enhance their understanding through subjects such as accounting, book-keeping and business studies.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The school takes its responsibilities for pupils' welfare, health and safety seriously. Much work has been done to ensure that the required policies and procedures are in place using the FLT manual, and to ensure the regulations are met. There are secure written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. The school's health and safety policy and related documents are comprehensive and include detailed risk assessments. The school has sufficient numbers of trained First-Aiders to meet the regulations, but the school is aware of the need to ensure there is a designated First-Aider for the primary school. While there are sufficient designated and suitably trained staff for safeguarding pupils, the school has arranged for the primary senior teacher to receive the appropriate level of training to become the designated person in the primary school, further extending the provision. Policies to prevent bullying and promote good

behaviour are clear and provide suitable guidance for staff and pupils. The school's rules have been written in collaboration with pupils and staff, and are displayed in every classroom; they are straightforward and positive in tone. Behaviour is excellent; pupils act responsibly, have positive attitudes to school and are keen to learn. As one Year 8 pupil said with enthusiasm '...I enjoy coming to school ... maths is fun...'. Pupils are actively encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles. They participate in PE with a great deal of enthusiasm and learn about eating healthily in, for example, science, food and nutrition and PSHE lessons. Supervision is good around the school and trustees are rightly reviewing the need for an adult presence in the room during Key Stage 4 VC lessons.

The attendance registers now meet the regulatory requirements. Currently, the school has two separate admissions registers for the primary and secondary departments of the school. Individually both meet the requirements but this may lead to confusion of entries over time.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school's procedures for checking staff are careful and thorough; detailed records are kept in the confidential files on individual members of staff. A single central record of the required checks is in place, ensuring that the school meets all the current regulations.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school occupies an appropriate site in generally suitable premises. The accommodation is made up of a number of single storey demountable buildings that have been added over time as the school has grown. The trustees are actively seeking to provide alternative premises to consolidate and improve the accommodation for the whole school. There are separate hard surface play spaces for both the primary girls and the primary boys, allowing pupils to play safely during breaks and in PE lessons. Secondary pupils make good use of the local leisure centre for games.

The recently opened primary school is in good quality accommodation that is light and airy and supports learning very well. Secondary and post-16 groups are housed in a collection of older demountables. Pupils respect the accommodation and help to keep it clean and tidy. Although there are limitations to this accommodation, the school uses the space well. The imminent opening on site of new classrooms and a large well equipped D&T work shop is intended to improve greatly the secondary provision. Added to this, the sensible reorganisation of the existing rooms will enable the Year 12 and 13 students to have their own study room for the first time. Displays, including posters, photographs of visits and pupils' work, enhance the environment in all areas of the school. These are attractively mounted and often annotated, providing good support for learning and celebrating pupils' achievements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The school provides parents with all the required information in a comprehensive handbook, including the policies that apply to the whole school. Details of the primary school have been added recently by way of an insert, where information differs from that of the secondary school. A quarterly colourful newsletter provides parents with interesting articles about the school and its activities. Parents of primary pupils receive two reports per year on their children's progress. In secondary, parents receive three reports per year, two of which are interim reports and one an end of year report. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire they were overwhelmingly supportive of the school, although a significant minority would like to have more information about their children's progress. The academic review day is intended to provide an answer to these requests.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school has adopted the Focus Learning Trust policy for handling complaints. There have been no complaints in the last twelve months.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The South Downs Education Trust is a charitable trust and the board comprises seven trustees with responsibility for both the secondary and primary schools. The trustees understand their individual and collective responsibility to provide a strategy and resources to meet the aims and objectives of the charity, and to comply with all the legal obligations and Focus Learning Trust ethos and policies. Board meetings are held monthly, are well attended and minutes are produced.

The primary and secondary schools are led by separate management teams. All members are dedicated and hard working. Each team consists of the respective senior teacher for the particular phase. In addition, for the primary school, the team includes the primary manager and primary trustee. The CEO is part of both management teams. Recently, the senior teachers have met informally to discuss matters of common interest. There is a detailed management structure for trustees and staff with all responsibilities delegated to a team of committed voluntary supporters from the Brethren community. With the opening of the primary school in September 2008, the school now provides 'all through' learning for pupils from Years 3 to 13. Currently, there are no regular, programmed meetings between the primary and the secondary management teams. These would provide positive opportunities for developing a cohesive approach across the whole school and would benefit both pupils and staff.

The pastoral care is good, and pupils are well disciplined, respectful, friendly and evidently happy at school. Staff speak of their appreciation of the working conditions in the school. Communications are generally good. Record keeping and office administration is very good.

Could the organisation and management of the school be improved?

Yes.

To improve the management and organisation of the school further, the trustees should consider:

- ensuring that there are regular joint management meetings between the primary and the secondary management teams. These meetings should be properly minuted, and copies of these minutes should be sent to those present and to all trustees. In addition, regular timetabled meetings between the two senior teachers would be beneficial; and
- both of the senior teachers should be given detailed job descriptions to clarify their respective responsibilities.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Focus Learning Trust. Further copies of the report are available from the Operations Manager of the Focus Learning Trust, Siskin House, Siskin Drive, Coventry, or from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionsservice.co.uk