

# Ashby Willesley Primary School



Inspiring the next generation



Matthew Brookes,  
Headteacher

Overseeing a school growing in pupil numbers can present challenges. Matthew Brookes, Headteacher at Ashby Willesley Primary School which has increased its pupil size by around 100 students in three years, discusses how it coped with the increase while converting to academy status.

Children are individuals, a fact that wasn't forgotten during the significant growth in pupil intake in the past three years. This increased over the same period by around 100 – taking the total number of pupils on roll in September 2016 to 420. Despite this, we've still maintained the family-orientated environment that has been the lifeblood of the school for more than 50 years and maintained its tight-knit community feel.

The unique child-focused environment we've fostered is underpinned by our fantastic staff working collaboratively with our parents in a very open and honest way. This means there are sometimes difficult discussions, but generally our parents are very appreciative of this. The staff are also helped by this engagement, as it means they are able to get to know a child's needs. These factors were especially important as we undertook one of the biggest changes in the school's history by converting to academy status in September 2016.

## Investment

In the period running up to our conversion, a lot of the dialogue we had with our local authority, Leicestershire Education Authority, was around providing new accommodation and converting to a two-form entry school. To facilitate the school growth, we have received investment to the tune of £800,000 in the past three years for new buildings and improving facilities.

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Matthew Brookes
- » Location: Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire
- » Serves ages 4–11 with a 60 pupil per year intake
- » 415 pupils on roll (September 2016)
- » Converted to an academy school in 2016
- » Built a new school block including a drama/music studio in October 2015
- » Most recent Ofsted inspection rating (2012): Good

## “Conversion to academy status has given Ashby Willesley a great opportunity”

At the centre of the investment was a new building completed in October 2015. The block has helped alleviate some of the capacity issues we encountered with overflowing class sizes and mixed-age groups. It also refreshed the facilities themselves, as some of the older classrooms quite simply were no longer fit for purpose.

The facilities include a new classroom block for our Year Six students along with the addition of a music and drama studio, which is particularly pleasing as that had been something we had envisioned at the school for several years. Appearance is equally as important as impressions really do count, so during this time, the original 1960s building was also completely refurbished with the addition of a new roof and windows. Overall, the school is the most aesthetically pleasing it has ever been.

### Changing fortunes

The conversion to academy status, along with the subsequent investment, has given Ashby Willesley a great opportunity, because just three years ago, the school was struggling financially. Budgets were projected to run at a deficit while large cuts were made to staffing which, in turn, had an adverse effect on morale.

Improving both the physical and structural aspects of the school has had a positive effect across the school. Class sizes, previously more than 30 pupils, have now been reduced and we are two-form entry through all school years. Having a bigger school and an increased number of pupils has also led to a great deal of additional funding and ensured healthy budgets which can be allocated for further investment in resources. We've focused on increasing staff numbers including more classroom assistants to support our teachers and pupils. Learning aids were also prioritised, including technology such as new laptops and iPads for the children. These have proved very popular additions and have given a new approach to pupil learning.

Some challenges persist however. Being one of only a few schools in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, a small market town with a population of just under 13,000, competition for places can be quite fierce. We're now in a position where classes are oversubscribed in every year group despite the extra pupil places we have created.

To some degree, this is a nice position to be in, as increasing our overall size by 100 pupils shows the popularity of

Embracing technology







Creative learning

the school. It also means we can be more ambitious in our future planning as these numbers mean there will be sustained school development.

### Striving for better

The turnaround is evident in the school's general atmosphere – it's a positive and vibrant place to be. Further demonstrating our improving fortunes is our better attainment, something that has been steadily climbing by the year with areas like reading, writing and maths now scoring well above the national average.

Having reversed the decline, the next step for Ashby Willesley is further academic progress by reviewing relevant data to drive further improvement in areas such as Key Stage 2. Our next Ofsted inspection, whenever that may occur, will also be a good indicator of our progress.

Work with other schools in our newly-formed multi-academy trust (MAT), the Symphony Learning Trust, will be vital in securing future school improvement. Our unique, primary school only, MAT is strong, likeminded

and dedicated to improving the chances of the pupils in our care.

Extracurricular activities will also continue to be of great importance as these give children a more rounded school experience while promoting key values such as hard work. The school's long-standing sporting prowess is something of which we are particularly proud, having regularly been ranked among the top five performing schools in Leicestershire. However, this was to the detriment of other activities, particularly music, which we will see improve when the construction of our music centre is completed.

Our popular music tuition has been expanded to offer piano, cello, flute and other instruments. In the 2016–17 academic year, 12 % of our pupils were learning a musical instrument. Emphasis on music shows pupils the value of practice and hard work. Partaking in activities like these and showcasing their talents through concerts and performance helps form more confident individuals and that's something we want to continue to develop.

“The Symphony Learning Trust will be vital in securing future school improvements and is dedicated to improving the chances of pupils in our care”