

Abington High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	120311
Local Authority	Leicestershire
Inspection number	358740
Inspection dates	13–14 October 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Brooker HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	10–14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	653
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoffrey Hall
Headteacher	Alex Green
Date of previous school inspection	2 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. In total there were 41 lesson observations, some of which were undertaken jointly with senior leaders; 37 teachers were seen teaching. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the documentation relating to the safeguarding of pupils, the progress that different groups of pupils are making in their learning and their wider participation in the life of the school. Inspectors analysed 180 parental questionnaire responses and questionnaires returned by some staff and a sample of over 120 pupils. Meetings were held with nominated staff, representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils.

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

- What is the standard of pupils' work on entry at the start of Year 6, and what is their attainment at the end of Year 9 and then at Key Stage 4 in the upper school?
- To what extent has the school successfully accelerated the pupils' progress and raised standards since the last inspection, particularly at Key Stage 2?
- What is the impact of the school's monitoring, self-evaluation and improvement planning at all levels, including the impact of governors?

Information about the school

Abington High School takes pupils from a wide geographical area in Wigston and attracts almost one third of pupils from beyond its catchment, largely from the City of Leicester. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national figure. The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic groups is above average, although relatively few speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, as is the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

The school is a National Support School and Specialist Arts College. It has achieved several accreditations, including Artsmark Gold, Sportsmark and the Inclusion Quality Mark.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Abington High School is outstanding because it provides a safe, happy and stimulating environment which encourages pupils to thrive, both academically and in their personal development. All groups of pupils achieve exceptional outcomes because the promotion of equality of opportunity is at the heart of the school's work. Rigorous monitoring of progress ensures that the school achieves its challenging targets, that any gaps in performance are narrowed and that pupils with particular difficulties or disadvantages are able to participate fully and achieve exceptionally well.

The school has a proud record of high achievement at Key Stage 3 and has worked hard to maintain and improve its results. Since the last inspection standards have risen, most notably at Key Stage 2. Pupils make outstanding progress, often from low starting points, to reach standards at the end of Year 9 that are above average. Specialist subjects make a strong contribution to pupil outcomes, and have a considerable influence on pupils' option choices in Key Stage 4.

The pupils feel completely safe, understand how to keep fit and healthy and enjoy school. They speak enthusiastically about what they enjoy most, are confident about what they can achieve and are proud of their individual contribution to the school and its wider community. Pupils' behaviour around the school is exemplary: they respond to the trust that they are shown by acting responsibly and showing considerable support and respect for one another. Furthermore, their excellent attitudes are outstanding features of the school's extremely positive ethos and are key factors in their successful learning.

The school achieves exceptional outcomes because its provision is outstanding. The curriculum is relevant, broad and stimulating and presents pupils wide opportunities to succeed and excel. The exemplary support and excellent guidance for individual pupils ensures that each can take advantage of what the school offers and that the pupils can mature as responsible, independent-minded young adults who are well equipped for the next stage of education and for later life. Teaching enables pupils to make exceptional progress because lessons are very well organised and skilfully directed. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' attitudes, engagement and effort. However, academic aspirations are not consistently high because assessment is not always well integrated into teachers' everyday work. For example, short-term planning does not use prior assessment to set consistently ambitious learning outcomes, and some marking does not build on what pupils have achieved. Although some teachers have clever strategies for assessing pupils' understanding and progress during lessons, good practice is not widely replicated.

The impact of the headteacher's outstanding leadership is recognised and appreciated in equal measure by parents, pupils and staff. Since the last inspection senior leaders have successfully built on the school's well-established record of academic achievement. The school's improved performance is soundly based on strengthening all aspects of provision

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through robust target-setting, rigorous monitoring and careful analysis. These well established systems for self review ensure that the school has excellent capacity to sustain improvement. Moreover, the school's outward-looking and collaborative approach to improvement reflects the fact that the best interests of children and young people in the local area are genuinely at the heart of all its work.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish a more consistent level of challenge in lessons by sharpening the impact of assessment to more effectively:
 - set ambitious learning outcomes and demanding activities for all pupils
 - gauge the progress of pupils and adjust the pace of learning accordingly
 - use marking to identify specific strengths and points for improvement, that are then followed up by pupils and teachers.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

At the start of Year 6 the standard of pupils' work is generally below average. In recent years results in Key Stage 2 tests have also been below national figures, but attainment in 2010 increased significantly and was more broadly average. Pupils make outstanding progress in Key Stage 3 so that by the end of Year 9 attainment is above age-related expectations, and attainment data from the upper school indicates that Abington pupils sustain their performance well. All groups of pupils make outstanding progress. That made by pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is exceptional because of the high quality of support and guidance that they receive. Since the last inspection, levels of attainment have shown significant improvement for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Pupils feel completely safe and respond positively to all that the school provides. Levels of participation in music, drama, sport and optional extra-curricular activities are impressively high. Many pupils willingly contribute to the life of the school and beyond through their individual leadership roles, such as mentors, monitors and sports leaders. The pupils show exceptional enthusiasm and commitment to succeed in all aspects of school life. They enjoy school and grasp opportunities to extend and improve their learning. These positive attitudes underpin the excellent progress that they make in lessons and over time, and their outstanding personal development. The pupils' excellent behaviour reflects the strong personal qualities that are quickly developed during their time at Abington, based on mutual trust, respect and co-operation. Pupils enjoy challenging tasks and their learning is impressive when they are given the opportunity to work independently. In history, geography, design and art lessons observed, for example, pupils were presented with interesting resources in small groups and pairs, which required analysis, discussion and deduction. These enabled them to explore sophisticated ideas and ask questions that went far beyond the most obvious subject content.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
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	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

The curriculum has good breadth and balance and is tailored to meet the changing needs of individuals and groups, for example through college courses. Its diversity is enhanced by an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities and enrichment days, trips to places of interest and foreign visits, many of which provide pupils with memorable experiences. The school's specialism makes a significant contribution to pupils' enjoyment and engagement and to their personal and academic development. The recent production of 'Billy Elliott' in a local theatre involved almost one in four pupils.

Most lessons are good and a significant amount of teaching is excellent. This high quality provision, underpinned by the excellent curriculum and the pupils' outstanding behaviour, ensures that pupils make exceptional progress. The best lessons present pupils with opportunities to extend their understanding and develop their skills through independent and collaborative work. Pupils respond with lively interest whenever they are asked to volunteer answers, or when given a chance discuss ideas, be creative or evaluate one another's work. Target setting is rigorous and is systematically reviewed by pupils with their tutors, so that pupils aspire to high achieve achievement. Marking is regular, encouraging and helpful. However, unlike other aspects of teaching, it does not drive outstanding learning and progress because too often the teachers' comments praise effort and reward presentation rather than identifying subject-specific strengths and areas for improvement which can be followed up.

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Excellent attention is given to all aspects of care, guidance and support and paramount importance is placed on meeting pupils' individual needs. Very well targeted support for all pupils enables them to make the best of the opportunities provided by the school; one-to-one tuition has been highly successful in raising attainment and is being extended this year. The school makes use of a wide range of support services to ensure that pupils with particular difficulties make good progress. Effective work is undertaken to encourage regular attendance for all groups of pupils.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's drive to sustain and extend high achievement is propelled by the vision and energy of the headteacher, ably supported by the complementary skills of excellent senior and middle leaders. Governors play a key role in supporting and challenging the school in order to set ever-higher expectations. There is a strong sense of shared purpose, which involves sustaining ambitious targets for all pupils. The school monitors teaching rigorously, and is aware that use of assessment is less strong than other aspects, but has not replicated more widely the existing best practice in assessment. Staff understand well how to support pupils by addressing their personal needs and aspirations, so that they develop the confidence to participate and succeed. They are relentless in seeking to achieve the school's avowed aim of 'equality of access' so that all pupils, regardless of their background, are able to make the most of the wide range of opportunities that the school offers. The school's ethos of mutual respect and trust permeates all of its endeavours.

The school is highly committed to working in partnership and takes a leading role in developing productive links that will support its pupils. Transition arrangements are impressively strong. The school has excellent relationships with all groups of parents and carers, who are very well informed about all aspects of their own children's progress and are heavily involved in decision-making on key matters, through well-established procedures.

Community cohesion is promoted strategically and is embedded in the everyday work of the school. Pupils of all ages and from all backgrounds mix easily to make a wonderfully cohesive community. The school has developed good links both locally and further afield in order to widen the horizons of its pupils and develop a very strong sense of community at all levels.

The school puts all aspects of health and safety at the heart of its work and has developed excellent risk assessment systems which are routinely informed by the views of pupils and

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parents. Procedures for safeguarding pupils are implemented and reviewed with exceptional rigour so that staff and governors at all levels are aware of their responsibilities.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
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	1
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	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

All parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire were happy with their child's experience at the school and were unanimous in agreeing that the school is well led, that their child is safe and that they are well informed about progress. A significant number made additional comments in praise and commendation of the school. No response made critical comment. Inspectors agree with parents' overwhelmingly positive views and consider that the affirmative responses reflect the school's outstanding engagement with parents and carers.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abington High 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 180 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 653 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	94	52	81	45	3	2	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	111	62	68	38	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	101	56	79	44	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	94	52	83	46	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	107	59	72	40	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	96	53	81	45	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	33	109	61	9	5	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)	93	52	82	46	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	85	47	90	50	2	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	87	48	83	46	2	1	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	71	39	98	54	6	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	118	66	62	34	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	114	63	66	37	0	0	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 all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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 pupils' 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 October 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abington High School, Wigston, Leicestershire LE18 2DU

Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for the very positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We appreciated the time that you took to speak to us. Your views, alongside the survey responses from your parents, were helpful in confirming for us that Abington is an excellent school. We were impressed by many aspects, but especially:

Abington's well-established record of academic achievement and improvement

- its outstanding provision, including the high-quality teaching, the rich curriculum and the excellent care, guidance and support
- your impeccable behaviour and excellent attitudes in lessons
- the impressive progress that you make during your four years at the school
- the way that the school works so hard to ensure that each and every one of you is safe, happy and successful.

The survey responses from pupils, staff and parents were all overwhelmingly positive. Nonetheless, there is always room for improvement! Although a lot of teaching is outstanding, we feel that teachers could sometimes expect more from you. We have therefore asked the school specifically to make sure that assessment information is used effectively to ensure that:

- lessons are, at all times, suitably ambitious and challenging for you
- marking gives you clear guidance on how to improve your work.

Your excellent behaviour, hard work and positive participation contribute strongly in making Abington an outstanding school. This report identifies a few ways that you can do even better. You can also help by attending well, working hard and checking that you understand exactly what you need to do to improve, especially when your work is marked, and that you follow the advice that's given.

Congratulations, you can all be proud of your efforts and achievements! We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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