

# Abbey Hill School and Technology College

Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	111787
<b>Local authority</b>	Stockton-on-Tees
<b>Inspection number</b>	378359
<b>Inspection dates</b>	5–6 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Alastair Younger

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	267
<b>Of which number on roll in the sixth form</b>	76
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Colin Whittaker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elizabeth Horne(Executive) Clare Devine(Head of Provision)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	27 November 2008
<b>School address</b>	Ketton Road Hardwick Estate Stockton-on-Tees TS19 8BU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01642 677113
<b>Fax number</b>	01642 679198
<b>Email address</b>	abbeyhill@stockton.gov.uk

---

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It rates council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
[enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. They observed nineteen lessons, each taught by a different teacher. Meetings were held with senior staff and representatives of the governing body. A telephone conversation was held with a representative of the local authority. Informal discussions were held with many individual students. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at documentation relating to students' progress, school improvement and information concerning the safeguarding of students. Inspectors analysed 65 questionnaires from parents and carers along with many more from staff and students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- Why Key Stage 3 students performed better in English than in mathematics last year.
- Whether students are sufficiently encouraged to assume responsibility for their own behaviour and learning.
- How well the feedback given to students helps them improve their work.
- In what ways the federation has had an impact on the work of the school.

## Information about the school

The school provides for students with a wide range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The nature of these needs is often complex and all students have a statement of special educational needs. A significant number of students has autistic spectrum difficulties and many exhibit speech, language and communication disorders and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. A large group of students has moderate learning difficulties and smaller groups have severe or profound learning difficulties. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is high. A few students are from minority ethnic families and about 5% are looked-after children. There are nearly twice as many boys as girls.

For five years, the school has been partnered very closely with another school in the authority to form a part of the Stockton Borough First Federation. It is led by an executive headteacher who took up post in September 2009, shortly after the last inspection.

Among other awards, Abbey Hill has recently gained the International Schools' award and National Autistic Accreditation.

**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?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**2**

## Main findings

This is a good school. Aspects that are outstanding include the care, guidance and support of students, which contribute to their feelings of safety. Students gain an excellent awareness of how to adopt healthy lifestyles, not only in relation to their physical health but also to their mental and emotional well-being. Students develop an excellent understanding of how they can contribute to the school and the broader community. The school engages outstandingly well with parents and carers to help them become effectively involved in their children's education. It has also developed many excellent links with other partners, such as schools, colleges and agencies concerned with the safety and well-being of children and families.

Students are well behaved and work hard and with enjoyment in lessons. All the different groups are taught well and make good progress from their starting points. There are examples of outstanding teaching and there is no evidence of any being inadequate. What stops teaching being outstanding overall is that while some teachers are consistently excellent there are others whose lessons are more variable in quality; the difference is often due to the skill with which teachers use assessment information to ensure that all students are equally challenged in all lessons. The assessment of students' progress is accurate but different systems tend to be used for different groups, resulting in it being cumbersome and sometimes difficult to access by third parties such as the governing body. The curriculum is good in that it meets the widely different needs of most groups particularly well. What weakens it slightly is the fact that cross-curricular provision to promote numeracy and literacy remains variable in quality.

There is an outstanding sixth form. Most students transfer into it from the main school. Students are particularly well-prepared for moving on into other settings, usually training or college. They show a rapidly-developing maturity and sense of responsibility for their own actions and gain a wide range of relevant qualifications to demonstrate the progress they have made.

Leadership, management and governance are good. Some aspects are outstanding but not all staff are fully committed to the federation and some issues around this remain unresolved. The school has a long record of ensuring that students make good progress, teaching has been improved, and senior staff and the governing body show a good awareness of strengths and weaknesses based on good self-evaluation. As such, the school demonstrates good capacity for further improvement.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Streamline the gathering and presentation of assessment data to:
  - make information more accessible to third parties, including members of the governing body, to help them contribute fully to school self-evaluation and hold the school to account.
  
- Improve teaching and learning by:
  - ensuring that teachers adapt work during a lesson when they recognise that a pupil has mastered what is being taught, rather than waiting for the next lesson to provide harder work.
  
- Ensure that leaders, managers and members of the governing body work with those staff who are not fully committed to the federation to see the benefits of sharing good practice.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2
---

In lessons, students work hard. They concentrate well and clearly enjoy learning. They listen attentively and whenever possible contribute to dialogue. In a Year 9 lesson, for instance, all students were fully engaged and entranced as they communicated with students from another school via the use of computers. In a small minority of lessons a few higher-attaining students are not challenged enough or lower-attaining ones are given work that is too difficult. This slows their progress in these lessons but over time there is no major difference in the performance of different groups. Differences between progress in Key Stage 3 mathematics and English last year can clearly be traced back to staffing issues. There was no difference in earlier years and there is no difference in the current one.

The nature of students' learning difficulties means that it is unlikely that any will meet national expectations for attainment before they leave. Nevertheless, their good progress, from low starting points, means that their achievement is good. All students gain some form of accreditation before they leave. This is usually through entry-level courses, reflecting attainment at Level 2 or 3 of the National Curriculum. Students also gain appropriate recognition for their progress through courses which promote life skills and employability.

The behaviour observed during the inspection was outstanding but there was a rise in the number of exclusions last year and there are occasional serious incidents on record. The school works well to promote independence and to ensure that students are discouraged from remaining over-reliant on adult support to moderate their behaviour. Attendance is broadly average. Students' awareness of cultural issues is a strength of the school, fostered and promoted through initiatives recognised by the gaining of the International Schools' award.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

**How effective is the provision?**

There is a significant amount of outstanding teaching. A few teachers are consistently outstanding but there are others whose teaching is more variable. Those teachers who are consistently outstanding use assessment data with precision to make sure that all students are equally challenged. In a Year 8 English lesson, for example, slightly different learning objectives were identified for different ability groups and tasks were precisely adapted to reflect expectations. This meant that all students could work with as much independence as possible and achieve success when learning about the use of prepositions. The marking of students' work is predominantly good, with perceptive comments often being added to help students celebrate success and learn how they could improve. What is less well established is the practice of moving students on to harder work the instant they have mastered what has been expected of them.

The curriculum provides students with many enjoyable and memorable experiences. Through the weekly enrichment afternoons students participate in a wide range of sporting, aesthetic and creative activities, often led by visiting professionals and classroom support staff and trainers. There is a good focus on promoting communication throughout the curriculum, with good use being made of specialised techniques such as the use of pictures and symbols and also of technological aids. A strong programme of personal, health and social education contributes well to promoting students' personal skills. Although computers are used widely, there is not always enough emphasis placed on the identification and use of opportunities to promote numeracy and literacy across the whole curriculum.

Students are exceptionally well supported. Outstanding attention is paid to points of major change. For instance, induction into Year 7 starts with close liaison with their

<sup>1</sup>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.

Year 6 schools and opportunities for those pupils to visit Abbey Hill to sample different subjects and familiarise them with routines. Likewise, when the time comes to leave, sixth-form students are sensitively introduced to college courses and the realities of adult life. Through the work of the parent support adviser, the school also offers excellent support to families who may be experiencing difficulties in supporting their children’s education.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

**How effective are leadership and management?**

Leaders and managers have been largely effective in driving forward improvement and raising standards. Most staff demonstrate a keen sense of ambition and the good leadership and management of teaching and learning has resulted in an increase in good and outstanding teaching. Most staff are fully committed to the federation, and recognise its benefits, including an enhanced career structure and a broader range of training opportunities. For example, staff have benefited from shared professional development with the partner school on dealing with students with particular behavioural difficulties. However, not all staff are convinced by the arrangements.

The good governing body is highly supportive and generally well-informed. It has made it clear that it wants data about students’ progress presented in a more accessible fashion so that it can interpret it more easily in order to be able to ask more searching questions about the school’s performance and outcomes. Members of the governing body play a full role in ensuring that regulations relating to the safeguarding of students are met. Safeguarding procedures are good. All staff have access to and complete on-line safeguarding modules. The school communicates extremely effectively with parents and carers, taking care to respect the fact that many prefer to use text or the spoken word rather than written communication. Excellent links with local schools and colleges aid the successful transition of students between settings. Equal opportunities are promoted well. There is no discrimination and no major differences between the performances of different groups of students. The school has identified where minor improvements could be made to move towards outstanding outcomes. The school promotes community cohesion well. It makes a good contribution to the local community, recognising the socio-economic challenges it faces and its gradually-changing ethnic profile. Enrichment days, such as International Day and various faith days give students good insights into the broader community.

*These are the grades for the leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2

<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

The sixth form is highly effective. A strong leadership team has been developed, within which different managers fully understand their roles and can convey this understanding lucidly and convincingly. It is the norm for all Year 11 Abbey Hill students to transfer into the sixth form. Students rapidly grow in confidence and maturity, developing an exceptional understanding of how to stay healthy and safe and contribute fully to the community, for instance by supporting each other and younger students. Behaviour is exemplary. The curriculum is particularly well adapted to meet need, with opportunities for higher-attaining students to gain accreditation that accurately reflects their achievement. Those who need vocational courses are provided with excellent opportunities to develop their practical skills, for instance through land-based studies, textiles and cookery. New courses, such as mechanics, are already being planned for next year. There is a very strong focus on building up students' employability skills. High-quality teaching ensures that students make the best possible progress. The same excellent care guidance and support seen throughout the rest of the school is evident in the sixth form.

### *These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth Form</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

## Views of parents and carers

A smaller than average proportion of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive. This support is not universal but what little concern exists is often around single issues. Wherever possible, issues were followed up during the inspection but this was not always possible because most parents and carers who disagreed with questionnaire statements did not specify the reasons why. Nevertheless, the inspection team did point out to the school those small areas where parents and carers expressed dissatisfaction. Many parents and carers added glowing testimonials to their questionnaires. Many did not complete all sections of the questionnaire. There is a broad agreement that their children feel safe and happy at school. The vast majority feels that behaviour is good and that their children are making good progress, which in turn is preparing them well for the future. Nearly all parents and carers feel that the school is led and



managed well and are happy that their children are getting a good deal. In judging the school to be good, the inspection team supports the positive views of parents and carers.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abbey Hill School and Technology College 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 65 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 267 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	62	21	32	1	2	2	3
The school keeps my child safe	43	66	19	29	0	0	2	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	32	49	27	42	3	5	1	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	27	42	32	49	2	3	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	38	58	24	37	0	0	2	3
The school helps me to support my child's learning	31	48	27	42	4	6	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	31	48	29	45	2	3	1	2
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)	30	46	28	43	0	0	2	3
The school meets my child's particular needs	39	60	21	32	3	5	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	35	54	25	38	1	2	3	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	46	27	42	1	2	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	32	49	27	42	0	0	2	3
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	41	63	20	31	0	0	2	3

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 is for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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. Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



7 October 2011

Dear Students

**Inspection of Abbey Hill School and Technology College, Stockton-on-Tees, TS19 8BU**

Thank you for making us welcome when we inspected your school last week. Thank you especially to those who spared a bit of time to talk to us and let us know what you felt about your experience of school.

Abbey Hill is a good school. Many things about it are outstanding. Most of these are to do with the ways in which you are cared for, supported and guided towards successful and fulfilling futures. You told us you feel safe and enjoy school. We feel that your confidence is well-placed. You say you are taught well and we agree with you. At times you are outstandingly well taught. Your timetables are full of enjoyable and exciting activities and we could tell how much you enjoy your enrichment afternoon each week. All this adds up to you making good progress and achieving well.

Congratulations to those of you in the sixth form. It is here that all the hard work of previous years comes to fruition and you emerge as delightful young adults with good grounds for optimism for the future.

We left some ideas for further improvement with the school. These involve making sure that all teachers take care to present you with suitably challenging work in all lessons and to make sure they do not miss any opportunity to improve your reading, writing and number work, whatever the subject being taught. We also want the people who run your school to streamline the way that assessment information is presented so that governors can be more involved in evaluating the school. We would also like them to make sure that all staff understand what can be gained from working closely with staff from the partner school to open up even better opportunities for all of you.

All of you can help by letting your teachers know when you could manage harder work or making it clear to them when you are struggling.

Yours sincerely

Alastair Younger  
Lead Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234**, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).