

The Abbey School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	125426
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	381078
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2012
Lead inspector	Janet Dinsmore

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	103
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Neal-Smith
Headteacher	Chris Gardiner
Date of previous school inspection	11–12 March 2009
School address	Menin Way Farnham GU9 8DY
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Introduction

Inspection team

Janet Dinsmore

Additional inspector

Desmond Dunne

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Year 11 had left the school and Years 7 and 10 were out of school on visits and work placements during the inspection. The team observed 13 lessons taught by 12 teachers. Meetings were held with staff, groups of students, parents and carers and governors. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey in planning the inspection and observed the school's work. They looked at school documentation, including assessment data, school development plans, incident logs and minutes of governing body meetings. The team analysed account 51 parental and carers' questionnaires and others completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

The Abbey is an average-sized special school. All the students have a statement of special educational needs. Students have a range of disabilities and special educational needs, the majority have medical conditions including autistic spectrum conditions which are combined with other categories of needs: speech language and communication and moderate learning difficulties. Most are from White British heritage. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is larger than average.

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	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- The Abbey is an outstanding school. The school's vision for all members of its community to be responsible and have the skills and understanding to be valuable and valued citizens underpins all its work. This results in young people who have confidence and skills and who are very well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Achievement is outstanding. Students make rapid and sustained progress from a wide range of very low starting points. They make excellent progress in gaining communication and social skills and in acquiring basic skills in mathematics, English and information and communication technology, which equips them well for their futures.
- Teaching is outstanding because teachers' excellent knowledge of the individual students and their abilities enables them to plan learning opportunities that ensure students continue to make rapid progress in acquiring skills particularly in communication, reading and mathematics. Assessment is used effectively to group students and plan for their future learning so that excellent progress is maintained. In a few lessons students' individual learning targets are not used well enough for students and teachers to evaluate their work.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Students have excellent attitudes to learning. They relate extremely well together, despite some of the barriers that they face, because of the highly positive relationships and expectations of conduct that underpin the school's work.
- Leadership and management are outstanding. Leaders and managers at all levels have significant responsibilities in monitoring and evaluating all aspects of the school's work, including the quality of teaching and the management of performance. They use their findings very effectively when planning further developments. Parents' and carers' engagement is excellent. Parents and carers speak very highly of the school, saying that their children are achieving in so

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many ways, far better than their own expectations had been for them.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Sharpen the precision of assessment by ensuring that students' individual learning targets are used consistently across the school in evaluating progress in all lessons.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students' learning and performance in the classroom are excellent. Attainment in accredited courses at age 16 is improving each year, particularly in information and communication technology and mathematics. Attainment is low; however, students make rapid and sustained progress from very low starting points. There is no significant difference between the performance of different groups of students with different disabilities and special educational needs because of the high expectations of individual progress and challenging targets that are set. Students face particular difficulties with social communication and they make excellent progress in this area. Most can work well together in pairs and groups, supporting each other's learning, for example when playing a game to match coins to prices of items and recording their learning about Hindu weddings. They respond to questions well from staff developing their understanding and use of spoken language. This is further extended when they develop their own questions through excellent role play. They use their developing skills well when reading books for pleasure and carrying out research on the internet. Books are well matched to students' ability and interest, so enabling students to develop their reading skills and understanding.

Students in Year 8 were observed developing basic sentence structures when one pupil said, 'I am really enjoying this.' Others used their word processing skills well to extend their writing. They applied their knowledge of grammar well in developing different sentence starters. Writing skills are developed across the curriculum and students make good and excellent progress particularly in using information and communication technology to support this. Year 11 students can express themselves well when evaluating their progress at school, particularly about how they have gained in confidence through their poetry. They also used their good knowledge of staying safe on the internet to produce a leaflet for parents and carers. Mathematical skills are developed in well-planned practical activities, for example in working out differences in amounts of money and in calculating costs of a meal. Students at Key Stage 4 demonstrated practical understanding of money and used multiplication skills to calculate costs. Students' opportunities to develop these skills further are provided by the school bank, which parents comment give their children the skills they need to handle money.

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Quality of teaching

Teachers have excellent knowledge of the complexity of disabilities and special educational needs of individual students so that precise questioning, pairing and grouping of students can be used to best effect in enabling them to make excellent progress, overcoming significant barriers to communication and learning. An excellent range of assessment tools is used that is moderated within the school and between partner schools. This ensures that assessment is accurate and informs the next small steps in learning for students so that progress can be fully evaluated. In outstanding lessons learning is well structured so that teachers and students can evaluate progress well. Prior assessment is used very effectively in planning, but in a few lessons such precision is not in place and students are not clear about what they have achieved towards reaching their targets. Interventions to accelerate progress in reading are used well and effectively if any slowing in progress is identified.

Students are keen and motivated by the interesting activities that are planned in all subjects and develop high levels of resilience, despite their difficulties, in maintaining focus, motivation and confidence in their skills. Teachers' knowledge of individual students and their verbal feedback to them contribute strongly to this. Questioning is used well by staff in developing students' understanding of what the students need to do to improve. Teaching assistants are well trained and very effective in supporting students' learning and development of social and communication skills. Social and moral understanding and emotional awareness are promoted in all lessons and most students are aware and articulate about the feelings of others. Students know about people from different cultures and communities because these aspects are integrated well into the planned curriculum.

Students' individual aptitudes are developed well, for example in art where students use a wide range of media and preparation activities to develop skills including writing and evaluating their work and expressing opinions. Science teaching is particularly effective in developing students' good awareness of safety and in supporting their evaluation of their learning. Parents and carers say that their children return home talking excitedly about all they have learnt at school and how pleased and amazed they are at the progress their children are making. They say that teachers tell them exactly how well their children are achieving and are committed and dedicated to ensuring each student reaches their potential. Inspection evidence supports these views.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Parents say 'this is more inclusive than a mainstream school'. This is because of the excellent relationships throughout the school community that value every individual and the high expectations of behaviour and conduct that are consistently reinforced by both staff and students. As a result, inspection evidence, including incident logs, parent and pupil questionnaires, and discussions with students, shows that behaviour is typically and consistently excellent. Students understand what bullying is and its different forms. Their signatures on the school charter confirming that they will

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report bullying, and not allow it to happen, result in almost none occurring. Any incident of behaviour that is contrary to the school code is recorded and acted upon swiftly. This system is constantly monitored by the headteacher so that patterns arising that may indicate that an adjustment in provision is necessary for a particular student can be implemented. Students' excellent behaviour contributes very strongly to learning in lessons where students demonstrate highly positive attitudes. Attendance is well above the national average for secondary schools and parents and carers report that their children 'will not miss school'. Year 10 students on work placements demonstrated an excellent understanding of risk assessment of situations within the workplace and this was also shown by students' own management of their football and basketball games at lunchtime. Students know how to stay safe in different situations. A range of extra-curricular activities at lunchtime cater very well for the diversity of students' needs, including library club and dance opportunities, and maintain a consistent routine. Parents and carers agree that students are safe and that their behaviour is excellent. They comment that the school has made students responsible and that they understand the feelings of those around them.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, leaders and managers at all levels, including the governing body, have drive and a shared ambition to improve the school. They use self-evaluation tools and information, especially assessment data, well to plan improvements. There is capacity for further improvement. Teaching is continuously evaluated and any less than good performance is addressed very well through professional development, resulting in teaching that is consistently good and outstanding.

The curriculum is outstanding. In Key Stage 3 it is broad, balanced and adapted well to students' disabilities and special educational needs in its delivery and content. In Key Stage 4 a well-established, good range of work placements enable students to apply their skills in real-life contexts. Partnerships with mainstream provision have enabled a few students to complete GCSE courses with their peers. Students' individual needs, aptitudes and learning requirements are fully met through adaptations to the curriculum, for example the individual support for managing the behaviour of those facing most challenge. Courses in art, science and information and communication technology enable students to excel. The diverse and different needs of the changing cohorts entering the school have resulted in constant review and adjustments to the curriculum to meet these and enable students to continue to make sustained progress from their starting points. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted strongly through the excellent relationships within the school community and a wide range of partnerships and activities outside the school that enhance students' opportunities to be involved in performance, sporting and community events.

The attention to detail for risk assessment for these potentially vulnerable students is excellent and there are effective arrangements for safeguarding. Engagement with parents and carers is also outstanding and begins before students start at the school through liaison with students' primary schools and the comprehensive transition and

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induction procedures. Parents and carers speak very highly of the school and those who may find it more difficult to engage with the school are very well supported. Equality and lack of discrimination are evident in students' attitudes and understanding. This is demonstrated through discussion in lessons and at the school council. Equality is very well maintained by the application of the school's policies. Parents and carers say that they and their children are treated with the utmost respect and that students benefit from the patience, understanding, kindness, efficiency and overall education the staff of the school provide.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



5 July 2012

Dear Students,

Inspection of The Abbey School, Farnham GU9 8DY

Thank you very much for making us so welcome when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking to you and finding out about how well you are learning.

Yours is an outstanding school.

Its particular strengths include:

- the way in which your speaking and listening skills are developed
- your high confidence by the time you leave
- the way your teachers help you make rapid progress with reading, writing and using your mathematics and computer skills
- your awareness of your own and other people's feelings, which helps you with your behaviour so well
- the way you work and play together so well, we agree with you that your behaviour is excellent
- all that the school does to make sure that you are well prepared for your next stage of education, training and employment, especially through work experience
- the way your headteacher and all the staff and governing body make improvements to the school all the time
- that your parents know exactly how well you are doing at school.

We agree with the few of you who said you don't always know exactly how well you are doing and we have asked your teachers to make that clear to you in all of your lessons. You can help by letting them know when you are unsure.

We know that you will continue to work hard and enjoy all that you do at school.

Yours sincerely

Janet Dinsmore
Lead inspector

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