

# Abbot's Lea School

Beaconsfield Road, Woolton, Liverpool. L25 6EE

## Inspection dates

13–14 September 2012

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
	This inspection:	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is good school because:

- The majority of pupils at the school make at least good progress and achieve well. They make outstanding gains in their social and communication skills. Progress is equally good for all different groups.
- Reading and numeracy skills are promoted systematically and effectively across the curriculum. Almost all pupils achieve English and mathematics awards, and passes at GCSE level are rising in a range of subjects.
- Focused teaching in the assessment centre ensures that the youngest pupils make good gains in their personal development and tailored multi-sensory programmes.
- The sixth form is good. Students make good progress and achieve well. They gain confidence and are well prepared for their chosen post-16 pathway.
- Teaching is at least good. It promotes pupils' learning well and is improving. Lessons capture pupils' interest and are consistently planned to enhance and develop pupils' social, emotional and communication awareness. Teaching support is very effective.
- Pupils enjoy lessons and are proud of their school. They feel safe and valued in its secure, structured and cohesive community. Their outstanding behaviour and attendance contribute significantly to the school's excellent climate for learning and inclusive ethos.
- The very effective headteacher and senior managers work well together and have a positive impact on raising pupil achievement and furthering the school's development. Governors are fully committed and regularly challenge senior leaders to keep improving the school. Teaching is efficiently managed and recent training to make the use of questioning in lessons more effective has significantly improved the quality of pupils' contributions in the classroom.
- The school's outreach service provides well organised, very experienced support. It is very well regarded by the schools that it serves and by the local authority.
- The school has good capacity for further improvement.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- There are inconsistencies in teaching, including, in a few classes, that work is not sufficiently graded to stretch pupils of all levels of ability throughout each lesson.
- Some tracking and additional support information is not used as effectively as it could be to improve pupils' learning programmes.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 22 lessons, one of which was a joint observation with the headteacher. In addition, inspectors made a number of short visits to lessons and registration periods, and listened to pupils read.
- Meetings were held with four groups of pupils, the Chair of the Governing Body, members of the school staff including senior and middle managers and with the local authority representative for the school.
- Inspectors took account of the nine responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and the results of the 2012 parent and carer questionnaire information held by the school. Feedback from outreach schools and a telephone conversation with the local authority commissioning officer for outreach were also considered.
- The school's work was observed and inspectors looked at documentation including data on progress, planning and monitoring documents. Records relating to behaviour and attendance, parent workshop courses and documents related to safeguarding were also reviewed.
- Visits were made to both the main school site and to the assessment centre to observe lessons and meet with staff.

## Inspection team

Linda Clare, Lead inspector	Additional inspector
Drew Crawshaw	Additional inspector
Pauline Pitman	Additional inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The number of pupils at the main site – primary, secondary and post-16 ages – has increased since the last inspection. In addition, in January 2012 the school incorporated a satellite site, the Abbot's Lea Matthew Arnold (ALMA) Assessment Centre which is two to three miles from the main school buildings. ALMA has a combination of assessment and full-time places for pupils aged between four and seven years.
- All pupils attending the school have statements of special educational needs indicating autistic spectrum disorders. All have social and communication difficulties, many have associated dyslexia, dyspraxia or mental health needs and the vast majority have cognitive delay or deficit.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is above average. Fewer than one in 10 pupils are girls. There is a very small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, mainly of mixed backgrounds.
- Students in the sixth form follow link courses at Liverpool Community College but these had not started at the time of the inspection.
- The school manages an outreach service for the local authority to advise and support both mainstream secondary and primary schools on the needs and education of pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
- Abbot's Lea has the National Autistic Society Autism Accreditation, Investors in People Award Enhanced Healthy Schools award and the Living for Sport accreditation.

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

- Improve teaching and pupils' achievement by ensuring that all pupils are working to levels which extend their knowledge, skills and understanding by:
  - ensuring activities in the classroom reflect teacher planning and that tasks challenge each pupil at their own levels throughout the lesson
  - providing pupils with sufficient time to respond to questioning and to develop more independent and effective thinking and learning skills
  - reducing teacher talk to allow pupils more opportunity to undertake planned activities, practical work, group work or independent research
  - moderating pupils' work at different levels against the work of pupils at similar levels in other schools.
- Further develop school monitoring and the evaluation of pupils' progress by:
  - using lesson evaluations to update and build upon the next step of learning at each pupil's own speed and ability levels
  - evaluating the impact of the extra support provided for some pupils on their learning.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils

### is good

- Parents are in agreement with their children that Abbot's Lea is 'fantastic'. They appreciate the good levels of contact offered and support for their child's often unique combination of needs. Pupils say they particularly appreciate staff efforts in helping them to make friends and to understand their work.
- Pupils enter the school with low starting points as a result of their multiple needs and often disrupted patterns of schooling. Excellent and consistent behaviour management combined with the building of positive and trusting relationships with staff allows them to learn how to succeed.
- Pupils make good progress from their individual starting points at all key stages. They settle to their lessons well, take part in lessons to the best of their ability and show interest and enthusiasm for favourite subjects. They generally know their targets, which have good levels of challenge and how these help them to improve their work.
- Pupils make outstanding gains in their communication skills. They develop skills of literacy and numeracy well. Writing skills have been targeted since the last inspection and show good improvement.
- Pupils at the assessment centre thrive in well-ordered indoor and outdoor environments where they enjoy lessons and make good gains in learning. Teachers foster an early love of books, '*Aliens with underpants*' is a current favourite. By the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 pupils make generally good progress against expected levels when measured against their starting points in reading.
- Progress from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4 is good. The flexibility of the curriculum allows pupils to contribute to decisions about accreditation and match provision to their interests. The recently expanded range of qualifications meets different levels of pupil ability, and last year a small group of pupils achieved age appropriate qualifications at end of Year 11.
- Progress in the sixth form is good and students enjoy film-making at Liverpool Community College, experiencing community and collaborative work.
- The school's system for tracking and monitoring pupil progress is relatively new and developing well. Allocation of extra support is linked to the tracking system but the amount of benefit this provides to individual pupils is not yet assessed.
- Pupils achieve well as they go through the school and there is no significant difference in the progress of different groups, those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable or those for whom the pupil premium applies - all make good progress relative to their peers and overall. Care is taken to ensure that the small number of girls do not feel isolated. They achieve well and a girls group meets weekly for them to share experiences and make friends.

### The quality of teaching

### is good

- Teaching is good and, over time, the proportion that is outstanding has increased. This good teaching contributes significantly to pupil progress and achievement.
- All pupils are tested on entry to school to ensure teaching programmes are based on accurate and current information. This assessment is generally used well to plan activities which take good account of needs and abilities and have high expectations.
- However, lesson activity does not always sufficiently reflect planning, particularly in the middle and later stages of lessons. In a number of lessons observed pupils waited for others to 'catch up'. Behaviour as pupils waited to rejoin the lesson was calm and tolerant, but their progress was limited by this inactivity.
- All lessons incorporate activities to promote social communication extremely well and teachers use pupil interest effectively to motivate and enthuse. For example, in a

mathematics lesson on 'tallying' pupils were shown how to create a tally chart, asked to think of their own question, design the chart, then approach every other member of the class appropriately for a multiple choice response. Pupils' engagement in the task was excellent – their learning and enjoyment clearly demonstrated.

- Teachers are very skilled in their use of questioning to draw in less forthcoming pupils and ensure all participate. In some lessons pupils are not given sufficient time to gather their thoughts, or support is offered too quickly, which limits thinking and learning skills. Reading is promoted well across the curriculum and taught effectively.
- Excellent classroom management contributes well to the climate for learning in lessons. Teachers are well trained, knowledgeable in their subject areas and universally show enthusiasm and genuine care for their pupils. They use information technology effectively but in some lessons too much teacher talk and explanation leaves less time for pupils to develop as independent learners or to work collaboratively in pairs or groups.
- Teachers regularly check how well pupils have understood their learning. However, teacher planning is not readily accessible in all lessons nor swiftly reviewed, which slows monitoring and evaluation and the updating of pupils' next steps.
- Extra support is provided for those in need of specific help. The school has yet to evaluate how well this support has worked at both pupil and whole-school levels in order to make improvements.
- Teaching assistance is a strength of the school. Support staff provide discrete assistance and know their pupils well. On odd occasions this can inhibit trial and error as pupils strive to grasp a concept and support is too swift.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and makes an outstanding contribution to both learning and social skills development. The 'Chigung' music and movement session sets the tone for the school day and encourages reflection and calm, which pupils take seriously and say they enjoy.
- Parents, pupils and staff all recognise behaviour to be outstanding. As pupils go through school they become polite, articulate young people with developing views and excellent attitudes to learning.
- Pupils have very clear views and understanding about bullying and its consequences – particularly regarding text or email intimidation. They are adamant that any occasional instance of untoward behaviour will be swiftly and transparently dealt with by staff.
- Behaviour management is consistent and very effective. All staff are well trained in supporting pupils and the focus is clearly on developing self-management skills and self-regulation. Pupil's social and emotional progress is efficiently tracked and underpinned by individual opportunities for counselling or targeted support.
- Students say they feel very safe in the school. On a scale of one to five (with five as the most secure feeling) one pupil declared the school to be a 10. Parents and carers overwhelmingly agree. They recognise the excellent levels achieved by the school to ensure the well-being of all pupils, particularly for those whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.
- The school is a very cohesive community. Its inclusive nature is very effectively enhanced by its successful outreach service, which serves all Liverpool mainstream schools, its close links with ALMA, work at local colleges and links with the local neighbourhood. Attendance is above average with virtually no persistent absence.

### **The leadership and management are good**

- The headteacher's consistently high expectations for school improvement are shared by

senior managers, staff and governors. The outstanding drive and ambition of the wider senior leadership team is having a real impact on improvement because it is well supported by a good combination of experienced and recently qualified teachers and a newly established middle leadership team. Management of the sixth form department, the assessment centre and the outreach service are all equally good and staff morale is high.

- The school's recently revised tracking systems are becoming established, school self-evaluation is accurate and issues identified at the last inspection have been effectively addressed. Data is used effectively to provide starting points for pupil programmes but information from lessons and the extra support provided for some pupils is not always evaluated swiftly enough to contribute to pupils' next steps in learning. The school has yet to compare the work of its pupils against pupils at the same levels in other schools to ensure its data is robust.
- The management of teaching is good and recent work to develop staff questioning skills has improved pupil learning. Performance management and staff training are effectively linked to future planning and to improving pupils' progress.
- The curriculum is rich, stimulating and flexible, and meets pupils' needs extremely well. Pupils make good progress in literacy as a result of the focus on reading and writing skills in all lessons. Practical activities, out of school residential trips, visits and after-school clubs enhance the curriculum and provide strong cultural and social experiences.
- Leaders and governors tackle discrimination and promote equality comprehensively. Close working partnerships with a range of health, medical, therapy and social care agencies help break down barriers to learning for the pupils. Academic and vocational partnerships prepare older pupils well for future careers.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet statutory requirements.
- The school has good partnership links with parents and carers. The parent workshops are an excellent introduction to the school and of great benefit to parents.
- The light touch monitoring and support provided by the local authority for good schools has forged an excellent working partnership which is supporting governors and senior managers to effectively improve and develop the school, its new assessment centre and outreach services.
- **The governance of the school**
  - members of the governing body challenge the school well and effectively hold senior leaders to account
  - governors have a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for improvement, and are aware of school priorities for future development
  - governors have a keen understanding of pupils' progress and ensure finance, including staffing costs and the use of pupil premium funding, are managed effectively.

## What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104736
<b>Local authority</b>	Liverpool
<b>Inspection number</b>	400733

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>	4–19
<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>	185
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	35
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Sarah Powell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Margaret Lucas
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	14 January 2010
<b>Telephone number</b>	0151 428 1161
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