

Abbeyfield School

Stanley Lane, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN15 3XB

Inspection dates

27–28 September 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leadership and management are good. In spite of considerable recent turbulence, leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, have been very successful in promoting improvement, particularly in teaching and learning.
- Attainment has risen since the last inspection, so the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSEs including English and mathematics is now above average.
- Higher- and middle-attaining students make particularly good progress. Students' achievement in mathematics is outstanding.
- Teaching is good, and inspectors observed a number of outstanding lessons.
- Lessons are typically active and engaging, and teachers are adept at assessing students' progress as they ensure that activities are suitably challenging.
- Behaviour and safety are good. Students are exceptionally polite and welcoming to visitors, and conduct themselves admirably around the school site. Incidents of bullying are rare and swiftly resolved.
- Behaviour in lessons is usually good, and students have positive attitudes to learning. Most parents and carers feel that behaviour in lessons is good and much improved of late.
- Students are enthusiastically involved in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, the arts, enterprise, community and leadership activities.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The progress and attendance of the small number of students known to be eligible for free school meals, as well as disabled students and those who have special educational needs, are not consistently good.
- The small sixth form requires improvement as the achievement of some students has been held back by taking courses not best suited to their capabilities, interests or aspirations.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 27 teachers teaching 29 lessons, around a fifth of which were joint observations with members of the senior team.
- In addition, inspectors carried out more focused observations of lessons and activities to check the quality of provision for literacy and for disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- Meetings were held with groups of students, with the Chair of the Governing Body and with school staff, including senior and middle leaders. Informal discussions also took place with staff and students.
- Questionnaire returns from 50 staff were analysed.
- Inspectors took account of 45 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire in planning the inspection, along with written comments from and informal discussion with a small number of parents and carers. Evidence from the school's own surveys of parents and carers was also considered, including one completed at a parents' and carers' consultation event during the inspection.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-evaluation and development plans, its safeguarding policies, and minutes of meetings of the governing body.

Inspection team

Ian Hodgkinson, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Neil Gillespie

Additional inspector

Helen Prince

Additional inspector

Annette Rhodes

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Abbeyfield is smaller than the average secondary school, and has a small sixth form. Numbers on roll have dropped by over 100 since the previous inspection, largely because of local demographic factors.
- The school has held a specialism in business and enterprise since 2005. It is part of the North Wiltshire Federation, a partnership of secondary schools who collaborate to support leadership, teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- Most students are White British, although small numbers of students are drawn from a range of other heritages.
- The proportion of students supported through school action, just over a tenth, is below average. The proportion supported through school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs, also at just over a tenth, is above average. The proportion of students known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra money provided by the government) is below average at less than 10%. This group includes the students known to be eligible for free school meals.
- Off-site provision of part-time vocational courses is made for specific students in Key Stage 4, largely through Wiltshire College.
- The school consistently exceeds the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.
- There has been considerable turbulence in school leadership and staffing over the last year. The headteacher appointed after the last inspection was suspended in January 2012 and left by mutual consent at the end of the last academic year. The current headteacher, who was formerly the deputy headteacher, has been appointed to lead the school on an interim basis until the end of the current academic year.
- As a result of falling rolls and a budget deficit, 10 teachers and five support staff were made redundant at the end of the last academic year. Many senior and middle leadership positions have now been taken by staff who have been promoted to these roles on an interim basis.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the progress and attendance of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium, and of disabled students and those with special educational needs by:
 - ensuring that leaders and managers at all levels monitor the outcomes for these groups more rigorously to improve their intervention and planning
 - extending the school's initiatives to develop students' literacy skills across subjects.
- Improve students' achievement in the sixth form by ensuring that students are guided more appropriately onto courses that suit their capabilities, aspirations and interests.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students join the school in Year 7 with broadly average attainment, although with generally fewer of the highest attainers than found in most schools.
- Attainment at GCSE has risen in a number of key areas since the last inspection. Improvement on the key headline figure of five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C accelerated faster than the national rate of increase from 2009 to 2011 and moved to above average. Unvalidated results for 2012 indicate that this position has been sustained.
- The large majority of students make good progress. In mathematics, students' progress is outstanding, and the proportion reaching GCSE grades A* to C is high. Students' progress is monitored very carefully in mathematics, and teaching and the curriculum are adapted finely to suit the needs of individual students.
- Other subjects are now sharing the approaches used in mathematics to improve the progress of all groups of students. In English, for example, GCSE results in 2011 showed very strong progress for middle and higher attainers, but much less so for groups who joined the school with lower attainment. The English department is now successfully monitoring much more closely the progress of those in key groups vulnerable to underachievement by adjusting its grouping and teaching of these students. Students are now learning well in these groups.
- A focus of leaders and managers in the past has been on ensuring success for students in getting across the GCSE grade C threshold. There has been less focus on monitoring the success of lower attaining groups in making progress. As a consequence, many students known to be eligible for free school meals, as well as those who are disabled or who have special educational needs, made less progress than others and some underachieved.
- The school's focus on groups more vulnerable to underachievement is changing, and there is now more careful targeting, for example of pupil premium funding to support those for whom it was intended. A strong emphasis on ensuring that teachers and support staff are regularly accountable for the progress of these students is helping to ensure that they learn well in class so progress gaps are beginning to close.
- The development of students' literacy skills is accorded a high priority in English and in form time, particularly in Year 7. Students' writing and oracy skills are sound. Literacy support programmes have enjoyed significant success in boosting the reading ages of lower and middle attainers. However, the development of literacy across subjects other than English is in its early stages, so that, for example, the specific marking to improve students' writing skills is not evident in all areas.
- In the sixth form, achievement requires improvement. Attainment has risen markedly since the previous inspection and is now broadly average. However, the progress of individual students has varied widely. Many students make good or better progress, but for a small minority progress is weak. Students generally learn well in lessons but progress for some is hampered because they have chosen courses which are not well suited to their capabilities or interests.

The quality of teaching is good

- School leaders have successfully placed a renewed emphasis on securing high quality teaching and learning across the school. They monitor the quality of teaching regularly and their data suggest that the proportion of good or better teaching has improved from two thirds last year to around four fifths for the current term. Inspection evidence concurs with this, and inspectors observed a number of outstanding lessons.
- Teachers typically have high expectations of their students and manage classes well. In most cases lessons are planned, in line with the new school policy, to ensure that the pace of learning accelerates as students are given challenging individual or group tasks to complete.

- Teachers' highly developed questioning skills were a feature of most of the outstanding lessons seen. Teachers elicit detailed and thoughtful responses from students, for example in a Year 10 science lesson on the moral and ethical issues surrounding the carriers of inherited genetic diseases.
- The use of assessment to support students' learning is a key strength. Teachers in most subjects are adept at monitoring students' progress through lesson activities and intervening when necessary to offer more challenge or support. This is a key feature, for example, of teaching in mathematics.
- Teachers generally adapt tasks well to match students' capabilities. For example, in an outstanding Year 11 history lesson on developing a radio broadcast about the Coventry Blitz, lower-attaining students in a mixed-ability class were able to play a full part in a challenging activity because materials had been tailored to suit their needs. Through such effective teaching, students known to be eligible for the pupil premium, disabled students and those with special educational needs are closing the gap in progress with other groups.
- In the few lessons where teaching quality required improvement, the pace of learning was slow for some groups because work was not well suited to the needs of all students or because the teacher talked for too long and stifled students' independent learning skills. These weaker areas have been identified in school monitoring and are being addressed.
- Purposeful homework is set regularly in the majority of subjects. Much of the marking of this work is regular and helpful, although there remain some inconsistencies in the quality of written feedback. Form tutors check homework planners regularly to ensure their completion. Students appreciate the homework club facility to help them complete homework well.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Students in formal discussions and informal conversations told inspectors that they felt safe on a well-ordered and well-managed school site. They confirmed that students get on well together and that bullying is rare. They expressed great confidence in the ability of the pastoral managers and heads of houses to resolve any difficulties.
- Students have a good understanding of most forms of bullying and discrimination and how to guard against it, although they are less clear about aspects of homophobic bullying and discrimination.
- Parents and carers have positive views of students' behaviour. Questionnaires and discussion evidence show that parents and carers feel the general standard of behaviour around the school site is good. While a very small number has reservations, this evidence also shows a marked improvement of parents' and carers' perceptions about the quality of behaviour in lessons.
- Inspectors found students' behaviour to be at least good in the very large majority of lessons, and their conduct around the school site to be helpful, polite and courteous. The school's development priority for promoting respect in the school has been well met. During breaks, lunchtimes and after school, many students are constructively involved in clubs, recreational activities or further study. Punctuality to lessons is good.
- Sixth form students engage in a wide range of local and international community projects which significantly enhance their social and cultural understanding.
- Students' attendance has been adversely affected by relatively high rates of persistent absence, particularly for students known to be eligible for free school meals and for disabled students and those who have special educational needs. Data for the last full year show some improvement, but there has been insufficiently precise monitoring of attendance by pupil group to develop a strategic approach to closing this gap. The current whole-school priority of working with parents and carers to promote better attendance is aimed at addressing this.
- The school has been highly successful in substantially reducing the number of exclusions of students, including for those groups most vulnerable to underachievement.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has skilfully kept the school on track to make significant improvements to the quality of teaching, learning and ethos, despite the turmoil in leadership and staffing during the last nine months. He has commanded much loyalty from his teaching staff, many of whom have stepped up to take on significant leadership roles.
- Teachers and leaders are very supportive of the school's renewed focus on high quality teaching and learning. There is a thirst for sharing ideas for best practice in teaching within and across departments. The management of staff performance is being reshaped following the recent unsettled period, and there is much dialogue within departments about the role of the new teachers' standards in driving further improvements. Support staff are generally less supportive of the school's new direction.
- The school has a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses, based on extensive monitoring of performance and well-developed line management systems. Heads of faculties and subjects have much autonomy in shaping and improving provision, and are held fully to account by senior leaders and governors for variations in performance. Whole-school development priorities are based appropriately on largely thorough self-evaluation.
- The school has drawn very effectively on external support to secure its improvement. The local authority provided swift and effective guidance during the transition from the leadership of the previous headteacher, including through the appointment of consultant headteacher support for the new leaders. As this support has reduced, school leaders have forged stronger links with partner secondary schools to share approaches to teaching, leadership and the curriculum.
- The curriculum has considerable strengths. Provision at Key Stage 4 is well tailored to meet the needs of students across the ability range in most subjects, although budgetary constraints have restricted specialist teaching in design and technology. Off-site provision of vocational courses is well managed and has been instrumental in reducing exclusions from school and improving students' attendance. Extra-curricular provision is rich and varied, and makes a considerable contribution to students' personal development. Results in the specialist subject of business and related subjects continue to be strong.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - is well led by an experienced and knowledgeable Chair of the Governing Body.
 - has returned the school to in-year budget balance after taking tough decisions to significantly cut staffing levels
 - is well informed about aspects of the school's performance through well-developed links between governors, the school and departments
 - has developed its capacity for critical questioning of the school's performance by the appointment of governors with specific skills in education, finance and human resources
 - in common with leaders at other levels, has not sufficiently interrogated differences in outcomes between key groups of students in evaluating the school's success in promoting equality of opportunity
 - ensures that safeguarding meets current government requirements.

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

Unique reference number	131969
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	402524

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	834
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Sage
Headteacher	David Nicholson
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 September 2009
Telephone number	01249 464500
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