

Abbey Hill School and Performing Arts College

Greasley Road, Bucknall, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, ST2 8LG

Inspection dates 4–5 February 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	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.

- From low starting points, most, but not all students, make rapid progress in all subjects.
- Students make particularly good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, in Key Stage 1 and 2 and in the school's sixth form.
- Teaching across the school is frequently good, with a small minority of teaching which is outstanding.
- Students' behaviour around school is impeccable. They show respect to adults and other students. Students feel safe, enjoy very supportive relationships with staff, and students make great strides in their personal and social development.
- Leaders, managers and governors have provided training and support for teachers to improve the quality of teaching so students have now improved their progress.
- Members of the governing body work well together and know the school well. They are confident in questioning the headteacher and other leaders about what is already good, what is improving and what still needs to be done.
- The sixth form is outstanding. The rate of progress made by students has increased and they achieve highly from their starting points. Students follow carefully planned courses, well matched to their individual needs, and gain useful qualifications so they can move on to college, training or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- More teaching needs to be outstanding so all students make rapid progress.
- Resources and materials in lessons are not always used carefully enough so students can make the progress of which they are capable.
- Communication systems and sensory experiences are not used fully to ensure students with more complex needs learn effectively.
- Teaching assistants (known in the school as Special Needs Practitioners) do not always have the necessary skills to support students' learning fully.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 17 teachers in 20 lessons, four of which were joint observations with the headteacher and senior staff.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, the Chair of the Governing Body and a governor, and a telephone conversation took place with a representative from the local authority. Inspectors spoke to many students individually, in lessons and in groups from all key stages, and around the school generally.
- An inspector spoke to a small number of parents bringing their child to school.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents about the school's checks on students' progress, attendance and behaviour, documents showing how the school measures the success of steps it has taken to improve, safeguarding policies and information about the work the school does with other schools.
- Inspectors listened to students read in lessons and looked at the work in their books and files.

Inspection team

Nell Banfield, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Marilyn Massey

Additional Inspector

David Halford

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school caters for students from four to 19 years-of-age who have a range of disabilities and special educational needs. The largest groups are those with moderate learning difficulties and those with autistic spectrum conditions. A small minority have more complex difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs.
- The majority of students are boys.
- The proportion of students supported by pupil premium funding is higher than the average. This is additional funding for those students known to be eligible for free school meals, for students who are looked after by the local authority and for the children of service families.
- Most students are of White British heritage.
- A very small minority of students are looked after by the local authority.
- The school is currently seeing an increase in the numbers of students arriving with autistic spectrum conditions and more complex needs.
- More students than average join the school at times other than at the usual times of admission.
- The school is recognised as a high performing specialist school and has specialisms in Performing Arts and in Special Educational Needs and Inclusion (Communication and Interaction).
- Recent awards include the Inclusion Quality Mark, Quality in Study Support Award (Established) and Dyslexia Friendly School Status. It has gained Autism Accreditation.
- The school is part of a wide informal network of schools in the locality who share specialisms and a member of the region's Teaching Alliance. It has a significant role in supporting the development of specialist practice in the locality.
- The school is due to move to new, purpose-built accommodation in September 2014.
- A very small number of students attend local schools for some of their education through informal arrangements. The majority of students attend courses away from the school site for some or all of the time at Newcastle College and Sporting Stars.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of lessons that are outstanding so all students make rapid progress by:
 - using the visual communication system more flexibly to meet a wider range of individual needs, especially those students with more complex needs
 - using knowledge of the stages students are working at to plan clear steps and resources that take students further in their learning.
- Increase the effectiveness of leaders still further by:
 - using the sensory curriculum more widely to improve literacy and numeracy of those with more complex needs
 - further spreading the use of the revised curriculum to increase the range of activities in lessons so students widen their knowledge and deepen their understanding
 - developing the skills of teaching assistants further so they can support individual students' learning more effectively.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- All students are working at standards lower than those expected nationally for their age. The school's figures clearly show that a large majority of students from all groups in the school make at least good progress in their learning with a small minority making exceptional progress. However, measures suggest that in a minority of lessons, students with more complex needs do not always make the progress they are capable of because the work set is not planned specifically enough to meet their needs.
- The majority of students, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, make good or outstanding progress in literacy and numeracy, as a result of the opportunities they have to practise these skills in and outside lessons.
- Students who join the school at other than the usual times make slower progress from their starting points because they do not have as much time in school to benefit from teaching and support. A very small number of these students attend courses away from the school site which meet their needs very well.
- By the end of Years 11, 12 and 13, every student gains some level of accreditation in English, mathematics and in other subjects, including a small minority who succeed at GCSE. The school supports the most able students to do as well as they can. Students do exceptionally well in the school's performing arts subjects and these experiences contribute significantly to the development of students' overall communication and social skills. They feel secure in working on their own in the school and in businesses and in meeting a wide range of students and staff in other settings.
- Pupil premium funding is used by the school to create smaller teaching groups for those students with complex and/or exceptional needs who need intensive support to make the best progress in their learning and in their personal development. As a result, students with mainly autistic spectrum conditions, those supported by pupil premium funding and students known to be eligible for free school meals make progress which is as good as most students in the school. This is evidence of the school's commitment to equal opportunities to learn effectively. Girls do as well as, or better than boys. Year 7 catch-up funding is well used to provide a summer school to get to know students joining the following term to make sure the school can plan effectively to meet their learning needs. The summer session also gives students confidence to settle to learning quickly at the beginning of their first term.
- Achievement in the sixth form is outstanding and the culmination of the good support provided from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Key Stage 4. Every student is challenged to do things for themselves and to strive to achieve the highest standards possible. As a result, a very small minority of the most able achieve standards the same as most students nationally in mathematics. Support is always at hand but students are expected to manage situations using their own skills and knowledge. As one student described it 'Staff watch from behind'. He vouched for many students when he attested to the support that was there if needed.
- Students attending courses away from the school site achieve as well as other students in the school. They are well supported and arrangements made to ensure their safety are extensive and thorough.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching has improved over time due to decisive action taken by the headteacher, senior leaders and governors to ensure planning is effective and leads to students' progress. As a result, well over half of teaching is good and a small minority is outstanding. Where there is good or better teaching, students' progress has improved.
- Some teachers use questioning and well-chosen resources to identify exactly what students need to do to move on in their learning. In a Key Stage 1 lesson, pupils were initially unable to

consistently find and read words containing key letters on the interactive white board. They succeeded in shaping letters correctly and were pleased and excited when they were able to correctly locate the words and matching shapes. The teacher identified clearly the very small steps in learning so pupils were able to meet the challenge presented to them. As a result, children made rapid progress in literacy.

- Students extended their understanding in science, as a result of teachers' use of visual resources which clearly illustrated different forces. Students could then answer questions on gravity, Isaac Newton and make reliable scientific predictions.
- Teaching is not outstanding overall because not all students make the progress of which they are capable. Activities are focused too often on matching and word completion of worksheets which enables students to practise their skills but does not deepen their understanding. Pupils in Key Stage 2, and recently students in Key Stage 3, are following the school's revised curriculum which includes a wider range of challenging activities which not only develop new and existing skills but also introduce new knowledge.
- Not all teachers use sensory and visual systems and resources carefully or flexibly enough to make sure that those who need these approaches learn as well as they can. Photographs, symbols and sensory experiences are not always related specifically enough to the students' stage of understanding to prompt the response that will support the next stage in learning.
- Teaching assistants provide very effective support to ensure that most students' difficulties in managing their own behaviour do not get in the way of their own, or others', learning. However, when supporting the learning of students with more complex needs, some support staff rely too much on the teacher for direction and do not have the skills or experience to identify the small steps necessary to take students' learning forward. As a result, a small minority of students make slower progress.
- In Years 12 and 13, learning is highly tailored to individual needs so students are challenged and have to think for themselves. Students spoke very confidently of how staff make them work particularly hard in the lessons before examinations. The school's figures demonstrate, both the increase over time in the number of students taking examinations in English, mathematics, information and communication technology and work-related skills, and the improved levels students reach.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. They show respect and consideration to adults and their peers. A very large majority listen carefully in class and move calmly around the school.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. It is well planned, so all students can develop greater independence and confidence within a secure environment.
- Behaviour in all areas of the school is respectful and calm with displays which celebrate and record students' achievements in art, performing arts and music. Students were observed working exceptionally well together to prepare a school production and confidently sang together and alone, achieving a high standard. Students speak politely and openly to visitors about their experience of school. Without prompting, they offer visitors refreshments.
- Staff do not do anything for students that they can do themselves. Students are consistently expected to work and operate on their own. This expectation is carefully built in to the curriculum, and in courses such as Travel Training so, by the time they enter the sixth form, students are allowed, with parents' consent and training in road use, to go across the road at lunchtime to buy their own food. The preparation of students for independent travel is exemplary and many make their own way to college regularly. The school's rigorous arrangements to make sure students are safe are successful in developing young people who go about their business with an air of quiet confidence.
- The behaviour of some students in lessons, though usually well managed, can prevent a small minority of students from engaging in their learning. Visual prompts and teaching assistant support are used to good effect at times but are not always effective in preventing behaviour

from slowing learning.

- Students are unanimous that they feel safe in school and say bullying very rarely happens. All say they would turn to a member of staff if they were unhappy or someone was being unkind. Older students know how to use social networking sites safely and use information from school, for example about alcohol, to make sure they do not find themselves in risky situations.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection say they are very happy with the progress their child makes in school and are sure their child is safe. The local authority representative described the high regard the school has in the area for providing excellent care and support for students. As a result, attendance levels are consistently high and are close to national levels. Instances of students being excluded from school are rare.
- Students talk enthusiastically about the opportunities they have for sharing their views about school and feel their opinions are listened and responded to. They have suggested and implemented their own ideas into the curriculum for funding their own events. For example, students in the school's Post 16 provision charge a small fee for ironing services and identify and organise their own trips and excursions, funding them from the profits made from their services.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good at all levels. The headteacher leads the clear, succinct and accurate self-evaluation so the school understands what needs to be done to improve.
- Leaders and managers have supported staff in developing visual and communication systems to improve most students' progress, and particularly those with more complex and autistic spectrum needs. They understand how expert use of these systems by all staff can improve learning and progress still further.
- The headteacher and governors have taken effective steps to ensure that teachers work towards objectives related closely to student progress. Opportunities for recognition, pay awards and promotion are linked to these objectives.
- The majority of subject and key stage leaders have improved teaching in their subject and key stage but there is a small minority of teaching which is not yet good. Leaders' observations of lessons sometimes evaluate engagement of students as evidence they are learning. However, the engagement can result from keenness to complete a task rather than from an interest in and the acquisition of new knowledge or skills.
- The improving curriculum, including performing arts and music, offers increasingly varied and challenging activities which successfully promote students' personal and academic progress. The school's revised curriculum, introduced in Key Stage 4, is currently being implemented in Key Stage 3 and is improving progress, as a result of the increased opportunities to widen knowledge and deepen understanding.
- The primary school sports funding is used to provide activities at lunchtime and after school to attract pupils who are least active to take part in sport. External sports coaches, a Key Stage 2 Sports residential and training for play leaders at lunchtimes, also funded by the school sports funding, provide more creative opportunities to attract pupils who may not otherwise take part in sports and physical activities.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength and is promoted exceptionally well, for example, by visiting groups. Year 9 students were observed creating artefacts from the First World War to accompany their singing of very complex songs from the time, in preparation for an exhibition and performance. Handling and talking about the weapons and events of the war brought home to them the reality of being a young man fighting in the trenches. The story of the first black commissioned officer demonstrated clearly the service of Commonwealth countries to the United Kingdom's war effort and clearly promoted the understanding of different lifestyles and beliefs.
- Very effective leadership of the school's sixth form has enabled students to benefit fully from the support, care and challenge consistently present as students move through the school. The leader of the sixth form is adamant that students are challenged to work hard, think for

themselves and supported to achieve independence in outside settings to prepare them well for the future.

- Staff spoken to during the inspection feel confident their teaching is strong, say they have benefited from useful training in using visual symbols and say that working with experienced colleagues has enabled them to learn from others' practice.
- Extensive partnerships with schools in the area, including Abbey Hill's formal outreach programme, has enabled specialist skills to be shared to the benefit of other schools.
- The local authority knows the strengths of the school and supports the overall plans for development. The Early Years Foundation Stage specialist visits the school and moderates the school's judgements.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding meet statutory requirements.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors work closely together, attend training to make sure they understand the school's measures of students' progress. They share expertise in order to support the headteacher but also to ask questions to make sure actions the school is taking to improve are effective. They understand how and why teaching has improved, and know what still needs to be done. They have approved the use of additional funding, such as the pupil premium and Year 7 catch-up funding. They are aware that this spending has resulted in students settling well into Year 7 and in improved progress for most students with more complex needs. They support the headteacher in implementing the new arrangements for performance management, in setting teachers' objectives and in any arrangements for pay rises.

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	124500
Local authority	Stoke-on-Trent
Inspection number	440875

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	211
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	19
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Rachel Challinor
Headteacher	Philip Kidman
Date of previous school inspection	15 June 2010
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