

Abbey Special School

Little Common Lane, Kimberworth, Rotherham, South Yorkshire, S61 2RA

Inspection dates

30 September–1 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures.

- Leaders, including governors through their work, have not ensured that pupils and students are safe and secure.
- Planned actions to improve the school are not yet effective and the quality of teaching has declined considerably since the last inspection.
- Leadership at all levels does not demonstrate the capacity to bring about the much needed improvements to the school.
- Governors are not well enough informed to be able to hold leaders robustly to account for the school's performance.
- Pupils and students are not guided well enough to know how to stay safe. Too many abscond from school and staff are not always aware of their whereabouts, which puts them at risk.
- The behaviour of pupils and students is inadequate; often it is not managed well enough. Exclusion rates are high. Incidents where staff use physical restraint are also high and not always recorded adequately.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of what pupils and students can achieve. Assessment information is not used well enough to ensure that learning is interesting and suitably challenging. Consequently, in lessons where this is the case, poor behaviour results and disrupts learning.
- High levels of staff turnover and absence are hindering efforts to improve the quality of teaching. Staff covering other teachers' lessons are not well enough prepared for each lesson; consequently learning and progress are often very slow.
- Attainment by the end of Key Stages 2 and 4 is exceptionally low. Overall pupils and students show inadequate achievement.
- Disadvantaged pupils and students are not supported well enough, because funding for them is not used effectively. The most able pupils and students are also not well provided for; as a result, these students also underachieve.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have welcomed the partnership with Winterhill School and support from the acting executive headteacher. Together they have an accurate view of the school's performance.
- Actions taken to improve arrangements for pupils and students arriving at school each morning have been successful. Everyone now receives a warm welcome and is well prepared to start each day.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 10 lessons or small-group activities. Seven of these sessions were conducted jointly with the headteacher, deputy headteacher or acting executive headteacher.
- Inspectors spoke to primary pupils and secondary students about their learning and looked at work in their books. Inspectors also spoke with older students about their views on behaviour and how the school keeps them safe.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, school staff, governors and a representative from the local authority.
- There were too few responses to Ofsted’s online parent questionnaire (Parent View), for inspectors to consider. However, inspectors did take account of a recent school survey of parent views and meet with a number of parents during the two days.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at a number of documents, including the school’s own information on pupils’ and students’ current progress, planning and monitoring, records of behaviour and attendance, and documents relating to safeguarding and child protection.
- Inspectors also took account of the 47 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Jim Alexander, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Adrian Simm

Additional Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- Abbey Special School provides education for pupils and students who have a wide range of special educational needs, including those who have moderate and severe learning difficulties as well as those who have behavioural and emotional difficulties. A growing number also have autistic spectrum difficulties. All have a statement of special educational need.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are eligible for support through the pupil premium is well above average. (The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for children who are looked after by the local authority and those known to be eligible for free school meals).
- The proportion of pupils and students from minority ethnic groups is below average.
- A new governing body was formed in September 2013. A new head of school was appointed in September 2013 and became headteacher in September 2014. Some middle leaders are also relatively new to the school. A new deputy headteacher was appointed in March 2014. A restructure of staffing concluded in March 2014.
- In January 2013, the school requested that the local authority conduct a review of provision. Following that review, support was provided by staff at Winterhill School (a National Support School) and an executive headteacher was appointed to help facilitate school improvement.
- At the time of the inspection, an acting executive headteacher was in post to support strategic improvement and daily management of the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As a matter of urgency, improve the safeguarding of pupils and students, by:
 - urgently improve the security and safety of the school site as well as ensuring that statutory requirements are met regarding the safe recruitment of staff
 - making sure new systems to record attendance are used daily and accurately, so that all pupils and students can be accounted for and any absences quickly tackled
 - ensuring that staff always complete detailed records about all serious incidents, including where restraint is used.
- Improve the quality of teaching, so that all pupils and students make good progress, and standards in reading, writing and mathematics rise by the end of Key Stages 2 and 4, so more students gain qualifications before they leave school, by:
 - eradicating inadequate teaching
 - using accurate assessments of pupils' and students' achievement to plan work that better meets their needs and interests, especially for the most able
 - raising expectations of teachers and support staff as to what pupils and students are capable of achieving in lessons and over time, particularly in writing
 - improving teachers' subject knowledge in mathematics, so they can quickly identify what next steps in learning can be introduced
 - teachers making sure all pupils and students are involved in their learning throughout the whole of the lesson and not being allowed to give up part way
 - ensuring that teachers and support staff have and implement, better strategies to manage pupils' and students' unacceptable behaviour effectively, in order to reduce the high use of the support rooms
 - improving the quality of marking and ongoing guidance throughout the lessons, so pupils and students know how to make their work better
 - ensuring that the gaps in what pupils and students, especially the disadvantaged, know and understand

are quickly closed so that they achieve well.

- Improve the effectiveness of leadership at all levels, including governance, by:
 - ensuring that the management of staff performance is rigorous and that targets set for teachers are specific and effective in accelerating progress during lessons
 - making sure information and data collected are robust and accurate, so leaders can evaluate the effectiveness of improvements being made
 - reducing significantly staff absence and making sure all staff who cover lessons for absent staff are well trained, prepared and understand what is required for each lesson
 - supporting and challenging staff to put into daily practice their training on proportionate and safe use of restraint
 - using the additional funds the school has to help the disadvantaged pupils and students catch up quickly with the standards which they are capable of attaining
 - using the primary sports funding to support effectively only the pupils it is intended for in Key Stage 2
 - developing the skills of middle leaders so they play an effective role in improving achievement in reading, writing and mathematics across the school
 - improving the effectiveness of governors so they are able to robustly hold leaders to account for the school's improvement.
- Improve pupils' and students' behaviour and reduce the high levels of exclusion from school, by:
 - providing all pupils and students with full-time lesson timetables
 - ensuring that staff can recognise what triggers individual students' poor behaviour and so act quickly to de-escalate tension when it arises, in order that pupils' and students' behaviour does not end in crisis, and hence so reduce the need for frequent restraint to be used
 - ensuring behaviour management strategies are consistently implemented by all staff, so that pupils and students do not feel the need to run away from school
 - providing activities which capture the attention and imagination of all pupils and students so they want to stay in lessons
 - ensuring that a consistent approach is taken to managing pupils' and students' behaviour so learning is not disturbed in lessons
 - providing pupils and students with a good understanding of positive relationships, sexual health and how to keep themselves safe from, for example, the risk of sexual exploitation.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

are inadequate

- Inadequate leadership at all levels, including the governance, has resulted in the school's exceptionally poor practice and decline in keeping pupils and students safe and secure since the last inspection. The school has failed to meet pupils' and students' needs or prepare them adequately, both personally and academically, for the next phases in their lives.
- During the last academic year it came to light, through the actions of the newly appointed senior leadership team, that appropriate checks to ensure that employees were not barred from working with children had not been carried out for some staff. These checks have now been made, but the way in which this information is recorded still does not meet statutory requirements.
- The number of pupils and students who run away from the school is high. The school also has a number of pupils and students who attend school only on a part-time basis. Leaders are not able to ensure that these pupils and students are safe when they are not on the premises during the school day.
- Admission arrangements are not fit for purpose. Pupils and students are not always given the best start to school life, because their individual needs are not appropriately assessed and communication with their previous school or the local authority is not good enough. As a result, plans for a smooth transition are frequently rushed, not completed, or not started before pupils and students begin the school. This means that their education and welfare needs are not met adequately. At best, some pupils and students take longer to settle. At worst, this has resulted in some pupils and students being put at risk of harm.
- When in school, not all staff follow the training they have received to manage pupils' and students' behaviour well enough. Too frequently early signs are ignored and situations are allowed to quickly escalate; consequently, pupils and students are at risk of hurting themselves or harming others. As a result, staff then physically restrain pupils and students. These incidents are so frequent that they are not always recorded adequately.
- Leaders have recently introduced the use of support rooms, where staff can take pupils or students during the school day to spend some one-to-one time with an adult or just to refocus in a calm environment. However, not all staff have understood how these rooms are best used and frequently too many distressed pupils and students share this space and supervision is not adequate; this poses potential risks to their safety. Records of who uses these rooms and when, are not accurately kept, so leaders are unable to see any trends or patterns, which may help them better support these pupils and students in the future.
- Leaders are not able to monitor school improvement robustly enough, because the data they expect staff to collect is not always accurate or complete. For example, leaders have recently introduced a new system to monitor racist incidents or when homophobic insults are made. However, all incidents are recorded in the same system and it is not clear if an incident is related to race or homophobia or something else altogether. As a result, leaders are not able to judge if their efforts to reduce inappropriate behaviour or bullying are being effective.
- Leaders have introduced a new electronic system for the daily attendance register. However, two problems have occurred. Firstly the technology is not always reliable and secondly, some teachers are completing attendance for the wrong day. Both technical and human error means that leaders do not have a clear view of whether daily attendance is improving or not and even more seriously, they do not have an accurate view of where all pupils and students are.
- Leaders do not ensure that adequate use is made of additional funds. For example, the pupil premium is not being used effectively to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils. Also, the primary sports funding is being used in part to support older students attain their GCSEs, rather than focused purely on the primary school pupils.
- Leaders are raising the profile of reading, writing and mathematics across the school, but the school is at a very early stage of developing a rich and balanced curriculum for pupils and students to enjoy. The curriculum for the most able pupils and students is inadequate and does not meet their needs well enough.
- The curriculum for helping pupils and students to understand how to stay safe, recognising, for example, the potential risks posed to their personal safety by sexual exploitation, is inadequate.
- Middle leaders, many of whom are new to their role, have not yet developed the skills they require to make the significant improvements that are required in the teaching and learning of reading, writing and mathematics. New procedures to measure progress and plot attainment have not been finalised.
- During the last academic year there have been many changes within the staff. Some were planned and others due to staff absence. The result is that almost half of the teaching and support staff is temporary

and provided by supply agencies. This is not providing the high levels of continuity that these pupils and students require.

- The recently appointed senior leadership team, together with support from the acting executive head teacher, do have an accurate view of the school and what is required to bring about the necessary improvements. They have a clear vision and higher expectations for where they want the school to get too. Joint observations demonstrated the three senior leaders also have a clear understanding of what is good and what remains inadequate. However, leadership at all levels does need more support from the local authority, because their capacity to bring about the much needed improvements is weak.
- The local authority conducted a review of provision in January 2013 and identified key aspects of weakness and that help was required. They organised support from Winterhill School, which has been warmly welcomed by senior leaders. The local authority is also planning to conduct an immediate review of safeguarding. Leaders realise that they need to act quickly on all recommendations which come from this review. However, the local authority have not always been so quick to respond to school leaders' and governors' requests for help, particularly with regard to the behaviour and safeguarding of pupils.
- There are areas of improvement that have been more successful. For example, the fire alarm system has been repaired and now regular drills can take place. Also, arrangements for the start of each day have improved considerably. Pupils and students no longer have to wait on school buses or in taxis for any length of time, but are welcomed into school, even if they arrive early. This helps the day get off to a good start. This is one example of how leaders are helping to improve pupils' and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders have now made sure that all staff have contracts of employment and targets have been set and agreed against the Teachers' Standards. These have only just been introduced and not yet reviewed. The school's pay policy has also been written, but staff performance has not yet been evaluated to link to pay awards.
- The school should not appoint newly qualified teachers.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance of the school is inadequate, because governors have not ensured that the school provides an acceptable standard of education, safety or care for pupils and students. Recently appointed and experienced governors have approved new policies for managing staff performance, new systems to monitor the school's work and agreed plans for improvement. However, there are already some important deadlines being missed because, as some governors said, 'there is just so much to do'. Governors are not well enough informed about the use of additional funds and what difference they are making to pupils' and students achievement. The school budget has not been used well and as a result the school provides ineffective value for money. Governors now have specific responsibilities for child protection and safeguarding and have received the appropriate training. However, checks on the school child protection and safeguarding procedures are not robust enough.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are inadequate

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils and students is inadequate. Lessons are frequently disrupted by unacceptable behaviour and learning suffers as a consequence.
- Too many pupils and students have learned that if things are not going the way they want, they can, without being stopped, leave class, walk away or leave the school grounds altogether.
- Pupils and students say they enjoy meeting their friends at school but that some 'lessons are dull'. They also explain that they find it hard to concentrate in lessons 'when everyone keeps messing about or getting upset and stopping off'.
- Rates of exclusion are high overall. Some pupils and students are excluded from the school so frequently that they spend more time away from school than in school. This is having a hugely detrimental impact on their education and future life chances.
- Arrangements at the start of the school day have improved. Pupils and students no longer have to wait for half an hour on the school buses and taxis before being allowed in school. This has been appreciated by pupils and students, who say 'we don't have to sit around for ages any more'.
- Pupils and students are sociable, but have no recollection of being taught about different faiths and have a weak understanding of some cultural issues around living in today's society. This does not prepare them well for life outside school.
- There are some bullying and racist comments, although pupils and students explain that it is less now than previously.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils and students safe and secure is inadequate.
- Statutory requirements are not met and the school playground is not safe. Leaders have, for example, put up fencing to stop pupils and students hurting themselves, but some of this fencing is not always as secure enough.
- School data shows attendance to be broadly average, but this data is not necessarily reliable. There are, however, other signs which tell leaders that attendance is not good enough, for example the number of pupils and students on part-time timetables or the number that abscond during the school day.
- Leaders have introduced new systems to record incidents of unacceptable behaviour, but not all staff use the new system well enough. This does not allow leaders to accurately evaluate the impact of their work to improve behaviour.
- Risk assessments to consider the individual needs of specific pupils or students are also being developed, but there remain gaps in how well these are used by all staff.
- Pupils do not have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe from, for example, the risk of sexual exploitation.

The quality of teaching

is inadequate

- In general, teachers have low expectations of what pupils and students can achieve in lessons, and work which is provided often lacks appropriate challenge as a result of inadequate teaching over time.
- The teaching of writing is limited by teachers' low expectations and work is often only a sentence or two long.
- Reading is better taught and pupils and students are becoming more confident, for example to choose books by themselves. The introduction of daily skills sessions are helping reading to improve.
- The teaching of mathematics is limited by teachers' poor subject knowledge and a lack of understanding about what the most able pupils and students are capable of achieving in lessons.
- When supply staff are asked to cover lessons, they do not always know what pupils and students have been learning or what is planned for that particular day. This causes a piecemeal approach to learning and pupils and students are not building upon what they already know successfully.
- The marking of pupils' and students' work is not consistent across the school and guidance offered during lessons often revolves around attitudes and behaviour, rather than how to improve the quality or standard of their work.
- Some teachers know how to help and encourage pupils and students well and this helps to foster their social and emotional development. However, other staff do not provide pupils and students with enough strategies for them to manage their own emotions and behaviour. This results in too much use being made of the 'support rooms'.
- Some support staff are deployed very well and relationships with individuals are warm and friendly. This helps pupils and students feel confident, develop their self-esteem and they respond well. Other interaction with pupils and students, however, can sound harsh and confrontational, which only serves to escalate poor behaviour.

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- From their individual starting points, which are often low, pupils and students have made inadequate progress during their time at school and leave with very few qualifications. Consequently, they are ill prepared for the next stage in their lives.
- In Key Stage 2, far too few pupils make expected progress. No pupils make better than expected progress. For the majority, their progress is inadequate. As a result, attainment by the end of Year 6 is low in reading, writing and mathematics.
- This inadequate progress continues across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Leaders focused on helping Year 11 leavers in July 2014 gain an improving number of vocational and GCSE qualifications; however, their better progress was not always matched across other year groups.
- There is very little work in pupils' and students' books and that which is there, is of a very low quality.
- The school fails to provide the most able pupils and students with an appropriate curriculum or the quality of teaching they require to make the progress of which they are capable.
- By the end of Year 6 in 2014, there were no gaps between the disadvantaged pupils and others in their

class. However, this is only due to the fact that both groups of pupils have equally low attainment. Against the national average, disadvantaged pupils were four years behind others in reading and mathematics and six years behind in writing.

- By the end of Year 11 in 2014, the disadvantaged students were six months years behind others in the school and five years behind others nationally in English and mathematics. There is no data in school to show how these gaps have reduced or widened by the end of last academic year.
- School data is not robust and does not provide leaders with accurate or robust information regarding pupils' and students' progress.

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	106967
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	447930

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	87
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Andrea Kitchen
Acting Executive Headteacher	Jo Carter-Whitham
Date of previous school inspection	18 October 2011
Telephone number	01709 740074
Fax number	01709 553465
Email address	abbey.special@rotherham.gov.uk

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