

Abbey Hill Academy

Ketton Road, Stockton-on-Tees, TS19 8BU

Inspection dates

24–25 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Sixth form provision		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- The ambitious leadership of the chief executive, together with the effective support of the academy's principals, other leaders, and Board of Directors, are successfully improving many aspects of the academy's work, including teaching and students' achievements.
- From low starting points in Year 7, all groups of students, regardless of their backgrounds, make good progress through Key Stages 3 and 4, including in English and mathematics. In English, students do particularly well because they are given plenty of opportunities to use and apply their language and communication skills, including reading, across the various curriculum subjects.
- Students who attend the academy's nurture groups often make outstanding progress in their social and emotional skills.
- Students' good progress reflects the good quality of teaching they receive. Expectations of what students can achieve, including the most able, are high. Teachers effectively adjust learning in lessons based on their accurate assessments of what students know and can do.
- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Students have excellent relationships with staff and have an impressive understanding of how to keep safe.
- Students behave well, including in lessons and around the academy, and have good attitudes to their learning.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students particularly enjoy assemblies and many activities outside school where they socialise and experience new things.
- Provision in the sixth form is outstanding. As a result of outstanding teaching, students' achievement is excellent. They gain a wide range of qualifications and benefit from life-skills courses that promote independence, self-confidence and well-being. They are exceptionally well prepared for the next stage in their education or training.
- The knowledgeable and skilled Board of Directors makes a commendable contribution to the vision, direction and leadership of the academy.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- In Key Stages 3 and 4, teaching is not yet outstanding. Marking does not always enable students to know how to improve their work nor do students always act on the guidance they are given.
- Opportunities for students to use and apply their numeracy skills as part of work in other curriculum subjects are overlooked. This sometimes slows students' progress in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed a wide range of lessons and parts of lessons. In addition, the principal of the main academy, principal of the sixth form and other leaders made a number of short visits to lessons along with inspectors to check the quality of teaching.
- Inspectors met with two groups of students to talk about their work and experience of the academy.
- Inspectors met with the chief executive of the trust, senior leaders, middle leaders and other staff. A meeting was also held with the Board of Directors.
- Inspectors looked at the work of the academy, including students' behaviour. They reviewed documentation in relation to attendance, safeguarding, self-evaluation and the academy's system for checking on students' progress. The inspectors examined students' work in different year groups.
- Inspectors gained the views of parents from 13 responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire and responses to the academy's own recent parental questionnaire. Inspectors also held conversations with parents.
- The views of staff were gained from the 51 responses to the Ofsted questionnaire.

Inspection team

Ann Muxworthy, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Irene Lavelle	Additional Inspector
Judith James	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Abbey Hill Academy converted to become an academy school in August 2013. When its predecessor school, Abbey Hill School and Technology College, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The academy is part of the Horizons Specialist Academy Trust (HSAT).
- All students have a statement of special educational need or education health care plan. It provides for students with moderate, severe, profound and complex learning difficulties or autistic spectrum condition.
- There are significantly more boys on roll than girls.
- The proportion of disadvantaged students, those supported by the pupil premium, is much higher than average. The pupil premium is additional government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority.
- The academy provides a nurture group for a small number of students with social and emotional needs.
- Most students are of White British heritage. Very few students are from minority ethnic backgrounds and speak English as an additional language.
- The academy works in partnership with Westlands and Green Gates Academies through the academy trust.
- The academy uses no alternative provision.
- A chief executive leads the academy. Two principals support her, one for the main academy and one in the sixth form.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching even further in Key Stages 3 and 4 so that it is outstanding and students make outstanding progress by:
 - improving the quality of marking so that all students know how to improve their work and act on teachers' advice about how to do so
 - providing more opportunities for students to use and apply their numeracy skills when they undertake work across the various curriculum subjects.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The chief executive and the two principal headteachers lead the academy with enthusiasm, energy and focus. They are committed to making sure that students achieve their best, both academically and personally. They are very ably supported by other leaders and the Board of Directors. As a result, the academy is improving at a good rate.
- Senior leaders' view of the academy's performance is accurate. They use external consultants and expertise well to challenge their views and to drive continual improvement.
- The leadership and management of teaching are good. Leaders aim for high-quality teaching and learning. Their reviews of teachers' performance ensure that teachers are helped to improve their teaching practices, often receiving bespoke training.
- Middle leaders are effective. They carefully check students' outcomes in their subjects and areas of responsibility. Their monitoring is regular, robust and accurate. As a result, provision, including in English and mathematics, is good.
- Leaders carefully track students' progress across the academy. They use this information to good effect to ensure that there are no marked differences in the progress of different groups of students and to ensure equality of opportunity for all. They know that students in Key Stages 3 and 4 achieve well but that they do not do as well as students in the sixth form.
- Leaders make good use of the pupil premium funding to ensure that disadvantaged students achieve as well as other students. Provision is monitored very carefully and students are given very well-targeted extra support to help them improve their skills, particularly in reading. Consequently, there are no gaps between their achievement and that of other students.
- The curriculum is strongly focused on developing students' communication skills so they make at least good progress in speaking, reading and writing. However, leaders are yet to ensure that students are given good opportunities to use and apply their numeracy skills as part of their work in other curriculum subjects.
- The curriculum is both creative and enriching, including visits, enterprise and sports activities, providing rich experiences and enjoyment to students' learning. Exciting topics, such as those on Mexico and Buddhism, have a very positive impact on students' understanding of other cultures. This contributes very well to their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Leaders successfully promote tolerance and respect among students and with staff. Students say staff help them understand the difference between right from wrong. Excellent relationships promote a good understanding of equality, different beliefs and issues of discrimination. Discrimination is not tolerated. As a result, students are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders work well in partnership with the trust and other schools. This has been highly effective in moderating students' work.
- Leaders ensure they communicate effectively with parents about their child's progress. Parents are very supportive and value the academy highly. 'My child has made excellent progress since starting the academy' reflects a typical comment.
- High-quality advice and careers guidance is provided to help students make the right choices about their next steps. All Year 11 students either go on to study in the academy's sixth form, secure a place at a local college or move on to full-time work or training.
- Arrangements to safeguard students meet statutory requirement and are very effective. Very good care and support is provided for students and their families.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The board of directors are effective. They are very active and fully committed to the academy and its students. They make a strong contribution to leadership, checking the academy's work carefully and providing a healthy balance of challenge and support.
 - The board understands the academy's strengths and weaknesses very well. It is regularly involved in checking the quality of teaching and how well students are doing. Directors have a good understanding of the data that shows how well the academy performs in comparison to other similar schools.
 - Directors make very effective use of performance management to improve the outcomes for students. They ensure that the chief executive and principals' performance have a good impact on academy improvement and that any underperformance is effectively addressed.
 - The board provides a high level of professional expertise and suitable training has been undertaken to ensure that meet its statutory requirements. Financial management is good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. They are respectful, polite and work hard. Students are confident, show good attitudes to their learning and take pride in their work. They want to do well.
- Prior to arriving, some students have had difficult experiences at school and are reluctant to engage with work. Very caring staff support them extremely well to get on with their work. Parents particularly appreciate this aspect of the academy's work. 'My child is much more settled and happy in herself. She has new friends and has developed her social skills well.' This reflects a typical parental comment.
- Staff are highly skilled in maintaining a positive atmosphere at all times. This is because they use skilled techniques to ensure students are calm and stress free. Comments from parents, staff and students are positive about the good standard of behaviour they see in the academy.
- Students make good gains in their personal development. Staff understand their individual needs very well and are highly skilled in helping them. The supportive nurture provision is highly successful in helping students to settle back to work. They soon return to lessons where they quickly get on with their work.
- Conversations with students reveal that they are aware of different types of bullying but do not see it as an issue. They speak confidently about how staff are always there to help them if they have concerns.
- The academy works extremely diligently to improve attendance, which is now above that in similar academies. This has included highly effective work with other professionals and families and in particular, for those students with long-term absence because of their medical needs.

Safety

- The academy's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding. Risk assessments are highly rigorous to ensure that every student can get involved in all activities and visits, irrespective of their particular needs.
- Students' understanding about how they can keep themselves safe is impressive. Sixth-form students' portfolios show their strong awareness of subjects like self-harm and depression. They show great sensitivity in expressing how it might feel in such situations.
- Highly effective leadership and very well-trained staff show an excellent understanding of child protection, e-safety and safeguarding matters.

The quality of teaching is good

- Work seen in students' assessment files and inspection evidence confirm that the quality of teaching over time is good and, as a result, all group of students in Key Stages 3 and 4 make good progress.
- Expectations of what students are capable of achieving academically and of their good behaviour, are usually high. Students, including the most able, say teachers challenge them to work hard. 'Some work is very challenging, we deal with it in a positive way' reflects a typical comment from students.
- Teachers use questioning very well to systematically check students' understanding as the lesson proceeds. Based on what they know about students' prior learning teachers adjust their plans to ensure each student is achieving their best.
- Teaching ensures that any student who is not on track to meet their targets receive effective additional support, including for literacy, communication and therapies. These programmes of support are all personalised to students' individual needs
- The quality of marking is not consistently good. Marking of students' work does not always provide students with clear advice about what they need to do next to improve their work. Where teachers do provide clear guidance, they do not always ensure students act upon it.
- Reading, writing and mathematics are all taught well. Tasks engage students and, in some lessons, highly-skilled teachers adapt tasks extremely well to develop students' understanding. For example, in a lesson about polygons, a very different illustration of a road traffic sign was used to check students' understanding of symmetry. Effective daily reading sessions ensure that students make good progress in their reading skills. Literacy skills are also promoted very well across the various curriculum subjects. However, opportunities to develop students' numeracy skills in this way are sometimes overlooked and this limits somewhat their achievement in mathematics.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding because high-quality marking of students' work helps them to

improve their portfolios for external assessment.

The achievement of pupils is good

- As a result of their special educational needs and disabilities, all students are working at levels of attainment that are well below national expectations when they join the academy in Year 7. In Key Stages 3 and 4, all groups of students, including the most able, disadvantaged students and the few that speak English as an additional language, achieve well and make good progress, including in English and mathematics, from their starting points.
- Students who attend the nurture group often achieve exceedingly well in developing their social and emotional skills. The excellent care and trusting relationships help them to become calm so that they quickly engage in their work and enjoy their learning.
- Students achieve well in English. Students' books show they have a good range of opportunities to read and write, including when they complete work in other curriculum subjects. Daily reading lessons and well-planned programmes of support ensure that students make better than expected progress in reading. In mathematics, although progress is good, it is sometimes held back because students do not have enough opportunities to use and apply their numeracy skills as part of their work in other curriculum subjects.
- Students with speech and language difficulties make good progress as a result of the successful integrated therapy that improves their access to learning.
- The most able students achieve well in reading, writing and numeracy. This is because of teachers' high expectations and the highly effective challenge they give students as a result.
- Disadvantaged students do as well as other students in the academy. This was very evident in art, for example, where students in Year 11 produced some exceptional artwork comparable to students on GCSE courses in mainstream secondary schools.

The sixth form provision is outstanding

- Leadership and management in the sixth form are excellent. Leaders are highly motivated to provide the very best opportunities possible for the students in their personal and academic achievements. This is seen for example, in the outstanding commitment to provide mainstream GCSE qualifications for the most able students.
- The outstanding curriculum supports students exceedingly well in developing their independence, self-confidence and self-reliance and provides them with skills they can use in their future employment.
- Students' progress is outstanding. This is seen in their excellent achievement in English and mathematics, where a very strong focus is placed on developing their literacy and numeracy skills. Students, particularly the most able, gain considerable confidence in their abilities to study GCSE courses.
- Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding. Relationships between students and staff are outstanding and staff have an excellent understanding of students' individual needs. Teachers are very skilled in adapting their teaching to develop students' understanding and to ensure they produce high-quality work. The quality of marking is consistently good. Students are very clear how to improve their work, including their portfolios for external assessment.
- Students have excellent opportunities to understand challenging topics, such as justice. Students enthusiastically share their opinions and became familiar with the legal language of barristers and defendants.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to learning are excellent because they are highly engaged in their activities and very respectful of the teaching staff and other students. They are given encouragement to work independently and can do so extremely successfully.
- Leaders and staff work together to ensure that students are kept very safe. Students get on exceedingly well with staff and know there is always someone to talk to. Students feel very safe. Staff keep a close watch on making sure students use equipment safely in practical activities.

What inspection judgements mean

Academy		
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 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>

Academy details

Unique reference number	139974
Local authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	449944

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

Type of academy	Special
Academy category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11-19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the academy roll	302
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	87
Appropriate authority	Directors Board
Chair	Colin Whittaker
Chief Executive	Elizabeth Horne
Principal Abbey Hill	Rebecca Whelan
Principal Sixth Form	Melanie Lyons
Date of previous academy inspection	Not previously inspected as an academy
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