

Abbey School

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

Inspection dates

24–25 May 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has led the school from inadequate to good with relentless determination. She set the bar high and successfully motivated staff to make the improvements needed.
- The interim executive board (IEB) shares the headteacher's commitment to improving the school. Members have challenged leaders resolutely and successfully to improve provision and raise pupils' achievement.
- Teaching is good because training for teachers has been targeted well. Teachers assess pupils' learning accurately and plan effectively so that, overall, in all key stages progress in English and mathematics is good.
- The exciting new immersive curriculum enthuses pupils about learning and so contributes to their good progress. The breadth of learning and experiences encompassed in the half-termly topics contributes well to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils' behaviour is good overall because it is managed well. Staff understand pupils' individual needs and provide tailored support to help them manage their own emotions.
- Staff look after pupils well and take all the necessary steps to keep them safe. Good links with parents contribute effectively to pupils' welfare.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Middle leadership is underdeveloped. Middle leaders are not fully equipped with the skills needed to monitor and drive improvement in their subjects.
- The school does not systematically assess the effectiveness of the strategies used to foster pupils' personal qualities or evaluate the progress pupils make in developing the personal skills they need for learning and life.

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management so that the school's capacity to improve to outstanding expands, by:
 - ensuring that middle leaders develop the range of skills required to drive improvement in their subjects
 - systematically assessing the effectiveness of the strategies used to foster pupils' personal development
 - evaluating the progress pupils make in developing the personal skills they need for learning and life.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The headteacher's inspirational leadership, combined with unwaveringly high expectations of pupils and staff, has been pivotal in the rapid improvement seen across all areas of the school's work. She has successfully fostered a team approach of which staff are rightly proud. Morale is high and staff often go the extra mile because they put pupils at the heart of everything they do.
- The headteacher and senior leaders have a realistic view of the school's performance. Regular meetings to evaluate pupils' progress, combined with monitoring the quality of provision and pupils' work, have led to well-focused planning for improvement. Monitoring has become increasingly fine-tuned and this sharper focus has helped to ensure that improvements continue to be made.
- Performance management is well established for teachers and teaching assistants. The whole-school target is ambitious. Staff have appropriate opportunities for professional development to help them reach their personal targets.
- Leaders encourage teachers to develop their classroom practice by trying out new methods. On 'Risky Fridays', teachers are free to innovate in their classrooms. Quick-fire weekly meetings focus on teaching strategies. Teachers say that the ideas shared have had a positive impact on their teaching and this is evident in pupils' improved progress.
- The leadership of subjects is not fully developed. Middle leaders give direction in their subjects but not all have had opportunities to gain the skills needed to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of delivery.
- The deployment of pupil premium funding is effective: there is little difference in the rate of progress made by disadvantaged pupils and others. Teachers draw up plans for support and activities targeted at the social, emotional or learning needs of individual disadvantaged pupils. These plans are reviewed at intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of the support and redirect this if necessary. This clearly demonstrates the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.
- Through links with a local secondary academy, the school uses the sports premium funding to extend the range of sporting activities pupils can participate in. These include competitive sports and outdoor pursuits.
- The introduction of an immersive curriculum has transformed the school's environment as well as pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Teachers create vibrant, exciting classroom settings linked to a new topic each half term. A wide range of colours, textures, sounds and smells helps to capture pupils' interest as they learn through a topic. The more relaxed arrangements of furniture and freedom to choose where to learn in the classroom have helped to reduce anxiety for many pupils.
- Learning is carefully planned so that the basic skills taught in discrete sessions are practised and developed through the topic pupils are studying. The range of topics contribute well to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils find out about religious festivals, have new experiences such as going to the zoo and have to complete some tasks collaboratively. Opportunities for enterprise activities such as 'grow a tenner' help to equip pupils for the next stage of their education.
- Older pupils learn in a bright, modern, office-style environment which they say they like. They are now able to choose from a range of accredited vocational courses that better reflect their aspirations for adult life.
- The school's commitment to equal opportunities is evident in the better relationships with parents. Communication with all parents has improved significantly. A feature of this is the group set up for Roma parents. The school has employed a teaching assistant who can translate for both adults and pupils. Parents appreciate this and are pleased with the progress their children are making. They value the range of support they receive to help them access services such as healthcare for their children.
- The local authority has provided regular support to the school through advice, helpful checks on progress and contributions to IEB meetings. It played a key role in linking the school with an executive headteacher, a significant step when additional leadership capacity was essential. Rightly, the local authority's support has reduced as the school's own capacity has grown.

■ The governance of the school

- The IEB has been tenacious in its pursuit of the school's improvement. Members have a thorough, deep understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have used their skills and expertise very effectively to provide strategic direction and high levels of challenge through the school's difficult transformation to good. Their level of commitment and ambitions for the school has been high, as is clear from the time they have given to keep developments on track.
- The IEB has overseen the imminent transfer to a local governing body and taken appropriate steps to maintain continuity in governance as the school moves forward. The IEB has monitored the school's finances astutely and helped leaders reduce an agreed deficit, so that the situation members are handing over is better than the one they inherited. They have checked the impact of funding aimed at disadvantaged pupils.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and staff are fully alert to the risks to pupils' safety and well-being and are well trained to recognise and act upon any signs of harm. They take prompt action to address any concerns and are persistent in working with other agencies to access the support and protection they know pupils need. Rigorous checks on the suitability of staff to work with children are conducted before allowing them to take up their posts. All parents who responded to the school's own recent questionnaire indicated that their child feels safe in school and is well looked after.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching and assessment has improved considerably and is now resulting in good progress for pupils. Through careful monitoring leading to targeted professional development, senior leaders have broadened teachers' expertise and raised expectations so that these are now high across the school.
- There is an excitement about learning. This is because the immersive learning environments capture pupils' imaginations: they can see the links between the topic, their activities and, for older pupils, the skills they will need beyond school.
- Teachers plan carefully to ensure that pupils develop their skills progressively and have opportunities through their topic work to practise these. Teachers have the same high expectations, for instance, whether a piece of writing is linked to an English lesson or the topic. Problem-solving tasks form part of the topic work, developing pupils' personal skills through encouraging them to work together to reach solutions.
- All pupils read daily, usually to an adult. During the inspection, some were keen to read to inspectors and talked knowledgeably about their books. Phonics (the link between letters and the sounds they represent) teaching is having a positive impact on pupils' reading skills. Pupils know how to use their phonics knowledge when they meet unfamiliar words and more broadly when, for instance, they want to conduct an internet search.
- The school makes appropriate use of a number of aids to communication for pupils who find this difficult. Leaders are seeking to increase the range and effectiveness of these.
- Pupils' mathematical skills are developed well and they are guided to use the correct terms, for instance 'remainder' in division. They are challenged to apply what they know outside lessons. For instance, using tablet computers, pupils were able to upload QR codes displayed around the school to read calculations, which they then completed.
- The introduction of a new assessment system and close attention to securing accurate assessments of pupils' learning have led to a good match of tasks to pupils' needs. This has resulted in more challenge for the most able. For example, the most able older pupils were stretched to work out what was being inferred in two well-known poems.
- Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, including through helping pupils whose progress has slowed to make up the ground. They know pupils very well and are skilled at diffusing potential difficulties so that pupils stay on task for longer periods.
- Teachers mark pupils' work regularly in line with the school's policy. They identify what pupils have achieved and how improvements can be made. Pupils respond to teachers' comments in time set aside on 'Reflective Fridays'. For example, they might rewrite a paragraph with spaces between words if this is something they have been struggling with.
- When surveyed, parents were keen that their children should be set homework. At the beginning of each half term, teachers prepare a list of possible homework activities linked to the class topic and varied in type and difficulty. Some pupils enjoy completing these and are proud of the work they do at home.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the school. Staff know pupils very well and are attuned to their needs and signs of distress. The school successfully uses a range of strategies, such as sensory circuits and 'theraplay', to help pupils cope with their emotions and so reduce the barriers to their learning. However, there are no formal ways of capturing either the effectiveness of the various strategies or the progress pupils make in their personal development and readiness to learn. This often represents considerable achievement, enabling pupils to engage more readily in formal learning.
- The school draws effectively on the expertise of a range of external services such as speech and language therapy and nursing to help reduce the barriers to pupils' learning.
- Pupils learn about risks and how to stay safe, for example, day to day in the kitchen or when travelling on public transport. They are taught about keeping safe online and the school offers support at home to families who request help with e-safety.
- The school works hard to help pupils feel secure at social times when teaching assistants actively engage pupils in a range of activities such as hoola hoop. The range of break- and lunchtime clubs has been extended so that pupils can choose an activity or have the option of a quiet space. Pupils are helped to understand what bullying is and know that it is wrong. There have been very few bullying incidents this year.
- Pupils have some experience of democracy as they voted for members of the pupil leadership team. This group contributes to school life, for instance through sharing their views with the headteacher about the school environment. As the result of a recent suggestion, calming music now enhances displays in some areas.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' behaviour has improved considerably this year. There has been a marked decrease in incidents of unacceptable behaviour and only a minority of pupils have been involved in those that have occurred. In contrast to the previous picture, no pupils have been excluded for well over a year. There has been a decline in the number of occasions when pupils have to be removed from their class to learn on their own. Although pupils still need to leave the classroom at times in order to regulate their behaviour, they are generally away from learning for only short periods before rejoining the lesson.
- Staff manage pupils' behaviour consistently and effectively and this contributes much to their good progress. Great emphasis is placed on restorative justice to help pupils understand the consequences of their decisions and actions. The fundamental British values of respect, tolerance and the rule of law are emphasised when pupils think about their behaviour and how to put things right. This contributes to a calm atmosphere in which, in the main, pupils behave well.
- Leaders have established a robust system for the consistent recording of incidents, including those where restraint has been used. Staff are now able to analyse patterns in incidents and this is leading to a clearer understanding of the triggers for some pupils' emotional distress and consequent challenging behaviour.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. During the inspection they were proud to show inspectors their work both on displays and in their well-cared-for books. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations and are quick to follow teachers' routines for quiet.
- Pupils' attendance has improved and is now above the national average for special schools. It is a little below the national average for secondary schools. A small number of pupils are persistently absent. The school has good systems to check on their safety and staff often make home visits to encourage attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Overall, pupils in all key stages make good progress from their varied starting points. An exciting curriculum and good teaching have increased pupils' rates of progress markedly. Staff have high aspirations for pupils and have successfully raised pupils' horizons by encouraging them to look forward to their long-term goals. These are captured in pupils' individual 'flight paths' towards adult life, proudly displayed in the school's foyer.
- The school assesses what pupils know, understand and can do when they are admitted and sets targets for their learning. Pupils' individual learning journals have the small steps towards these targets listed and pupils are keen to show off the progress they have made.
- Leaders introduced a new assessment system this year and the staff team has worked diligently to ensure that their evaluations of pupils' learning are accurate. This more secure understanding of pupils' progress has helped to improve teaching and ensure that the most able pupils are suitably challenged.
- Effective systems are in place to help those pupils whose progress is faltering. Appropriate interventions are put in place rapidly to remove the barriers to their progress, whether these are social and emotional or caused by learning difficulties. Regular reviews of pupils' progress include checking on the effectiveness of the support teachers have planned for individual pupils.
- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing, mathematics, science and information technology as well as in topic work, where there are opportunities to practise the skills they have learned. For example, during the inspection in a topic on animals, primary pupils used practical equipment to help them work out the cost of a family visit to the zoo.
- Pupils' reading skills are promoted well. The school has increased its range of reading resources so they match pupils' needs and interests more closely. Each class reads a high-quality novel linked to their topic and teachers work hard to introduce literary characters and make them come alive, such as Miss Havesham from *Great Expectations*. Pupils write across a range of genres, often prompted by stimulating resources, such as a picture of a haunted house. Older pupils wrote poems about water when they were learning about the water cycle.
- Pupil premium funding is targeted sharply on the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Consequently, there is little difference between the progress of these pupils and that of others.
- In 2015, a very small number of Year 11 pupils gained externally accredited qualifications. This year the level of challenge, including for the most able, is much higher. All Year 11 pupils have already gained a GCSE pass in physical education and a number are entered for GCSEs in English and mathematics. All will leave school with entry-level qualifications in English, mathematics, science and information technology as well as accreditation in two vocational areas.
- All Year 11 pupils have post-16 places in education or training, as was the case in 2015. The school's transition worker maintains contact with pupils to help them settle into the next stage of their education.

School details

Unique reference number	106967
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	10009766

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	Maintained
Age range of pupils	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Appropriate authority	The interim executive board
Chair	Phil Marshall
Headteacher	Luci Windle
Telephone number	01709 740074
Website	http://abbeyschool.co
Email address	enquiries@abbeyschool.co
Date of previous inspection	1 October 2014

Information about this school

- Abbey is a small special school catering for pupils with statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans. Pupils have a range of needs, including moderate, specific and severe learning difficulties; autism spectrum disorder; speech, language and communication difficulties; sensory impairments; and social, emotional and mental health needs.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. Small numbers come from a range of other heritages, including Pakistani. A growing number of pupils belong to the Roma community. An above-average proportion speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, and for whom the school receives pupil premium funding, is high compared with the national average. The pupil premium is government funding to provide additional support for disadvantaged pupils, including those looked after by the local authority.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to evaluate the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observing learning in all classes, sometimes with the headteacher and deputy headteacher. Inspectors also made short visits to classrooms to evaluate the range of provision for different groups of pupils and to consider the quality of the curriculum.
- The inspectors reviewed the work in pupils' books and heard a number of pupils read. They spoke to pupils informally in lessons and at breaktimes and met a group of pupils more formally. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, teachers, members of the IEB, a principal adviser from the local authority and two groups of parents.
- Inspectors evaluated a range of information, including: the school's evaluation of its own performance; the improvement plan; the minutes of IEB meetings; information on the quality of teaching in the school's monitoring records; and information on pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance. They also looked at documents relating to safeguarding (protecting children and making sure they are safe). A wide range of information on the school's website was taken into account.
- The results of the school's recent surveys of parents' and pupils' views were taken into account.

Inspection team

Jane Austin, lead inspector
Diane Reynard

Her Majesty's Inspector
Ofsted Inspector

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