

Abbeyfield School

Mereway, Northampton NN4 8BU

Inspection dates

11–12 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
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Pupils are making good progress across many subjects and across all year groups.
- Leaders and managers have worked with determination and increasing effectiveness. School improvement has been rapid.
- Teachers with responsibility for subjects and pupil care show a good understanding of how well pupils and groups of pupils are doing. Examination results are improving.
- Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Teaching has improved strongly since the last inspection. Good teaching is enabling pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school site and at breaktimes.
- Pupils are proud of their school and are keen to do well. They value the good range of extra-curricular opportunities the school provides.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school. They are punctual to school and lessons.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Values of tolerance and respect are a core part of the school's ethos.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school.
- The sixth form is now good. Leaders have improved teaching and standards are rising.
- The curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to be successful and make progress after they leave school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Standards in science are not yet high enough across all year groups.
- Some groups of pupils do not attend school often enough and therefore do not access the good provision.
- The school's strategy for closing the gaps in the performance of disadvantaged pupils is not yet fully embedded.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen further the impact of leaders and managers on the quality of teaching and learning in science by:
 - ensuring teaching in key stage 3 prepares all pupils with the scientific knowledge and skills to be successful at GCSE
 - ensuring all staff in science share best practice and embed it so that pupil progress improves
 - ensuring that the leaders of the subject implement the good practice that exists in the school in closing the gaps for disadvantaged pupils.

- Embed existing effective strategies to improve the attendance and progress of disadvantaged pupils in Years 9 and 10.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The principal is a determined and ambitious leader. She is tenacious in her drive for school improvement and has developed a team of senior staff who are now equally determined that the school will be the best it can be. This has led directly to the rapid improvement in pupils' progress at the school.
- The high expectations leaders set for staff are clearly communicated in the plans that have been drawn up to further improve the school. Leaders of subjects say they value the training and support given by the new senior team. As a consequence, most are managing their teams well and passing on their own very high expectations. However, a few subjects such as science and humanities have not fully embedded these expectations. As a result, the pupils' progress in these subjects is too slow. All staff are held to account for their own performance through rigorous performance management systems. This helps explain how this process has contributed to the swift improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Any underperformance by teachers is addressed and teachers are provided with support plans to help make sure that their teaching improves.
- The leadership of teaching is good. There is a strong culture of sharing best practice and teachers are encouraged to take part in external training to improve their work. This is leading to good and better progress for pupils.
- Leaders and managers know the school well. Their own assessment of the school's strengths and what needs to be improved is accurate. They take appropriate actions to address any areas that need improvement, such as in geography.
- Pupil premium funding has been used effectively. A wide range of strategies have been selected and put into place to make sure pupils who are supported through the pupil premium rapidly catch up with their peers. For example, the 'Level Up' programme in Year 7, which provides intense literacy support, has had a striking impact on these pupils' progress in key stage 3.
- Senior leaders have used sound judgement to develop a broad and balanced curriculum that offers appropriate challenge and support for pupils of all abilities, including those with additional needs. In key stage 4, there are now more opportunities for pupils to take academic subjects.
- The curriculum contributes well to pupils' personal development through good use of tutor time, a comprehensive programme of assemblies and an excellent range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school gives a high priority to British values; tolerance and respect are fundamental to its ethos. For example, in an ethics lesson, pupils spoke confidently about stereotypes and how they would challenge them.
- Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is well catered for. They know right from wrong and work together well. Pupils have access to a range of trips and visits and there is a very strong emphasis on pupils learning about life in other countries and significant events, such as the conflict in Syria.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body works in conjunction with the Creative Education Trust. It comprises a group of skilled, experienced people who are highly ambitious for the school and very committed to making sure it continues to improve.
 - The governors know the school well and can articulate its strengths and weaknesses. They are aware of what the performance information shows and can analyse and interrogate it. They hold the principal and senior leaders robustly to account through a comprehensive committee structure.
 - Governors have a sound working knowledge of how pupil premium funding has been spent and the impact it has had. They link with subjects in the school and carry out regular visits to monitor and evaluate progress towards areas identified in the school improvement plan. They have taken decisive action to ensure pupils' progress can continue to improve. They are rigorous in ensuring that teachers carry out all their statutory duties diligently and are not rewarded for poor performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and are a strength of the school. Leaders take appropriate measures to support vulnerable pupils, including children who are looked after. Appropriate checks are made on adults working at the school. The school is a safe environment and leaders work effectively with parents and other agencies to make sure pupils are supported and are safe. All staff have undertaken 'Prevent' training this academic year, which is aimed at raising awareness of the risks of extremism and radicalisation.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment across a range of subjects has improved since the last inspection. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent, as are pupils' attitudes to learning. Teachers create an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in the classroom and enable pupils to thrive and make good progress.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and most teachers plan lessons which have high expectations and meet the pupils' needs. They are skilled at asking pupils questions which deepen their understanding and enable them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. The most able pupils are targeted and benefit particularly from this kind of challenge.
- Most teachers use the pupils' performance information and their knowledge of individual pupils' needs, to plan lessons which are purposeful and which secure progress over time. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good. Most teachers use the school's marking and feedback strategy, which supports better literacy well. Pupils are encouraged to respond to developmental questions from their teachers by writing their responses. This is one of the reasons why pupil progress has improved since the last inspection.
- Parents receive regular information about how well their child is doing at school. There are regular parents' evenings and a termly parent forum where they can come in and discuss how the school is doing with senior staff. Generally parents feel well informed about how their children are doing at school.
- There is a clear homework policy. Most subjects use this policy well but pupils commented that some teachers did not always stick to it.
- Most teachers use effective strategies to make sure that boys are as fully engaged in their learning as girls. They think carefully about where they seat boys in the class and make sure they target boys for questions, which keeps them focused on their learning. For example, the school chose to run an all-boys group in Year 11 GCSE English. Observations and analysis of performance information suggest that this cohort are now making much better progress than in previous years.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Staff are very effective at spotting any child who is at risk or vulnerable and supporting them, sometimes with the help of outside agencies. Pupils know that there is a large team to support them if they need any help.
- Bullying and the use of derogatory language are extremely rare. Pupils are clear that staff deal effectively with any bullying incidents. Older pupils commented on how the school has improved rapidly in supporting them in a variety of ways, such as the Success Centre.
- Pupils feel safe at school and are taught how to keep themselves safe. Important messages are regularly repeated, for example about the risks of not using the internet safely. Pupils appreciate the information they frequently receive from school about this and other potential risks to their safety.
- Pupils receive good advice about becoming a successful learner. For example, during the inspection some pupils were participating in a 'mental toughness' day where they investigated ways to solve their own problems. These types of events are helping to improve the progress of pupils in the school.
- Pupils receive good careers education, information, advice and guidance. The school gives a high priority to making sure pupils have high aspirations. It provides opportunities to have experiences which will help guide their choices for key stage 4 and key stage 5. The numbers of pupils who are not in education, employment or training when they leave school is low.
- There was no derogatory language heard in or out of lessons during the period of the inspection. Pupils felt, however, that if there was any derogatory language used by a pupil, this would be swiftly and effectively dealt with.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. They move around the school well and behave equally well at breaktimes. They are helpful to each other and polite to visitors and staff. Relationships with staff are open, warm and friendly. There is no litter around the site.

- Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils are interested and keen in their learning. Low-level disruption is rare and only when teaching is not as strong do pupils lose their focus on their learning.
- Attendance is improving. It is at the national average for most pupils and the number of pupils who are absent for long periods of time is reducing. While the attendance of disadvantaged pupils has improved overall since the last inspection, in years 9 and 10 it has not done so quickly enough.
- Pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.
- The number of fixed-term and permanent exclusions has reduced. The school works hard to identify those at risk of exclusion and supports them in school and with alternative placements out of school which are appropriate for their needs and aspirations.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils are making good progress in English and mathematics. In 2015, the proportion making expected progress in both subjects was at national averages. Evidence in pupils' books and from observations of learning support the school's view that pupils' achievement is on track to improve, particularly in mathematics.
- Across a range of subjects, disadvantaged pupils are now making accelerated progress and this is helping to rapidly close the progress gap with others nationally. In key stage 3, the progress gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers is closing in English, mathematics and science. Teachers regularly test pupils, check their misunderstanding and revisit skills and knowledge. The focus on literacy through the 'Level Up' curriculum is having a positive impact on the progress of these pupils.
- The strongest-performing subjects at GCSE are mathematics, languages, drama, business studies and health and social care. Results were above national averages for these in 2015. In subjects where results have not been as strong as they could have been, leaders have taken action to ensure they are set to improve this year.
- Progress in science is improving, but slowly. At key stage 4, staffing issues and weak teaching are being tackled with the support of the trust. Pupils' progress in key stage 3 in science is rapid.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress in a range of subjects from their different starting points. The school's support systems and careful use of other adults in the classroom is effective.
- Higher-attaining pupils make the same progress as similar pupils nationally in a range of subjects. Teachers challenge these pupils well in lessons with high-level feedback using the school policy.
- The gaps between girls' and boys' attainment and progress is narrowing over time. However, current progress information indicates there are some boys who are not achieving as well as they should, which means there are still some gaps between their performance overall and that of girls.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next stages of education. Good careers education, information, advice and guidance begins in Year 7 and pupils say it is helping them to choose the right subjects for key stage 4 in Year 9 and for post-16 in Year 11.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability make good progress in a range of subjects from their starting points. More effective use of information about pupils by teachers is helping them develop skills and knowledge.
- Pupils attending alternative provision make good progress in their courses and benefit from taking GCSE English and mathematics.
- Leaders are determined to close the attainment and progress gaps between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. Teachers use performance information to plan learning, and inspectors observed this during the inspection. However, this is not used effectively by all teachers and so there are still gaps in progress.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- Leaders and managers in the sixth form have been effective in ensuring that learners are enrolled on appropriate courses. The curriculum offers a range of academic and vocational courses and enrichment activities are well planned. As a consequence, progress is improving since the last inspection.
- Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good. Teachers appropriately encourage learners to develop

the skills needed to work independently and then provide opportunities where they may do so. For example, in a Year 13 languages lesson, learners debated the issue of immigration with confidence and accuracy, leading to good and better progress.

- Learners have positive attitudes to learning and have aspirations that are leading many to higher education or appropriate alternatives. Improving careers guidance and support is increasing the number of learners going on to higher education, with 75% doing so last year. Sixth form learners contribute well to the life of the school, acting as role models in the main school and taking leadership roles effectively. Leaders ensure that opportunities are taken to have debates and discuss current affairs; learners have discussed topical events such as the Paris shootings and the European Union referendum.
- Leaders ensure learners in the sixth form know how to stay safe. Learners say that a programme of tutorials and assemblies ensures they are aware of issues such as safety on a night out. Other topics covered equip students with a sound understanding of British values, tolerance and respect.
- Learners' progress is now good. Their attainment and progress are strong for work-related courses and improving rapidly towards national averages in the academic ones. The evidence in learners' books and school assessment information suggest this will continue this year. Learners on some vocational courses make outstanding progress. Those on academic courses are making better progress than previous years but this is not securely good in all cases.
- Careers guidance and support is effective. A programme to develop employability skills has led to better opportunities for some learners, such as regular mock interview sessions from local employers.

School details

Unique reference number	138858
Local authority	Northamptonshire County Council
Inspection number	10011762

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Sponsored academy
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,432
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	152
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Walls
Principal	Claire Morrell
Telephone number	01604 763 616
Website	www.abbeyfieldschool.org.uk
Email address	head@abbeyfieldschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	2–3 July 2014

Information about this school

- This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is similar to the national average.
- The large majority of pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is lower than the national average.
- There are 11 pupils who receive part of their education at a variety of settings including Northampton Schools Tutorial Centre, Rushmere Academy, Moulton College, Overleys and work experience.
- The school meets the government’s floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of year 11.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 48 lessons, 16 of which were jointly observed with senior leaders. During lesson observations, inspectors sampled pupils' books and talked to pupils in order to evaluate their learning. Inspectors attended form time and took a number of shorter visits to lessons.
- Inspectors observed the behaviour of pupils at break and lunchtime and as they moved around the school.
- Inspectors held a number of meetings with senior leaders, leaders in charge of subjects, teachers, governors and representatives from the Creative Academy Trust.
- Inspectors met with pupils from all year groups. These pupils were chosen at random.
- Inspectors scrutinised in detail a range of pupils' books in various subjects. These scrutinies were carried out jointly with leaders of subjects.
- The inspection team looked at a wide range of the school's documentation, including meeting records, action plans, records showing how leaders check on teaching, policies, information on pupils' progress towards their targets, the school's own evaluation of its performance as well as external evaluations of its performance, reports to parents and records of how the school supports vulnerable students.
- Inspectors took account of the 54 responses to Ofsted's online Parent View questionnaire.

Inspection team

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Emma Ing	Her Majesty's Inspector
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