

Abbey School for Exceptional Children

10-12 Abbey Square, Chester CH1 2HU

Inspection dates

18 August 2020

Overall outcome

The school is likely to meet all the independent school standards when it opens

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1), 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(1)(b)(i), 2(1)(b)(ii), 2(2), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b)

- Leaders have put in place detailed plans that seamlessly match the aims set out in the curriculum policy. Schemes of work are adapted at the different levels of 'engaging', 'exploring' and 'establishing' so that the plans can be matched to the way in which pupils learn.
- Leaders intend to personalise the curriculum further by setting individualised targets for each pupil. Their strategy involves staff working in teams to support pupils' learning and behavioural needs. These teams will include qualified teachers, speech and language therapists, behaviour analysts and occupational therapists. These teams will work together to adapt the curriculum to pupils' needs. Leaders propose to teach pupils in classes of no more than five pupils.
- The schemes of work cover learning in all of the areas required by the independent school standards.
- The curriculum for students in the sixth form aims to develop important daily living skills that will prepare them for adulthood. Students will have opportunities to achieve accreditation for the development of their functional literacy and numeracy skills at the same time as studying a curriculum that promotes their independence.
- Schemes of work for each key stage are organised into a rolling programme so that the content changes to ensure that pupils do not repeat the same learning.

Paragraph 2(2)(d), 2(2)(d)(i), 2(2)(d)(ii), 2(2)(e), 2(2)(e)(i), 2(2)(e)(ii), 2(2)(e)(iii), 2(2)(i)

- The plans for pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education development are interwoven between subjects and this is promoted well throughout all of the school's curriculum plans. The plans are progressive so that pupils build on their prior learning. For example, in key stage 4 pupils will study units on internet safety and social media, relationships and managing money. Students in the sixth

form will go on to learn about how to manage relationships, understand democracy and develop an awareness of issues such as online gambling.

- There is a structured programme of careers activities from key stage 3 onwards. Leaders have commissioned a company to deliver independent careers advice. They plan to ensure that pupils are supported and encouraged to undertake appropriate work placements in key stage 5 so that they learn the skills necessary in the workplace. Leaders hope to work towards meeting the Gatsby benchmarks with the careers provision.

Paragraph 3, 3(a) 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h), 3(i), 3(j), 4

- The school proposes to admit pupils who have complex autism and learning difficulties. As such, pupils at the school are likely to be working below the level of national tests. Leaders have ensured that there is a suite of appropriate standardised assessments to gauge pupils' attainment and to measure their progress. The structure of the assessment system means that pupils' achievements will be continually revised as they achieve their targets.
- The curriculum plans and assessment arrangements for the Reception year and for key stage 1 follow an early years curriculum model. This has been chosen to match the small steps in learning that pupils are likely to make.
- The curriculum aims to develop pupils' self-motivation and to promote pupils to think and learn for themselves.
- The school's assessment framework is comprehensive and aligned well with the aims of the school.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Paragraph 5, 5(a), 5(b), 5(b)(i), 5(b)(ii), 5(b)(iii), 5(b)(iv), 5(b)(v), 5(b)(vi), 5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d), 5(d)(i), 5(d)(ii) 5(d)(iii)

- There is a strong emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development throughout the plans for the PSHE curriculum. This is especially noticeable in key stage 4 and in the sixth form where there is a focus on developing pupils' life skills. Activities such as horticulture further support the development of pupils' independence skills.
- The school's behaviour policy and curriculum plans aim to encourage pupils to make the right decisions and recognise right from wrong.
- The school has a global learning plan to promote British values and equalities. Leaders intend to use cultural and spiritual events so that pupils have an opportunity to use real-world contexts to develop an understanding of these themes.
- The school's equality policy sets out clear aims for how equality will be promoted. Leaders have ensured that these aims have also been considered when developing the curriculum content. It is leaders' intention that pupils will develop a well-rounded understanding of the protected characteristics.

- The SMSC curriculum is woven through the subject curriculum plans. For example, in design technology leaders intend to use a sensory approach for pupils to explore different cultures by exploring how bread is used to celebrate special cultural and spiritual events.
- The proprietor has taken steps to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils they are presented with a balance of opposing views. This is written into the school's code of conduct for staff.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7, 7(a), 7(b), 9, 9(a), 9(b), 9(c), 10

- A comprehensive safeguarding policy is in place. It defines the roles and responsibilities of staff well. The policy provides clear definitions for the different forms of abuse. It clearly explains to staff how to spot some of the signs and symptoms that may indicate a child is at risk of harm.
- The school's policies for the management of behaviour and bullying are clear and focus on supportive strategies to ensure that instances of misbehaviour will be dealt with fairly and consistently. Leaders intend to appoint specialist support staff to help pupils to regulate their own behaviour and understand the consequences of their actions on others.
- The safeguarding policy takes into account the latest guidance of the Secretary of State. It is available on the school's website and for parents and carers.

Paragraph 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 16(a), 16(b)

- Leaders commissioned the fire authority to complete a fire risk assessment. Although the risk assessment did not identify any major issues, the principal has already commissioned the fire service to remedy the risks identified.
- The school has a format for monitoring the admission and attendance of pupils. These registers are kept on the school's management system.
- The risk assessment policy provides a structured procedure for staff to follow when managing risk. There are clear arrangements in place to identify risk, and the examples provided, which included an assessment of measures the school is taking to manage COVID-19 (coronavirus), are detailed.
- The school's health and safety policy sets out how a range of hazards will be managed.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraph 17, 18(1), 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a),

21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(4), 21(6), 21(7), 21(7)(a), 21(7)(b)

- Leaders have a single central register of the checks that are carried out on the suitability of each member of staff once they have been appointed. These checks are completed prior to staff working at the school. This record is held in an electronic format.
- Checks on the health and fitness of staff are undertaken before staff are appointed, and are recorded in the school's information management system.

Paragraph 19(1), 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(dd), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(3)

- Leaders intend to cover any staff absence internally as they feel that the pupils at the school will need the familiarity of working with people they already know. They do not intend to employ supply staff. However, the proprietor and leaders know what action needs to be taken if they do use supply teachers in the future.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23, 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c), 23(2), 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(2)

- The proprietor has renovated the school building to include suitable toilet and washing facilities for pupils' sole use as well as designated facilities for staff on each floor. All toilets are lockable from the inside.
- The proprietor has installed two shower facilities which can be used by pupils aged 11 years or over following physical education. One of these is located in the school's hygiene room and is equipped with harnesses for lifting pupils with physical disabilities.
- A dedicated medical room, which contains a washing facility, is ready for use. The room will be available at all times so that staff can attend to the medical needs of pupils, including those who injure themselves or fall ill.

Paragraph 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b), 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 28(2), 28(2)(a), 28(2)(b), 29(1), 29(1)(a), 29(1)(b), 31, 31(a), 31(b), 31(c)

- The school building has been expertly adapted to meet the expected needs of pupils. For example, special acoustic underlay has been fitted beneath the carpet in every classroom to ensure any noise level will be appropriate.
- The lighting in each room is suitable. Classrooms have been designed to have as much natural light as possible. The air conditioning system not only regulates the temperature in the building but also circulates air around the classroom. These are comfortable spaces for pupils which have a light and airy feel.
- Drinking water is clearly signed and is available from the sinks in each classroom.
- The school has three outdoor spaces for pupils to use at playtimes. The playground for younger pupils has a soft surface that has been fitted with play equipment. This

equipment has been specially selected to support pupils' learning. Older pupils have access to an outdoor gym and play area, both of which are fitted with artificial grass for use throughout the year.

- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(a), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(1)(f), 32(1)(g), 32(1)(h), 32(1)(i), 32(1)(j), 32(3), 32(3)(a), 32(3)(b), 32(3)(c), 32(3)(d), 32(3)(e), 32(3)(f), 32(3)(g)

- Leaders have devised report formats so that teachers can provide parents with an annual written report about their children's progress. Although these reports differ to reflect the content of each key stage, each will report on pupils' social and emotional development as well as their academic achievements.
- Leaders have clear systems to account for the income and expenditure for each pupil who will be funded by a local authority. This will be similar for each pupil as part of the school's core offer. Should a child need additional support beyond this offer, the school intends to detail how this funding will be used and how it makes a difference to the pupil's development.
- Records of pupils' progress will be available to parents, local authorities and other relevant agencies for the purpose of reviewing a pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- Copies of any of the school policies are available to parents either on the school website or upon request.

Paragraph 32(2), 32(2)(a), 32(2)(b), 32(b)(ii), 32(2)(c), 32(2)(d), 32(3)(b)

- The school's prospectus and website both contain the school's address, phone number and information about the proprietor's registered office. The website also contains detailed information about the development of the school and leaders' aims and vision.
- The admissions policy is clear that pupils are likely to have an EHC plan in place at the point of admission to the school. The information in the school's curriculum and assessment policies are clear on how the provision at the school will be adapted to meet individual pupils' needs.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33, 33(a), 33(b), 33(c), 33(d), 33(e), 33(f), 33(g), 33(h) 33(i), 33(i)(i), 33(i)(ii), 33(j), 33(j)(i), 33(j)(ii), 33(k)

- The school's policy on how it will handle complaints is comprehensive and meets all of the requirements of the independent school standards. The complaints process has different stages that allow for complaints to be raised both informally and formally. There are clear timescales in the policy for each of these stages.

- The policy makes it clear that any parent who is not happy with the outcome of a complaint can trigger a panel hearing with at least one member of the panel who is independent of the management and the running of the school.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c)

- The proprietor has put in place an advisory board who have been chosen because of their expertise. This board will make recommendations to support the proprietor when monitoring the quality of education at the school. The proprietor also intends to use the information from pupils' ongoing assessments to monitor their progress in learning when holding leaders to account for the school's performance.
- There is a strong focus on ensuring the well-being of pupils at the school throughout the curriculum plans. Leaders have been successful in putting in place the relevant policies and procedures for pupils' well-being as required by the independent school standards.
- The proprietor has ensured that the standards in this part are likely to be met.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- The school's accessibility plan contains relevant targets for making the curriculum and premises accessible for all pupils. The proprietor has ensured that disability access has been considered throughout the recent renovation of the building, which contains a lift for access to all floors.
- The proprietor has ensured that the requirements of The Equality Act 2010 are likely to be met.

Statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage

- The policies and arrangements that leaders have put in place for safeguarding, and for the administration of medicine and first aid in the main school, will also apply to children in the early years. There will be three staff trained in paediatric first aid, all of whom will be available to support children in the early years.
- The plans for pupils' learning are clear about the knowledge and skills that pupils will learn. These are matched to the seven prime areas of learning of the early years foundation stage (EYFS).
- The proprietor has ensured that the statutory requirements of the EYFS are likely to be met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Proposed school details

Unique reference number	147951
DfE registration number	896/6010
Inspection number	10154556

This inspection was carried out under section 99 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards that are required for registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Abbey School Ltd
Headteacher	Dr. Katy Lee
Annual fees (day pupils)	£82,700
Telephone number	01244960000
Website	www.abbeyschool.com
Email address	principal@abbeyschool.com
Date of previous standard inspection	Not previously inspected

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	Not applicable	4-19	4-19
Number of pupils on the school roll	Not applicable	75	75

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Not applicable	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	Not applicable	75
Number of part-time pupils	Not applicable	None
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	Not applicable	75
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	75
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	Not applicable	75

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	Not applicable	20
Number of part-time teaching staff	Not applicable	1
Number of staff in the welfare provision	Not applicable	12

Information about this proposed school

- Abbey School is in two adjacent grade 2 listed buildings in the centre of Chester. One building serves as an office and the other building is the school.
- The school intends to cater for pupils between the ages of 4 and 19 years. All pupils will have a diagnosis of autism and some will have social and behavioural needs.
- All of the pupils at the school are likely to have EHC plans.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic of 2020. Some of the inspection was conducted remotely. I visited the school site for a limited time to carry out a check of the school premises and safeguarding arrangements. This was due to restrictions placed on non-essential travel during the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Evidence was gathered remotely by telephone conversations that I had with the proprietor's representative, the principal and the vice principal. I also scrutinised documents that were shared electronically to check whether the school is likely to meet the independent school standards.
- This inspection was commissioned by the DfE to determine if the school is likely to meet the independent school standards prior to opening as a registered school.
- This is the school's first pre-registration inspection.
- I met with the principal, vice principal, school business manager and proprietor's representative to scrutinise the record of checks that the school undertakes on the suitability of staff and to check on the health and safety of the site, including the measures taken to meet fire safety.
- I looked at the plans for the education of pupils at the school and the assessment arrangements.
- I also scrutinised a broad range of policies, risk assessments and documentation about safeguarding.

Inspection team

Steve Bentham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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