

# Inspection of Abbot's Way School

St Mary's Road, Meare, Somerset BA6 9SR

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Inspection dates: 6 to 8 October 2021

## **Overall effectiveness**

## **Requires improvement**

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The quality of education

**Requires improvement**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Requires improvement**

Personal development

**Requires improvement**

Leadership and management

**Requires improvement**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Abbot's Way School provides a calm and nurturing environment for pupils to learn. Pupils feel safe and valued by staff. They enjoy the school's impressive natural grounds, which stretch back to the River Brue.

Staff want the best for pupils. They know pupils, their families and their interests well. Pupils have settled at the school and attend well. Leaders prioritise making sure that pupils are ready to learn. They have achieved this goal. Pupils are now ready to be challenged and to thrive. However, expectations of what pupils can achieve are not aspirational enough.

Pupils behave well and show respect to their peers and members of staff. Pupils focus well in lessons, and bullying is rare. However, they are less enthusiastic about some subjects than others, particularly when work lacks challenge. Teachers know what they want pupils to achieve, but have not given enough consideration to the smaller steps needed for pupils to reach these goals.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive high-quality specialist support. Knowledgeable staff provide therapy sessions that are precisely matched to pupils' needs. Academic targets are less precise, and teachers use these less well in lessons to tailor the curriculum to individual need.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Since the school opened, leaders have quickly established a school where pupils feel safe and valued. Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met in full.

Parents and carers overwhelmingly agree that the school plays a vital role for pupils who attend, particularly as pupils' prior schooling has often been less successful elsewhere.

Leaders know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. However, they acknowledge that pupils achieve more in some subjects compared with others. Leaders recognise that there is more to do to improve the quality of curriculum plans. Leaders have not scrutinised curriculum plans or teaching enough to make sure these support pupils' progress well.

Pupils follow a broad and varied curriculum. Curriculum leaders have had autonomy when developing curriculum plans. Where strongest, teaching builds on pupils' prior learning, and sequences of lessons build toward clear curriculum goals. Pupils can remember what they have learned and know how activities, such as off-site visits to a gurdwara, help deepen their understanding. Where weakest, the curriculum is sequenced less well and does not match what pupils already know well enough. At times, pupils find activities lack purpose because they have already learned and remembered that part of the school's curriculum.

The advisory body, brought in to provide an extra layer of scrutiny of school leaders, has played its part in getting the school to where it is now. Until recently, it has not focused enough on the education provided for pupils.

The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum is still in its infancy. Pupils learn how to lead healthy lives, ranging from healthy eating to understanding the difference between positive and negative relationships. Pupils also identify potential signs of a coercive relationship. The school's 'learning for life' curriculum is beginning to help pupils prepare for life in modern Britain and to understand the importance of fundamental British values. Leaders have ensured that pupils have access to impartial careers guidance to help them think about what they would like to do in the future. The school provides an after-school club, but this does not extend to deliberate development of pupils' talents.

Pupils enjoy reading. They read books that broadly match their reading ability. The newly appointed curriculum leader has brought in a coherent reading curriculum, which helps pupils learn about a range of increasingly challenging fiction and non-fiction texts. However, these plans have only just begun to be taught in class. Until recently, leaders prioritised pupils knowing how to read and to have positive attitudes towards reading. This work is paying off. Pupils read regularly and develop their understanding of what they have read well. Pupils who require phonics support receive this by way of interventions.

The school exclusively educates pupils with SEND. The highly knowledgeable special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has ensured that closely matched targets are in place to support pupils' specific needs. However, academic targets are less precise and do not identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Pupils have access to high-quality therapies and interventions, such as for speech and language, but curriculum adaptation in lessons does not support pupils' academic progress as closely. Pupils' progress against the school's curriculum is not as strong.

Pupils behave well both in lessons and around the school. They are polite and courteous. Leaders have taken appropriate steps to ensure that pupils attend well, particularly for pupils who have missed significant schooling in the past. Staff use praise to build pupils' confidence and self-esteem, which is mostly effective. However, expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. As a result, pupils receive praise for work they have completed, even though it occasionally lacks care.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders carry out the necessary recruitment checks on staff before they commence employment. They store these checks on the school's single central record, which leaders regularly check to ensure that it is current and free of any gaps.

Leaders provide training for staff, so they know their safeguarding responsibilities well. Staff know what to do if they have a concern about pupils' welfare, passing concerns directly to safeguarding leads and logging these on the school's record-keeping system. Leaders review concerns and take appropriate action to ensure that pupils are not at further risk. They consult with the local authority and external agencies well.

## **What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)**

- Senior leaders have given curriculum leaders autonomy to design and implement curriculum plans. These plans vary in quality depending on the expertise of the curriculum leader. Senior leaders need to ensure that curriculum leaders design high-quality curriculum plans, so that inconsistencies across subjects are diminished. Senior leaders and the advisory body will need to ensure that teachers are implementing these curriculum plans well.
- Curriculum plans vary in quality from subject to subject. In some subjects, it is not clear how plans consider what pupils already know or how the plans build towards curriculum milestones. The academic targets for pupils with SEND are too vague because of this. Leaders need to make sure that curriculum plans and pupils' targets support pupils with SEND to know and remember more.
- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are often too low. Pupils are praised by staff for work that lacks substance. Leaders need to ensure that staff consistently expect pupils to produce work of good quality.
- The recently appointed leader for English has implemented a new reading curriculum. Up to this point, leaders prioritised pupils enjoying reading and being able to read fluently. Leaders need to embed the new curriculum fully, so that pupils read critically, and increasingly understand challenging fiction and non-fiction texts.

## **How can I feed back my views?**

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	148006
<b>DfE registration number</b>	933/6015
<b>Local authority</b>	Somerset
<b>Inspection number</b>	10201927
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 14
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	17
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	3
<b>Proprietor</b>	Abbot's Way Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	David Pugh
<b>Headteacher</b>	Hellen Lush and Gareth Wright
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£18,981 to £23,379
<b>Telephone number</b>	01458 397497
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.abbotswayschool.co.uk">www.abbotswayschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:office@abbotsway.co.uk">office@abbotsway.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	Not previously inspected

## Information about this school

- The two members of the proprietor body are also the joint headteachers of the school. An advisory body has been established to check on the school's work and its compliance with the independent school standards.
- This was the school's first standard inspection since it opened in December 2020.
- Most pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school provides specialist education for pupils with: specific learning difficulties; speech, language and communication needs; and sensory and/or physical needs.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, science, and art and design. Inspectors met with senior leaders and curriculum leaders, considered pupils' work, visited lessons and spoke with staff and pupils.
- Inspectors met with a representative from the advisory body and considered minutes from the advisory body's meetings.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leads to evaluate the school's safeguarding procedures and to check safeguarding records, including the school's single central record.
- Meetings were held with leaders to determine how well they support pupils' personal development, and promote strong attendance and positive behaviour.
- Inspectors carried out a range of activities to determine whether the independent school standards are met in full. These activities included: consideration of the site and premises; scrutinising the information the school provide to parents, including the complaints policy and records; and considering how leaders ensure pupils' health, safety and welfare are protected.
- Inspectors considered responses to the staff survey. They also considered responses to Ofsted's questionnaire, Parent View.

- During this visit, inspectors also carried out a material change inspection in respect of the school's desire to increase its maximum number of pupils on roll from 15 to 23.

### **The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils**

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a material change to its registration. At the DfE's request, inspectors checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**

This is the second time that the proprietor body has requested a material change to increase the number of pupils on the school's roll from 15 to 23.

In order to accommodate more pupils, leaders intend to use additional premises. These premises are situated just over a mile away from the existing main site. The additional premises are suitable for the proposed increase. School leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

### **Inspection team**

Nathan Kemp, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Tracey Reynolds

Her Majesty's Inspector

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