

Inspection of The Abbey School

London Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8RZ

Inspection dates: 11 and 12 May 2022

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Inadequate

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders are determined that all pupils, including those with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND), experience a broad and interesting curriculum. Pupils benefit from the range of experiences they have and the range of subjects they study. As pupils' knowledge grows, so does their vocabulary, allowing them to think about, discuss and debate stimulating and important topics. Pupils with SEND, including those accessing the resource provision, are well supported and fully included in school life.

However, some pupils do not attend school as often as they should. This has a negative impact on their learning. Many pupils are unhappy and do not feel safe. They are not confident that staff deal with bullying effectively. This leads to pupils not reporting incidents because they have little faith that issues will get resolved. At social times, the poor behaviour of some pupils makes others feel vulnerable.

Pupils enjoy the wide range of opportunities to develop their interests and talents. These include clubs such as sports, drama and activities to look after the environment. Pupils are provided with regular, unbiased careers advice and guidance, including in the sixth form. This means they are well informed about different career pathways and future study options.

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

Leaders and staff have high aspirations for what all pupils can achieve across the curriculum, including those in the sixth form. They have identified gaps in learning that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic and are acting quickly to address these. The curriculum is closely aligned to pupils' individual needs, revisiting content that pupils missed during the pandemic and building on what they have understood. The needs of pupils with SEND are identified appropriately. Leaders work efficiently with staff to make sure that they have the training and knowledge to support these pupils effectively. Students in the sixth form enjoy the increased individual attention they receive from teachers, which helps them to learn well.

The important knowledge pupils should learn and the order in which they should learn it is clearly set out across subjects. This means that pupils benefit from building their knowledge in a logical order. Often, pupils recall this knowledge easily and apply this in different contexts. However, in a small number of subjects, pupils do not get the opportunity to revisit and recall their learning, meaning that the most important content is sometimes forgotten. Leaders are addressing this.

The number of pupils studying modern foreign languages (MFL) at key stage 4 is relatively low compared with the higher proportion of pupils who study geography and history at GCSE. Leaders are rightly taking steps to increase the proportion of pupils opting for languages so that more pupils study all of the English Baccalaureate subjects. As a result, more pupils are now choosing to study MFL.

In lessons, most pupils comply with leaders' strict expectations of behaviour. However, the way that leaders implement these expectations does not contribute positively to the culture of the school. For the majority of pupils, these approaches are applied in a manner that is overly restrictive. Many pupils find this oppressive. Leaders have not taken the right actions to address bullying or make sure that behaviour out of lessons is consistently good. Additionally, leaders have not instilled trust in pupils, which means pupils feel that they cannot report their concerns and know that these issues will be addressed effectively.

Trustees do not hold leaders fully to account for the impact of leaders' actions. Trustees do not provide sufficient challenge and accept too much of what leaders tell them without question. For example, trustees do not robustly challenge leaders about the school's safeguarding procedures or pupils' welfare, including the low rates of attendance. This means trustees have not challenged leaders effectively about issues around pupils' safety and bullying.

Some pupils' attendance is not high enough, including in the sixth form. This is having a significantly negative effect on the achievement of pupils who do not attend regularly enough. While the new strategies that leaders have introduced have led to some improvements in some individual pupils' attendance, they have not had the necessary impact yet overall.

Pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep themselves mentally and physically healthy. However, some pupils told inspectors that the personal, social and health education curriculum does not help everyone understand the importance of treating others with respect and consideration. This includes ensuring that all pupils know why bullying and the use of derogatory language are unacceptable.

Staff, including early career teachers, feel motivated and valued. They appreciate the guidance and support they receive from leaders to help manage their workload and well-being.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.

Systems for recording safeguarding concerns about pupils, including leaders' actions in response, are extremely poor. Often, actions are not recorded in detail. Records of safeguarding concerns are not kept confidential or stored securely. They are also maintained in different places. This means that leaders do not have a precise oversight of which pupils are vulnerable and at risk of harm. As a result, leaders do not always refer concerns to external agencies when they should. Consequently, pupils do not get the help they need.

Leaders take appropriate action to ensure the suitability of adults working with children. However, staff are unclear about the procedures to follow should they be concerned about the behaviour of an adult.

Trustees do not have a rigorous oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. They have not challenged leaders sufficiently to ensure that staff and leaders meet their safeguarding duties. This includes ensuring that all staff, including those responsible for safeguarding, have completed the required training.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Most pupils have little confidence in leaders' ability to tackle incidents of bullying successfully. This means that pupils do not feel safe. When incidents of bullying are reported, leaders need to take robust action to ensure that any incidents are resolved swiftly and effectively.
- The quality of written safeguarding records is poor. Too often, records are incomplete and do not contain the necessary detail about the nature of the concern. Additionally, any actions that have been taken are not recorded in sufficient detail and information is not shared with external agencies in a timely manner. This means that pupils are potentially at risk and do not get the help and support they need. Leaders must review all safeguarding roles, responsibilities and record-keeping procedures to ensure that they are secure and compliant.
- The designated safeguarding leaders are not well trained. As a result, they are not clear enough about their statutory responsibilities and the steps they should take to keep pupils safe from harm. Leaders should immediately strengthen safeguarding arrangements by ensuring that leaders responsible for safeguarding complete all statutory training.
- Trustees do not robustly challenge leaders about the safeguarding procedures. Trustees need to ensure that they challenge leaders more robustly and carefully to ensure that they meet their statutory duties.
- Some pupils' attendance is not high enough. This means that some pupils regularly miss out on essential learning. Leaders should continue with the strategies they have begun to introduce and ensure that these are implemented consistently to improve attendance, including students in the sixth form.

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

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 137154 |
| Local authority | Kent |
| Inspection number | 10226982 |
| Type of school | Secondary |
| School category | Academy converter |
| Age range of pupils | 11 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1202 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 138 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Trevor Martin |
| Headteacher | Rowland Speller |
| Website | www.abbeyschoolfaversham.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 21 February 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- The school has a higher-than-average number of pupils with SEND. This includes 44 pupils who attend the specially resourced provision for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- The school is currently using three alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

In accordance with section 44(2) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. The lead inspector met with four trustees, including the chair of trustees. She also met with a representative from Kent local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, drama, geography and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked samples of pupils' work.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, checked the single central record of recruitment checks, met with designated safeguarding leaders, spoke to a range of staff and pupils, and spoke with trustees.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's Parent View 265 additional free-text responses. They also took account of the responses to the confidential staff and pupil surveys, as well as gathering additional views throughout the inspection.

Inspection team

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Louise Walker, lead inspector | Her Majesty's Inspector |
| Dave Euridge | Ofsted Inspector |
| Yvonne Garvey | Ofsted Inspector |
| Neil Strowger | Ofsted Inspector |
| Sue Bzikot | Ofsted Inspector |
| Mark Roessler | Ofsted Inspector |

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