

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Abbey School

Menin Way, Farnham, Surrey GU9 8DY

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 December 2022

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils here thrive. They are friendly, confident and enjoy coming to school. Pupils embrace and respect differences and diversity and say that 'everyone can fit in here'. They show a depth of kindness and patience towards one another. They notice when their friends need their help. These thoughtful attitudes bring to life the school's mission statement that 'together we can'.

Leaders ensure a positive, supportive ethos runs right through the school. On arrival, pupils are warmly greeted by smiling staff. This helps to start the day in a positive way. Expectations of behaviour are consistently high. This results in a sense of calm, both in lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils are thoughtfully taught to recognise their emotions and understand their feelings. They can talk about how the school has helped them adopt helpful strategies to self-regulate and be 'ready to learn'.

Opportunities for pupils to talk about their feelings or worries are proactively provided. They appreciate the positive and trusting relationships they have built with staff. Pupils say they feel free from bullying and feel safe in school. Parents are highly appreciative of the school, with many commenting that staff go above and beyond in providing support to help pupils succeed.

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

Leaders are ambitious for pupils to grow into valued members of society. To support this, they have designed a carefully thought through curriculum. Teachers are knowledgeable and expertly adapt learning to meet the needs of all pupils. Older pupils are supported to take part in work experience and to explore different types of employment. Many pupils access entry level qualifications in mathematics and English, as well as a range of other subjects. These are chosen by pupils and based on their interests and ambitions for the

future. An option of studying for a GCSE is provided for those pupils who are able to achieve this qualification. Because of this, all pupils move on to relevant, appropriate college courses or apprenticeship programmes when they leave school.

Great thought is put into making sure that pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plan outcomes are achieved. These are broken down into achievable smaller steps. Pupils carry cards with these personalised targets to all their lessons. This offers them a sense of personal ownership of their learning. Pupils work towards these across a full range of curriculum subjects. Successes are celebrated and this encourages everyone to achieve their full potential.

Leaders have rightly recognised the need to establish a consistent school-wide approach to the teaching of reading. This is essential because pupils who are at the earliest stages of reading are not always quickly identified and given precise and targeted teaching. Although some pupils do receive targeted intervention in phonics, not all pupils get the help they need quickly enough to help them become confident readers. This means that some learning in other lessons is harder for them to access independently. Leaders do want pupils to develop a love of books and reading. This can be seen in the recent investment in a range of adapted core texts for older pupils. This includes books by authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Mary Shelley.

Staff promote positive behaviour expertly and with respect. They know pupils well and are responsive. They notice the smallest of alterations in pupils' behaviour and provide sensitive and gentle intervention when necessary. This results in a calm and settled atmosphere throughout the school.

Pupils enjoy the leadership opportunities on offer. The school council has been instrumental in representing pupils' voice. For example, they have influenced menu options and broadened the range of lunchtime clubs. Pupils have a range of opportunities to take their learning into the local community. Year 7 pupils demonstrated their excitement as they rehearsed for their upcoming Christmas performance.

Leaders have successfully created a culture where staff feel valued and supported. Staff have established a strong sense of collaboration. Usefully, specialist knowledge is shared across the trust. As a result, all staff have opportunities to develop their knowledge and expertise. Governance at all levels is strong and well organised. They have played a vital role in supporting leaders with ongoing expansion and improvement work.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a culture of vigilance about safeguarding that permeates across the school. Robust induction processes and the weekly staff 'soundbites' training ensure that keeping pupils safe is uppermost in everyone's mind. Staff are well equipped to identify risks to pupils and where help may be required. Adults sensitively seek to understand the difficulties pupils may face.

Pupils are taught about how to stay safe online. They put this knowledge into practice by using these skills in lessons. Pupils say they feel safe and can talk to a trusted adult if they need help.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils who are at the early stages of reading are not receiving the precise help they need to develop their phonic knowledge and language comprehension. This means some pupils are not becoming confident readers. Leaders know that this is a priority and have recently implemented a new approach to teaching phonics. They now need to carefully monitor the implementation of these changes to develop pupils' fluency and enjoyment in reading.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour, or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, The Abbey School, to be outstanding in July 2012.

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.

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

Unique reference number	146255
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10241572
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	132
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Ralph Johnson
Chair of governing body	Katie Hewett
Headteacher	David Jackson
Website	www.abbey.surrey.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Abbey School provides specialist support for pupils with autism spectrum disorder and moderate learning difficulties. All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school converted to become an academy in September 2018.
- The school does not make use of alternative education provision.
- 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

- 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 the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, members of the school's senior leadership team, the special educational needs and disabilities coordinator team, subject leaders, teachers, and teaching assistants.
- The lead inspector met with representatives from the governing body, including the chair.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer of the trust, and the vice-chair of the board of trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum planning in a range of subjects.
- Inspectors also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and outside during social times.
- Inspectors reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising safeguarding records and policies, speaking to staff and governors and discussing this with pupils.
- The inspection team considered the views of parents shared through Ofsted Parent View. They gathered the views of pupils and staff through surveys and discussions conducted throughout the inspection.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of the school's documentation, including school improvement documentation and governing body minutes.

Inspection team

Jo Petch, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Alice Roberts

His Majesty's Inspector

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