

Inspection of Abbeywood School

Rother Way, Hellaby Industrial Estate, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S66 8QN

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are safe and happy at this school. All pupils at Abbeywood have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school develops a highly detailed support plan for each pupil. Staff implement these plans very well. Many pupils join this school after long periods of time out of education. Once settled at Abbeywood, pupils display extremely positive attitudes to learning. Pupils attend, and behave, very well. Pupils learn how to understand, and manage, their feelings. Most parents and carers speak highly of the difference they see in their child at this school. More than one parent refers to the school as 'life changing'.

Pupils appreciate the wide range of subjects and qualifications on offer to them. These include vocational courses, such as hospitality and catering, and hair and beauty. Pupils are proud of what they achieve.

The school prepares pupils for life outside of school extremely well. Pupils benefit from an extensive enrichment programme. This includes regular trips and visits. Pupils have multiple opportunities to develop their talents and interests. Pupils are involved in a lot of charity work. All pupils follow a taught life skills programme. The school has a studio flat where pupils practise how to live independently.

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

The school is highly aspirational for pupils. The curriculum is ambitious. All subject programmes lead to recognised qualifications, including GCSEs and vocational awards. Subject plans are well organised. It is clear how pupils will build up key knowledge and skills from Year 5 to the end of Year 11. Pupils' workbooks show the pride pupils take in their work. Pupils are able to confidently recall what they have learned.

In most subjects, the delivery of planned learning in lessons is highly effective. Sometimes, however, lesson activities do not match the intended learning as precisely as they need to. This happens more often when staff are delivering outside of their subject specialism.

The school gathers a lot of information on pupils when they join the school. The proprietor's clinical team adds to this information with detailed assessments. Staff use this information very well. Pupils get the help they need to stay calm and focused in lessons. For example, pupils with sensory needs have specially designed equipment, such as rocker chairs, fidget toys and weighted blankets.

The school prioritises reading. All pupils understand that reading is important. At the same time, every day, each pupil has a structured reading activity. For pupils at the early stage of reading this is a phonics lesson. Trained staff teach phonics very well. Pupils quickly become independent readers. The school reinforces the importance of wider reading, through a reading enrichment programme. This includes regular trips out of school linked to reading. For example, older pupils recently went to the statue

dedicated to the author Barry Hines as part of their work on the book 'A Kestrel for a Knave'.

Some pupils join the school with a history of very low attendance. The school develops highly effective transition plans for pupils when they join the school. New pupils quickly move to full-time attendance. The school is very well ordered. Pupils are respectful of each other and polite to adults. Staff know that pupils may, at times, become anxious or distressed. Staff confidently provide well-judged support to pupils when needed. There is no disruption to learning.

The support for pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. The importance of learning about self, the community and the wider world is woven through the curriculum. Pupils learn about lifestyles and beliefs that are different to their own. There is a well-designed personal, social and health education programme. Pupils learn how to be healthy and stay safe. The school's teaching of relationships and sex education complies with statutory requirements.

All pupils receive comprehensive careers education. Older pupils get individual support from an independent careers' advisor. Pupils gain work experience from a range of local businesses. Staff support pupils on visits to local colleges and universities. All pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11, have moved on successfully into further education or training.

The proprietor ensures that all the independent school standards are met. School policies are comprehensive and reflect current statutory guidance. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010 effectively. The school has effective health and safety systems in place. Site staff implement these systems consistently and robustly.

The proprietor's arrangements for governance are extremely robust. There is a school board which meets half termly. The members of the school board are experienced and skilled leaders. The proprietor has established a comprehensive calendar of monitoring activities. Staff implement these daily, weekly and monthly monitoring tasks diligently.

Leaders are considerate of staff workload and well-being. Staff spoke warmly of the support that they get from leaders. Staff receive robust training for child protection and wider safeguarding. The school's training about pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities is equally strong. The proprietor recognises that staff would benefit from more subject-specific training.

There is regular communication between home and school. The school has forged helpful links with local businesses, charities and community groups.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

- In a small number of subjects, planned learning is not implemented as effectively as it could be. This is limiting what pupils know and can do in these subjects. The school should review pedagogic and adaptive practice to ensure that implementation of subject plans is consistently strong across all subjects. In order to embed this, the school should complete its work on the further development of subject leadership.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	146571
DfE registration number	372/6000
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	10286466
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Witherslack Group Ltd
Chair	Richard Wilkins
Headteacher	Sarah Douglas
Annual fees (day pupils)	£66,540 to £98,586
Telephone number	01709 916900
Website	www.witherslackgroup.co.uk
Email address	abbeywood@witherslackgroup.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	4 to 6 June 2019

Information about this school

- Abbeywood School is an independent special school, which is part of the Witherslack Group. It is situated on an industrial estate in Rotherham.
- The school has had one material change inspection since the last standard inspection. The material change inspection took place on 24 March 2022.
- Since the last standard inspection, the number of pupils the school is registered to take has increased from 51 to 96 and the school has opened a second site. The school's original site is at Rother Way, Hellaby Industrial Estate, Bramley, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S66 8QN. The school's second site is at Kea Park, Hellaby Industrial Estate, Rotherham S66 8LB. The school's Kea Park site is mainly for older pupils and has a large vocational workshop space.
- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, learning difficulties and neurodevelopmental needs. Some pupils have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school is registered to take pupils from 10 to 18 years. At the time of this inspection, there were no post-16 students on roll.
- 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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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, deputy headteachers, assistant headteacher, the pastoral manager and the proprietor. Inspectors also met with a range of other staff, including the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and members of the school's clinical team.
- Inspectors undertook a tour of the school and visited the classrooms, social areas and other facilities. The lead inspector checked the school buildings and grounds, on both sites, against the independent school standards.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English (including reading), mathematics, science and physical education. The deep dive for each subject included a meeting with curriculum leaders and a review of subject documents and plans. The deep dive also involved lesson visits, scrutiny of pupils' work and meetings with pupils and staff.
- Inspectors reviewed the curriculum plans of all other subjects.
- Inspectors scrutinised school records, including admission and attendance registers.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school throughout the day, including breaktimes and in lessons. Inspectors spoke to pupils about their experience of the school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors scrutinised school documents and the arrangements to safeguard pupils. This included meeting with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and speaking with staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's survey, Ofsted Parent View and surveys completed by staff and pupils. The lead inspector spoke to representatives of the local authorities who commission places at the school and to the local authority's designated officer.

The school's proposed change to the age range 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, we 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.**

Information about the material change inspection

- The proprietor wishes to lower the age of admission to Abbeywood School from 10 years to 8 years. This material change request is in response to local need. Leaders have spoken with referring local authorities as part of the proprietor's planning for the school's future development.
- The school intends to continue to cater specifically for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs, learning difficulties and neurodevelopmental needs, including autism. The school's SENCO, clinical team and DSL are experienced in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. These staff are already in post and able to support, and provide effective safeguarding, to eight and nine-year-old pupils with SEND.

- The school has appropriate curriculum plans and learning resources in place for the teaching of eight- and nine-year-old pupils. These plans and resources include those required for the delivery of relationships education. The proprietor intends to appoint an additional primary teacher and support assistant if the material change request is approved by the DfE.

Inspection team

Patricia Head, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Philippa Kermotschuk

His Majesty's Inspector

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