

Inspection of Abbot's Lea School

Beaconsfield Road, Woolton, Liverpool, Merseyside L25 6EE

Inspection dates: 10 and 11 July 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Requires Improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel safe and happy at Abbot's Lea School. Caring relationships between pupils and staff thrive in this warm and compassionate setting. Pupils said that staff take very good care of them. They appreciate the support that staff give them. In turn, pupils display highly positive attitudes and behave exceptionally well. They, including children in the early years and students in the sixth form, treat each other with respect.

The school has high expectations for each pupil's academic learning and personal development. Pupils are eager to meet these expectations. All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school works tirelessly to ensure that any barriers to learning are overcome. This enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well. Pupils are highly motivated and enthusiastic learners.

Pupils relish the wide variety of experiences on offer. Examples include horticulture experiences and science roadshows. Pupils excitedly told inspectors about the musical showcase that they performed during the inspection.

Pupils are proud to represent the school by undertaking many leadership roles. Older pupils support younger pupils by acting as buddies. The newly appointed 'head pupils', and active school council, are keen to make a difference by acting as advocates in the community.

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

Pupils, from the early years through to the sixth form, follow an ambitious and highly effective curriculum. Staff know what to teach, when to teach it and why. They tailor learning for each pupil. This attention to detail shines through. Pupils benefit greatly from this and, as a result, achieve remarkably well. Pupils' learning in all subjects links to the outside world. This helps to prepare pupils for adulthood.

The curriculum leads to pupils taking a suite of GCSE, functional skills and/or other vocational qualifications. Staff expertly adapt how they teach to meet pupils' SEND and address any gaps in learning effectively. Staff use targeted questioning to check that pupils have learned what they have been taught.

The school prioritises pupils' communication skills. Staff work closely with families and speech and language therapists to understand pupils' communication needs. The school works exceptionally well with pupils who do not communicate verbally. It establishes effective communication systems to help pupils' needs and wishes be heard. These systems include symbol exchange and assistive language devices that are used increasingly well by pupils over time.

From the moment pupils start school, reading is a high priority. For example, the school promotes pupils' love of reading by immersing children in the early years in stories, rhymes and poems. For pupils who are not ready to learn phonics, staff help

them to recognise and respond to sounds. When pupils are ready, they access daily sessions that develop their understanding of phonics well. Teachers implement a structured phonics approach that is tailored to the needs of individual pupils. As they progress through the phonics programme, the school ensures that pupils have regular opportunities to practise their reading. Over time, pupils become increasingly confident and fluent readers.

Pupils behave exceptionally well in lessons. They understand the school's extremely well-established routines. Some pupils require a highly considered approach to support them to manage their behaviour. The school has a specialist team which helps this group of pupils. As a result of the assistance that they receive, these pupils engage with education increasingly well over time.

The school is unrelenting in its approach to improving pupils' rates of attendance. The school's supportive actions have led to great success in improving many pupils' rates of attendance. Most pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, attend regularly and on time.

The school's exceptional personal development programme is woven into all aspects of school life. Pupils learn about different types of friendships, families and relationships. This means that pupils are clear about what a healthy and unhealthy relationship looks like. There is a clear focus on celebrating difference, tolerance, respect and diversity across the school. Pupils have a broad understanding of the differences between people.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, benefit from comprehensive careers education, information and guidance. Staff work with pupils very well to explore possible career pathways. This work includes aspirational college and training opportunities for pupils. Pupils have the information that they need to make well-considered decisions about their next steps.

The school works carefully to support staff with their workload and well-being. Most staff are supportive of the positive changes that have been made since the last inspection. However, there is more to be done to ensure that all staff are fully on board with the school's ambitious vision.

Governors offer high levels of support and challenge to the school. This leads to exemplary educational provision for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- A minority of staff have concerns regarding changes that are being implemented in the school. While this does not impact the exemplary education that pupils receive, on occasion it impacts the relationship between leaders and staff. The school should ensure that it further improves relationships between staff and leaders so that the school's vision for ongoing improvement is understood and enacted by all staff.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	104736
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10293077
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	272
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robert Lowe
Headteacher	Ania Hildrey
Website	www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	2 and 3 November 2021, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision for pupils.
- All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care plan. All pupils have autism spectrum disorder and cognition and learning needs. Some pupils also have social, emotional and mental health needs and/or sensory and physical difficulties.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's educational provision.
- Inspectors discussed the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, other senior leaders, staff, pupils and members of the governing body.
- An inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, geography and early reading, as well as the school's personalised bespoke provision (for students with most complex special educational needs). For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects. An inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- 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 spoke to staff about pupils' behaviour and staff's workload in school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online staff survey. They took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's online pupil survey. Inspectors considered the views of pupils through discussions during the inspection.

Inspection team

Rebecca Sharples, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Kate Bowker	His Majesty's Inspector
Dawn Farrent	Ofsted Inspector
Gil Bourgade	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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