

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Abbey School

Little Common Lane, Kimberworth, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S61 2RA

Inspection dates:

25 and 26 March 2025

Outcome

Abbey School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The executive headteacher of this school is Luci Windle. The head of school is Wayne Askham. This school is part of Nexus Multi Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Warren Carat, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Rachel Potts.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud to attend this exceptional school. Pupils know that staff care for them deeply and that there is always an adult there for them when needed. Consequently, pupils love their time in school and behave extremely well.

The school has extremely high aspirations for all pupils. There are no restrictions placed on what the school expects pupils to achieve. Pupils have numerous opportunities to develop their employability skills, as well as their independence and communication skills. Staff have a thorough understanding of pupils' individual and complex needs. This, along with an ambitious curriculum, ensures that pupils are extremely well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils' personal development is woven through everything the school does. Pupils appreciate the impressive range of opportunities they are offered. These include inclusive sports opportunities such as netball, cricket, dance festivals and school trips. Pupils are keen to help others and support local charities. They regularly visit their community, where they use the local shops, libraries and museums, and support the elderly.

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

Since the previous inspection, the school has continued to go from strength to strength. Leaders have a clear and ambitious vision for pupils to go on to further education and employment. They create purposeful, real-life learning environments in which pupils are eager to learn.

The school plans the curriculum exceptionally well to meet each pupil's needs. Staff check pupils' learning carefully. They know exactly what each pupil needs to learn and do next. This ensures that all pupils receive a high-quality education. Irrespective of their starting points or individual needs, pupils achieve well. At key stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils study a diverse range of qualifications that prepare them successfully for their next steps.

Communication is central to the school's approach. Young children learn to express their needs and communicate their choices. Staff model spoken language clearly, and they provide strong support. This helps children to communicate well, whether through speech, symbol support, sign language or communication devices. Older pupils are supported to communicate confidently through the many projects the school offers. These include the pupils' parliament and clubs designed to build confidence, such as the Abbey's Man Club and Girl Power Days.

The school is passionate about ensuring that all pupils learn to read fluently. Reading materials are well matched to pupils' reading levels. Daily pre-reading and phonics sessions enable pupils who struggle with reading to become confident readers. Highly trained staff provide targeted support to help pupils build their fluency in reading. Staff are relentless in seeking ways to engage pupils in a love of reading. Pupils have regular access to a wealth of high-quality texts.

Pupils are highly motivated and enjoy learning. The youngest children quickly learn how to follow routines and take turns. Staff support pupils well in learning to manage their own behaviour. Playtimes are full of activity, with exciting play spaces and pupils socialising happily with their peers. Older pupils are afforded opportunities to support younger children through leadership programmes. Pupils can talk confidently about the support they provide each other and why. The school builds strong relationships with families and carefully monitors pupils' attendance. This ensures that pupils attend school regularly.

The school places a great emphasis on the importance of pupils' wider personal development. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves healthy both physically and emotionally. They know how to stay safe online. Pupils celebrate religious festivals. They explore equality and diversity through school assemblies and a whole host of special events. These foster the understanding, tolerance and respect that are deeply embedded in the school's community.

The school prepares pupils exceptionally well for life in modern Britain. It provides comprehensive careers education, advice and guidance. Pupils are offered regular and meaningful opportunities to immerse themselves in the world of work through their

'Steam Street' jobs. Pupils need to apply for these jobs, which include hospitality, IT support and play worker. Pupils receive payment through house points that can then be exchanged for rewards. Pupils highly value these roles, which in turn support them to develop their confidence and the belief that they can go on to gain employment.

Trustees and governors share the school's passion for providing the absolute best for pupils. Staff are all very proud to work at the school. Staff value the support that they receive for their well-being, workload and their continued professional development. Parents and carers are glowing in their praise for the school. They typically say that staff 'go above and beyond' in all they do for their children and their families.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to outstanding for overall effectiveness in May 2019.

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	142768
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	10346580
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	233
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Rachel Potts
CEO of the trust	Warren Carratt
Headteacher	Luci Windle (Executive Headteacher) Wayne Askham (Head of School)
Website	www.abbeyschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 May 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Abbey School is a special school that supports pupils with moderate learning difficulties, autism and other attachment difficulties. Some pupils have additional sensory and/or communication needs. Some pupils have specific medical needs, and other may need support for their social, emotional and mental health
- All pupils at the school have an education, health and care plan.
- Abbey School is part of Nexus Multi Academy Trust.
- Abbey school has a hub based at Horizon College in Barnsley. This hub is for secondary-age pupils between 11 and 16 and serves the Barnsley area, allowing pupils

to stay in their local community and receive the specialist support that Abbey School offers.

- The school also has a sixth-form department on the main Abbey site.
- 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

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the executive headteacher, head of school, assistant headteachers and other senior leaders and staff in the school, including those responsible for behaviour, the sixth form, safeguarding and pastoral care.
- The lead inspector spoke with the CEO of the trust, members of the trust board and the local governing body.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 held discussions with staff, which focused on their own workload and well-being.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including documents relating to school improvement.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.
- Inspectors held meetings and informal discussions with various groups of pupils, including representatives from the school's pupil parliament.

Inspection team

Berni Moorcroft, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Claire Leech

Ofsted Inspector

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