

Abbotsfield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	102449
Local Authority	Hillingdon
Inspection number	286380
Inspection dates	27–28 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Barry Jones

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School	602
6th form	74
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr David Jones
Headteacher	Mr David Henderson
Date of previous school inspection	6 December 2005
School address	Clifton Gardens Hillingdon Uxbridge UB10 0EX
Telephone number	01895 237350
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Abbotsfield School is a relatively small school for boys. It is designated as a six form entry school but usually recruits boys for just three or four forms. It is an extended school and receives funding to provide a breakfast club, homework club and a club to raise the self-esteem of boys. The proportion of pupils who are entitled to free school meals is higher than the average, as are the percentages of pupils who come from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language. Pupils enter the school with attainment which is broadly average. The school shares a sixth form with the neighbouring Swakeleys School for girls. The head and deputy head of the sixth form are on the staff of both schools. When Abbotsfield School was inspected in November 2002, it was judged to require special measures. The current headteacher took up post in April 2005. In December 2005 the school was inspected again and removed from special measures. The school was given a Notice to Improve as achievement and standards and the quality of teaching and learning were inadequate.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

The school has made significant progress since the previous inspection in several respects. In particular, the quality of teaching is now satisfactory. Despite this, some of the school's problems were so deep rooted that its overall effectiveness remains inadequate because too many boys continue to underachieve, particularly in English. The teaching is not yet consistently good to counteract the legacy arising from previous weaknesses in the teaching and the curriculum. Since the previous inspection, the school's expenditure has considerably exceeded its income and it is now faced with having to make staff redundancies as a result. In accordance with section 13 of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than, in all the circumstances, it could be reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required to improve the standards and achievement, particularly in English, and in the financial management of the school. Value for money is therefore unsatisfactory.

Boys join the school with attainment that is broadly average. In the 2006 GCSE examinations the standards were well below average. Given the boys' starting points this means that achievement is inadequate. Performance between subjects is more variable than in most schools. While results in mathematics have improved significantly in recent years those in English have declined and are well below what should be achieved. The school is taking robust actions to address this variation but it is too soon to judge whether they are having the desired effect on raising achievement. The school has accurately diagnosed why there has been underperformance in past external examinations. This diagnosis identified further major weaknesses which were not apparent at the time of the previous inspection. Namely, there were weaknesses in the curriculum, and several subjects such as modern foreign languages were given too little time and this was reflected in the low performance in the GCSE examinations. The school has therefore rightly added to the issues that have had to be tackled by the new management team since the previous inspection. The curriculum has been modified and the evidence is that standards in these subjects are rising. Consequently, boys are on track to do better in the 2007 external examinations but still not as well as they should in key subjects such as English.

The curriculum is now satisfactory with some good features. In particular, it has been enhanced in the last two years by providing more opportunities for boys to study vocational course. This has increased the motivation of some boys and contributes to the significant improvement in the attendance rates which are now above average. It is also reflected in the attitudes of the boys who enjoy school and say that there have been marked improvements in the school since the arrival of the new headteacher. There has been a concerted effort to improve boys' behaviour. Although some parents perceive that it is still an issue, the effort has been successful and behaviour is now good. One boy summed this up, 'Ours is one of the strictest schools. You know you won't get away with anything since the headteacher came.'

The quality of care, guidance and support is now good overall and consequently boys' personal development and well-being are satisfactory and improving. The support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is satisfactory, well managed and improving too. As a result these boys make satisfactory progress socially and academically. Careers advice is good but academic guidance is less strong in other ways. The school has not identified underperformance early enough in Years 7 to 11 in recent times and so has not taken timely corrective action. New

systems have been introduced which have good potential and early indications are that they are their effective.

The leadership and management of the headteacher are very good and he has driven improvements in the school. The effectiveness of middle managers has improved and most are overseeing work in their departments well. This has resulted in improvements in pupils' achievement and behaviour, in the quality of teaching, the curriculum and in pastoral care. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well. However, the lack of prudent financial management means that there are some uncertainties over the school's ability to finance further improvement. Overall though, the capacity to improve is satisfactory.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is satisfactory. Pass rates at GCE A level are above national rates but standards are below average overall because there are relatively few higher grades. The value-added is average but improving. Boys make satisfactory progress because of the satisfactory teaching. In the past, boys have not always been well prepared for the sixth form and as a result, a significant minority have not completed their courses. The quality of guidance and support has improved in the last year and is now good so that achievement is beginning to rise further. Boys are looked after well and their personal development is good. Although time for one-to-one tutorials has recently been increased it is not always used effectively yet to help boys improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards and achievement, particularly in English.
- Agree a recovery plan with the local authority to remove the budget deficit whilst ensuring that the school is able to provide a good standard of education.
- Strengthen the procedures for tracking boys' progress so that timely support can be provided.
- Ensure that all middle managers carry out their role effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Grade for sixth form: 3

In 2005, there were significant improvements in the Key Stage 3 results. The improvement in mathematics has been sustained since then because the department is well led, staff in it have received targeted effective training and have raised their expectations of what boys can achieve. However, in 2006 results were exceptionally low in English. The school's scrutiny has revealed that standards in reading are too low and this has not been tackled sufficiently rigorously by the department and weaknesses in English persist.

At GCSE level, the progress made by pupils ranks in the bottom 10% of schools. The proportion of boys attaining five or more higher grades at GCSE level is much lower than in most schools. There is considerable variation between subjects which partly reflects previous inconsistencies in teaching, in tracking the progress of boys and in the leadership of different subjects. Performance has also been too low even in some departments that are led well, for instance, modern foreign languages. These departments were allocated insufficient time to allow in-depth coverage of all necessary topics. The school's monitoring shows significant improvements in 2007, particularly in vocational subjects. However, there is insufficient improvement in the

proportion attaining five or more grades when English and mathematics are included. The underachievement is distributed fairly evenly across groups in the school. Boys with English as an additional language make the same progress as the majority of their classmates but this is now accelerating as monitoring improves. Boys with learning difficulties and disabilities make satisfactory progress and this is reflected in the steady improvement in the proportion of boys attaining five or more GCSE passes.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 2

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The school has attached a high priority to improving behaviour. It has been successful because there is a consistent implementation of agreed whole-school policies that strike a good balance between sanctions and rewards. The boys have responded well and behaviour is now good. They say that there is little bullying and that the infrequent incidences are dealt with effectively by adults. The school council has grown in stature in the school and boys make a satisfactory contribution to the community. Physical education is a strength of the school and there is good participation by boys. They understand healthy eating issues but this is not reflected in many of their diets. Boys' preparation for their future is unsatisfactory because they have weak literacy and computer skills and lower numbers than expected have continued onto academic courses in the sixth form in some years. Their understanding of career options and work-related skills are improving.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The school's monitoring shows that the percentages of satisfactory and good teaching have improved significantly in each of the last two years. Some of the teachers have improved their practice from satisfactory to good as a result of targeted action. For instance, the school has concentrated whole-staff training sessions on the and;quot;interactive classroomand;quot; and how to question effectively and this is reflected in lessons. Teachers have good classroom management skills and make good use of a range of resources. Consequently, lessons are conducted in a calm atmosphere and the pupils say they are interesting. Teachers give the pupils ample opportunities to express and develop their ideas. New arrangements for supporting pupils with learning difficulties mean that the class teacher is better briefed about the needs of a particular boy and the support assistant is usefully involved in the planning. The teachers vary in their ability to set challenging work for different groups. Marking is inconsistent and does not always indicate to boys how they might improve further.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school has thoughtfully modified its curriculum to meet the needs of individual boys. The new vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 are bringing real purpose to learning and cater for

the interests and aspirations of some boys who had become disaffected. There is a good range of academic courses in the sixth form through close collaboration with the girls' school. There is an improving range of vocational courses and the school is seeking to introduce further choices such as construction and engineering. The curriculum reflects well the different cultures represented in the school. The school has resolved the anomalies and constraints in the previous timetable. There is now a fair distribution of time to each subject which underpins a broad and balanced curriculum. The English department did not make good use of the additional time it was allocated previously and there are still weaknesses in the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. Provision for numeracy is good. The use of computers across the school is not well established in all subjects and boys have too few opportunities to develop their skills. There are a good range of popular extra-curricular activities during lunchtime and after school. Educational visits and trips are very much appreciated by boys. These include sports trips to America and three excursions per year to France to improve their fluency in the language.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Care and support are good in the main school and in the sixth form. The staff show clear commitment and sensitivity to the needs of all boys and particularly to those who are vulnerable. As one Year 10 boy said, 'Our teachers are very committed to giving us all the best opportunities. For example, we are dying to join and;quot;coaching for successand;quot;.' (This is one of the activities which are available to boys wanting extra help.) The support for boys who have English as an additional language has improved significantly in the last year and their progress is consequently being accelerated. They are proud of the opportunity to celebrate their own cultures through school events such as the International Evening. The school places a high priority on building the boys' self-esteem. Its success is shown by their good behaviour and attendance. Boys feel safe and express pride in their school. The school works very well with other agencies to ensure that boys receive the support they need.

Academic guidance in Years 7 to 11 was a significant weakness in the school until a year ago. It is now satisfactory and improving. Careers advice has also improved in the last year and is now good; there are mock interviews for all Year 10 and 11 arranged through a partnership with local businesses. As a result, for the first time all Year 11 boys in 2006 continued into education, employment or training.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The headteacher is resolute and takes difficult decisions after careful consideration of the options. He has a clear vision for the school and this is shared with other staff and the governors. Other managers are held to account well and many of the management systems in the school have been strengthened since the previous inspection. Where weaknesses are identified an action plan is quickly formulated and support and challenge follows. For instance, there is a very detailed plan involving the local authority to improve the teaching of English. Middle managers have been trained well for their roles. Heads of department are now evaluating their subjects, including the monitoring of teaching

quality. Mostly, this is done effectively and is leading to improvements. Sometimes the judgements are a little generous and there are still some inconsistencies in the effectiveness of middle managers. However, most relish their increased responsibilities and are making things happen. The school has established focus groups that comprise senior and less experienced staff. This has been very effective in developing teaching and learning styles because the whole staff feel that they have been involved in the process.

The school has a large budget overspend and this has increased sharply in the last year. As a consequence, the local authority has withdrawn financial delegation from the governors and expenditure by the school has to be approved by officers of the authority. This situation was predictable as the school is over-staffed and there are falling rolls. The governors and the local authority have not taken action early enough and the school is now faced with making severe economies that will involve a significant reduction in staff. The school and the local authority are now working together and have drawn up draft proposals. Some key decisions still need to be made before these proposals can be confirmed as a recovery plan. Urgent action is needed in order that the school can successfully plan for next year.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

4 May 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Abbotsfield School, Clifton Gardens, Hillingdon, Uxbridge, UB10 0EX

Many thanks for your help and cooperation when we inspected your school recently. You told us how much things have improved since the headteacher came about two years ago. You told us that you enjoy coming to school and that you feel safe there. The staff are caring and the teachers make the lessons interesting. I attended the "lunch club" that the school provides for hungry boys on a Wednesday. I could easily see why the chef was awarded "Young chef of the year" by the local mayor. My thanks also to the Year 10 caterers who made my chocolate cake topped with a small Easter egg! Representatives of your school council also told us that their views are valued. One of your main concerns was that you feel that more could be done to improve the environment of the school.

There are many things that have improved in the school since your last inspection. These include more options in Year 10, you get better teaching, and the quality of care and support is good. It seems likely that boys will do better in the external tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11 this year as a result of improvements in the school.

There are four ways in which we have asked the school to improve further.

- Improve results in the external tests and GCSE examinations, particularly in English.
- Ensure that the school does not overspend.
- Check how well you are doing in your work so that support can be given when needed.
- Ensure that all subjects are equally well led.

You can play your part by making sure that you ask if you do not understand. The teachers will be very pleased to help you. For our part, Ofsted will check further on the school's progress.

We wish you every success.

Barry Jones
Lead inspector