

Abbot's Lea School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104736
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	287019
Inspection date	2 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Jim Alexander

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	111
6th form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wendy Simon
Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Lucas
Date of previous school inspection	1 July 2002
School address	Beaconsfield Road Woolton Liverpool Merseyside L25 6EE
Telephone number	0151 428 1161
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Age group	5–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Abbot's Lea, a school situated in Woolton on the outskirts of Liverpool, admits pupils from a wide area beyond its immediate catchment. It provides for both boys and girls aged 5 to 19 with autistic spectrum disorders. When they arrive at school their attainment is typically well below average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is above average. The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups or who have English as an additional language are smaller than those found nationally. All pupils have statements of special educational need. The majority of pupils join the school from mainstream schools; some, however, arrive having been excluded from other special schools. A growing number of pupils admitted into the school have more complex learning difficulties and associated disorders. Since the time of the last inspection the boarding provision has closed. The governing body has received significant support from the local authority to manage the school budget effectively and a new headteacher has been appointed. The school has recently achieved the Investors in People and Healthy Schools Awards.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school with outstanding features. It cares for its pupils extremely well and is one where their personal development and well-being thrives. It is a happy school which understands the need for pupils to feel not only safe and secure but also that their success is recognised: there is an atmosphere of celebration in what the pupils achieve. Pupils join the school at various stages in their school life and most have had unsettled experiences in previous schools. The majority are admitted around the time of transition between primary and secondary school. They are helped to settle quickly and respond well to the individual attention they receive. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their school and are given jobs and tasks to perform. They appreciate this and feel positive about the contribution they make. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, both in lessons and around the school: they are helped to manage their feelings exceptionally well. Pupils enjoy school because, 'we like being with friends and enjoy lessons'. Consequently their attendance is good.

Prior to arriving at Abbot's Lea, many pupils' attainment has been adversely affected by disrupted learning at their previous schools. As a result, their starting points are well below national expectations for their age. Irrespective of their age, however, new pupils respond quickly to good teaching and outstanding support and begin to make positive gains. By the time students leave school standards are still low, but school data clearly demonstrate that all pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science, in relation to their starting points. The progress they make in their personal and social development is excellent. Individual assessment records of pupils' attainment are accurate, comprehensive and well maintained. The good teaching offered by all staff is effectively supported by a well designed curriculum. A notable feature of the curriculum is how it addresses the needs of pupils very effectively, particularly their communication and social use of language. This helps pupils become confident that they can succeed. The excellent curriculum is also enhanced by effective links that are made between subjects. As a result pupils not only gain understanding in certain subjects, but also can apply these skills across a range of activities. Secondary students making pizzas, for example, used key skills of estimating, weighing and recording, which they developed in their mathematics lessons.

Since the time of the previous inspection the school has faced a number of difficult issues. All parents continue to support the staff in their efforts to get the best from each pupil, although a small minority remain concerned about the strategic direction the local authority has taken with the school in the recent past. A seconded headteacher was brought in to lead the school during this unsettled period. Whilst much time was consumed managing the issues, the headteacher successfully ensured the whole school community remained focused on developing the well-being of the pupils. The seconded headteacher's appointment was made permanent in February 2006. The headteacher's excellent leadership and the strong support of the deputy headteacher and senior leadership team have ensured that the school is once again on a very even keel. The school has recently introduced a computer system that collates assessment data. This is enabling the school to begin to track the academic progress pupils make over time. The senior leaders are already identifying pupils who are performing well, as well as those requiring further support. The school acts quickly to ensure such needs are addressed through the individual education plans that pupils have. A significant number of pupils, but not all, are involved in agreeing their own individual education plan targets. When pupils are involved more fully in this process it clearly benefits them well, giving a greater ownership of their learning

journey. The school is also currently incorporating the sixth form data into the tracking system. This now needs to be embedded into the practice of the school so that all pupils can be helped to make the best possible progress.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The school grades this as good and the inspection agrees. The post-16 provision is effectively managed and resources are used efficiently to enable students who need extra time to complete accredited courses. Their confidence and independence are developed extremely well.

Programmes followed by students are very well matched to their capabilities. Because of good teaching, achievement is good in academic courses and in practical opportunities that develop independence and life skills. However, the school has not included the sixth form assessment data into the whole school tracking system and this can make monitoring the progress students make difficult. The high standard of personal development of many of the students enables them to contribute greatly to the life of the school. Through good leadership, learning opportunities have been extended through partnership with other sixth form providers and also with a local university.

What the school should do to improve further

- Embed the newly developed tracking procedure to ensure all pupils make the best possible academic progress.
- Ensure all pupils, appropriate to their understanding, are involved in setting and agreeing their own individual education plan targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Achievement is good. All pupils have statements of special educational need and, on entry, assessment shows attainment is well below average. Individual pupil records demonstrate that progress in English, mathematics and science is good in relation to their very low starting points. Pupils' progress in personal, social and health education is particularly strong for all age groups. Although standards reached by the time students leave school remain low, there is no significant underachievement by any identifiable group. All learners aged 16 go on to successfully gain accreditation for their learning at a level matched to their capability. Pupils have individual education plans and, in the majority of cases, specified targets are met within the planned time. All students are included in reviewing their own individual education plans and a growing number are involved in setting their own targets.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Personal development and well-being are excellent and underpin the success of this good school. Attitudes and behaviour of pupils attending the daily Chi Gung (a time of therapeutic and meditative exercise) show that what happens has real meaning for them. They are helped to develop an understanding of their feelings and those of others. In their daily lives they are given opportunities to help one another, the more able caring for the most vulnerable. This is

indicative of their excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils know about healthy lifestyles and their excellent behaviour means they are safe in their classrooms and around the school. Pupils make a positive contribution to the life of the school as well as the wider community. They take their school council responsibility seriously and have mature discussions about how their school can improve further. Good arrangements to prepare students for their economic well-being include the excellent programme of work experience placements and other social skills opportunities.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and reflects the good progress pupils make over time. Typically, the management of behaviour in lessons is excellent. Because of their special educational needs, pupils from time to time display challenging behaviour. These difficulties are managed exceptionally well, with the minimum of fuss. Well deployed and highly effective teaching assistants offer invaluable support to ensure good progress is made by pupils in their lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well to match the individual needs of pupils. The use of visual cues, to help pupils access their learning, is a strong feature in the school. Teachers have strong relationships with pupils and high expectations for their personal development and well-being. Pupils respond well and consequently achieve much in lessons and individual support time. Information and communication technology is used effectively to support teaching and learning. This helps to engage pupils and supports their good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is excellent. It addresses the communication and social use of language needs of pupils very effectively, thereby helping all to become confident that they can succeed. The full range of National Curriculum subjects appropriate to each age group is offered. Pupils are encouraged to live safe and healthy lifestyles. Meals are well balanced and there are excellent opportunities and facilities for pupils to take exercise and join in competitive sports. Pupils are taught about the risks from smoking and substance abuse. Sex education is provided in line with the policy of the school. The curriculum is significantly enriched by opportunities to travel: a recent residential trip to Ireland, for example, is still much talked about. Pupils explain, 'The trips we have, like going to Ireland, are excellent!' Opportunities for work experience are varied and support young people well in preparing them for adult life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and this has an extremely positive impact on the pupils' personal development. The school has successfully established a very positive learning community in which pupils and adults treat each other with mutual respect and regard. Pupils

know that they can turn to adults for support or advice: they say, 'staff, teachers, everyone are really helpful here'. In lessons, great care is taken to ensure tasks are understood and that any pupil needing help and reassurance receive it. They are guided by well planned individual 'teach-strips' (work schedules). Pupils know that the school takes their ideas seriously. Risks to pupils and staff are very carefully assessed. Pupils are taught to deal with key risks within and beyond the school. Child protection procedures are in place and understood by staff members. The school meets the latest requirements for safeguarding children.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The excellent headteacher, together with a strong deputy headteacher and effective senior leadership team, know the school's strengths well. Indeed the school's capacity to improve is good because it examines its performance carefully and takes action to make things better. They have successfully led the school through a difficult couple of years. The closure of the residential provision caused concern for a number of parents, as has the admission of a greater number of pupils with more complex learning difficulties and associated disorders. The local authority proactively supported the school for a period of time, ensuring that the governing body managed the budget effectively. Governors are now much better informed about the overall quality of provision. They are regularly involved in monitoring the work of the school more robustly and are developing in their role as critical friends. Governors now manage the budget wisely and to good effect. Consequently, the school provides good value for money. The partnership with other schools and organisations is exceptionally good and this supports the work of the school very well. Leaders have ensured that improvements have been made since the last inspection.

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Annex A

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?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

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?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
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?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Inspection of Abbot's Lea School, Woolton, L25 6EE

Thank you very much for working so hard and being so friendly when I visited your school recently. It was really useful to know what you think about your school and also how much you enjoy what the school provides for you. I think Abbot's Lea is a good school, which does a number of things exceptionally well.

Many things impressed me, in particular how all of the staff in your school want you to do really well. I know you recognise how much they care for you and in return you try really hard in your work. Your behaviour was fantastic. Well done for all of you that attend so regularly, it makes such a difference to what you can achieve. I was also very impressed with the Chi Gung that you take part in every morning. What a great way to start the day!

To help the school improve further, I have asked the staff to use the information they have about how well you work to help you make even better progress. Many of you also help to set your own targets, but not all of you. I have asked the school to ensure that all of you have a chance to agree the targets you are aiming for.

I am confident that you will play your part in helping Abbot's Lea go from strength to strength. Thank you once again for being so polite and friendly.