



The Abbey School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118831
Local Authority Kent
Inspection number 291266
Inspection dates 1–2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Robin Hammerton HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	London Road
School category	Community		Faversham
Age range of pupils	11–19		ME13 8RZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01795 532633
Number on roll (school)	947	Fax number	01795 539931
Number on roll (6th form)	114		
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Patrick Mulcahy
		Headteacher	Catrin Woodend
Date of previous school inspection	8 October 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–19	1–2 November 2006	291266

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average size secondary school, with sixth form, serves a market town and rural district with some significant social deprivation. It is non-selective, in a grammar school area. Consequently, it recruits relatively few pupils of the highest academic potential. Most pupils are White British. The school has an autism unit for 32 pupils. There is also a significant number of looked after children on roll. A higher than average proportion of pupils is identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities. Additionally, the school has its own registered nursery, providing care and Foundation Stage education for under fives. This was inspected at the same time, with a separate report. A new headteacher began in September 2006. At the same time, the school achieved business and enterprise specialist status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Abbey School provides a sound education, with many good aspects. In particular, pupils in Years 7 to 11 make good progress. This is because of the strong and relevant curriculum and high quality, individual pastoral support and academic guidance. Provision and achievement in the sixth form are satisfactory. Pupils with autism, and those looked after by the Local Authority, are provided for well and make good progress. The school has enhanced its facilities significantly. This is an improving school which is well placed to continue to improve.

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. In class, pupils are generally attentive and interested, although some lessons are disturbed by poor behaviour. Opportunities for cultural (especially multicultural) and spiritual development are restricted. Pupils heed safety issues appropriately and many pupils learn to develop a healthy lifestyle through good catering options and effective physical education provision. Pupils contribute suitably to the school and local community, although opportunities for this are limited. Attendance is satisfactory.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but with significant variations across the school. Some lessons are excellent whilst others are inadequate, with a full range in between. Over time, whole-school action taken has not been effective enough to improve this situation and make the quality and style of teaching more consistent. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, much better work-related options and facilities have been recently introduced and more students are staying on. This reflects the new specialist status and helps pupils gain skills needed for their future economic wellbeing. However, limited opportunities to use and develop skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects tend to reduce this.

The new headteacher has made a good start, initiating worthwhile improvements to school self-evaluation and improvement planning. She has won the respect of staff and is encouraging her colleagues to give of their best. Leadership, management and governance are good. Rightly, the headteacher sees the need to consolidate this position by establishing an overarching sense of direction, or vision, for the school and ensuring pupils have a greater say.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

The sixth form is improving and is satisfactory with some good features. Joint provision with nearby colleges, and another school, ensures that a growing range of courses is available. Students see the relevance of the courses offered and recruitment into the sixth form has increased. Retention rates are good, although many students drop courses. Many courses start in Key Stage 4 and extend into the sixth form, providing stability and appropriate continuity and progression. Students appreciate the approachability and availability of staff, who provide satisfactory care and support. Academic progress is reviewed regularly and students are aware of their targets and what to do to improve. Adequate careers advice is provided. Teaching and learning

are satisfactory overall and students benefit from the generally small size of study groups.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the evaluation and development of teaching and learning, so that consistency increases and the overall quality improves.
- Increase the provision for literacy, numeracy and ICT across the curriculum.
- Develop the vision for the future direction of the school, involving the whole school community including pupils.
- Improve further pupils' personal development and well-being, including their opportunities for cultural and spiritual development.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

At Key Stage 3, standards are below average which reflects the non-selective intake. However, progress through the key stage is the fastest in the school and achievement is good. All pupils, especially boys, make significantly better progress in mathematics and science than their peers in most other schools. Standards in these subjects have improved in recent years, with pupils often attaining demanding targets. In English, standards and progress are lower but rose notably in Year 9 in 2006.

At GCSE, results are below average when compared with all schools but broadly in line with those for similar schools. Unvalidated results in 2006, for five A*–C grades, fell from 2005, although the percentage of pupils attaining five A*–C grades that included mathematics and English was higher. All groups of pupils achieve well in most subjects in Years 10 and 11. They make good progress in

Pupils with autism, and those looked after, make progress at least as good as that of their peers, and sometimes better. Achievement is satisfactory in the sixth form, with a particular strength in business studies. Standards are below average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Pupils are usually attentive in lessons and ready to learn. However, they voice concerns about the disruptive behaviour of a minority of pupils affecting their progress in some lessons. In one lesson observed, several pupils used bad language, although this was calmly handled by the teacher. Attendance has been a little below the national average, but in recent months procedures to encourage pupils to attend have been improved. Recent figures are similar to the national average with looked after children attending fairly well. Similarly, the latest figures for exclusion, whilst still significant, are half the number of last year.

Pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, although their opportunities to explore in depth a range of faiths and cultures, and for spiritual reflection, are limited. Moral and social development is good, helped by pupils' participation in a variety of sports, school events and some local community activities.

Many pupils improve their healthy lifestyle through active participation in physical education, out-of-school sports clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, and by eating wholesome meals. Suitable procedures are in place to combat bullying and, generally, pupils feel safe. Pupils feel the school deals with any concerns adequately, although some say this takes too long. Pupils can and do make some contribution to the school community through the new house system, although other opportunities to do so are limited. Pupils are not clear, for example, about how they can make suggestions through the school council. In lessons where teachers dominate, pupils' chances to chip in their ideas and help each other are few. In the sixth form, students have opportunities to participate in worthwhile activities, including a sixth-form council, but take-up rates are too low.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Grade for sixth form: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are best at Key Stage 3, and often in mathematics, science and physical education. However, the quality of lessons varies from outstanding to unsatisfactory. There are considerable inconsistencies in the way lessons are planned and taught, with too much left to individual teachers' discretion. The quality and style of teaching received by individual pupils can vary too much.

Many lessons are lively and interesting, with well-planned, motivating work. In an excellent Year 7 physical education lesson, for example, pupils responded enthusiastically to an activity where they crossed the floor of the new sports hall using mats without touching the floor. In some lessons, pupils have good opportunities to reflect on how well they have learned and work is closely matched to their individual needs, but this is not consistent. In other lessons, planning is not clear enough and this reduces pace and direction. In several lessons, the content is good but the way it is imparted to pupils is less effective. Sometimes, activities are not stimulating enough and staff do not check why pupils are not on task. In some other lessons, teachers dominate, leaving pupils little opportunity to contribute actively.

Teaching and learning in the sixth form are also satisfactory. Students learn suitably as a result of satisfactory planning, enthusiastic lesson delivery and sound subject knowledge. In the autism unit, teaching is consistently good.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is good across the school and very good for pupils with autism. A range of innovative learning opportunities is increasingly matched to the needs of students. For example, the 'Learning Zone' successfully meets the needs of lower attaining pupils. Most subject schemes of work provide motivating topics and good development of knowledge and skills. A broad and increasing range of courses is available in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, reflecting the school's business and enterprise status. This is well supported by some very good buildings and facilities for vocational education and a magnificent new sports hall. All Year 10 pupils participate in a well-structured programme of work experience. Higher attaining students can enter GCSE early. However, despite some developing links, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise literacy, numeracy and ICT skills in other subjects.

A good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities is provided for Years 7 to 11. Local and international school trips are well supported and significant annual events include a major school production and carol service. The provision of extra-curricular activities in the sixth form is satisfactory.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

The school keeps high-quality information about each pupil's personal development, targets and progress. Adults use this to provide good individual guidance and counselling. Pupils comment on the good advice they receive about how to improve their work, and the helpful extra revision sessions. Tutorial sessions are good. These factors help the pupils' good achievement. In the sixth form, these processes are not as well developed as in Years 7 to 11.

The school provides well for looked after children. Induction processes are robust, good levels of support are provided and the progress is monitored carefully. As a result, these pupils achieve well. Similarly, pupils with autism are supported very well and are helped in a staged way to integrate into the main school.

The new house system has started well. The rewards and points systems help to improve pupils' attitudes and behaviour by emphasising achievement and participation. Pupils at risk of exclusion are receiving better support, enabling more to remain in school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The headteacher has quickly established constructive relationships with staff, governors and pupils. She has begun to prepare effectively for the future by ensuring staff know what is expected now, whilst making clear that future changes are likely. The senior management team makes a valuable contribution. The sixth form is led energetically and clearly, leading to improvement, although sometimes the management of particular activities needs to be stronger. For example, insufficient checks are made on students' attendance at assembly. In the rest of the school, most improvements are managed well. Professional development for staff is given a high priority. Overall, the school has good capacity to continue to improve.

The headteacher has also improved self-evaluation by requiring each department to produce a useful initial evaluative statement. Most of the school's strengths and areas for development are correctly identified. The analysis of pupils' assessment data, led by an acting deputy headteacher, is strong. Curriculum developments have followed from a suitable understanding of pupils' needs and interests. However, although there is a well-established programme of lesson observation, there is insufficient whole-school analysis of strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Areas for improvement have not always been followed through rigorously enough or linked effectively to the school improvement plan, which has allowed the inconsistencies in lessons to continue.

The headteacher, recognising this, has begun to work with colleagues to prepare a new school improvement plan. This is well drafted and appropriately related to the development areas identified by the school. However, it is not underpinned by a clear enough sense of the school's future overall educational direction. Whilst the school's commitment to serve the local community is very strong, there is not yet a shared understanding of what this might mean in practice. The headteacher correctly sees the need to engage the school's key stakeholders, including pupils, in preparing a clearer vision for the school's future.

Middle managers make a reasonable contribution. Subject leaders are beginning to evaluate their subjects better and provide some helpful guidance to staff. In some subjects, including English (recently) and mathematics and science (over time), good management of initiatives has helped bring about improvements in achievement. Some managers are working together to make useful links across subject boundaries but this is at an early stage. The autism unit is managed very effectively with good systems for ensuring the pupils' needs are well met.

The governing body is suitably organised and carries out its functions well, supporting and challenging managers effectively. It has a clear understanding of the needs and aspirations of the local community.

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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?	3	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
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	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
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?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
The attendance of learners	3	
How well learners enjoy their education	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
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	3	

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?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	3

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.

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	3	
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

We enjoyed our visit to your school and thank you for the time many of you spent with us, telling us about the school and what you think. It was good to meet you.

We found that the school provides a satisfactory education overall but with many really good things going on. For example, in Years 7 to 11 especially, most of you make good progress and often get pretty good examination and test results. Well done! This happens because the curriculum you follow helps you to build up your knowledge and skills step by step. Many of you told us that you get good advice and help about choosing options and how you can make your work better. There are plenty of courses you can do in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form which help get you ready to find a job or go on to further education, which is great. There are good facilities too. Mrs Woodend has made a good start as your new headteacher and we think the school is ready to carry on getting better.

We think that the main things the school should work on to improve are:

- Make sure that all lessons are as well planned and organised as the best lessons are now.
- Make sure you have more chances to use literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) in other subjects.
- Involve the whole school community, especially all of you, in deciding what kind of a school you want to be – all schools are not the same; what is special about The Abbey?
- Help you all to have more opportunities to develop personal skills, like working together, looking after each other, reflecting on issues and understanding different cultures.

We hope you will want to join in and help the school to get better still. You will probably find you get asked what you think, so why not use the opportunity, and take an active part?

With best wishes for the future