



Abbey Hill School and Performing Arts College

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 124500
Local Authority Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number 293013
Inspection date 28 November 2006
Reporting inspector Michael Megee

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Greasley Road
School category	Community special		Bucknall
Age range of pupils	2-19		Stoke-on-Trent ST2 8LG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01782 234727
Number on roll (school)	195	Fax number	01782 234729
Number on roll (6th form)	15	Chair	Andrew Smith
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Headteacher	Philip Kidman
Date of previous school inspection	25 February 2002		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Abbey Hill School provides education for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. About a third of the pupils also have autism. Only a quarter of the pupils are girls, and most pupils are of White British heritage, except for a few who are mainly from Pakistani backgrounds. The school has specialist school status in the performing arts. The new headteacher took up his post in March 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Abbey Hill is an outstanding school where all staff are passionate about providing the very best for pupils, and pupils delight in learning. The school is justifiably proud of its achievements and knows that it is doing a first-class job. However, this does not mean that it is complacent. The key to the school's success is its single-minded striving to do even better, which means that its capacity for improvement is exceptional. Parents freely praise all that the school does. One summed up the views of many: 'Abbey Hill is a fantastic school. My son has been here for over ten years, and he is forever talking about school. He has enjoyed every single day. It has been ten happy, peaceful years'. In every class, right through to those in post-16, pupils clearly love to learn and they behave exceptionally well. They are offered an excellent curriculum with a wide range of activities which excites them and keeps them fully engaged and keen to make progress. All staff go the extra mile in ensuring that there are plenty of exciting things to do after school and in the school holidays. Teaching is outstandingly effective and often inspirational. Teachers understand their pupils very well and plan imaginative work that meets every pupil's needs.

Many pupils join the school having experienced frustration and failure in the past. All the staff recognise that they often need to rebuild confidence and self-esteem, and they do this by developing exceptionally good rapport and mutual respect which provide a solid foundation for learning. The school guides, supports and cares for its pupils remarkably well. A strong ethos shines through all its work, especially in the calm, purposeful working atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils' special educational needs mean that their attainment is exceptionally low. However, in Abbey Hill's invigorating and encouraging environment, pupils' achievement is outstanding both academically and in their personal development. It is not surprising that pupils do well because the school not only extends pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills across the whole curriculum - especially in its chosen area of specialism, the performing arts - but also significantly expands their personal horizons. This begins in the Reception Year where an excellent blend of experiences across all areas of learning gets them off to a flying start. All teachers consistently expect the very best from pupils and ensure that they continue to build on this excellent foundation and make outstanding progress right through to post-16. Highly successful teamwork and a shared dedication to excellence characterise the outstanding leadership and management. The highly talented staff team works as one both in the school as well as the post-16 provision to provide the very best for the pupils. The team is led by dynamic and committed senior managers who are always on the look-out for ways to improve further. For example, they have correctly identified that pupils are not prepared as much as they could be for life in a multicultural society. Governors provide excellent support for staff and play a very influential role in evaluating the school's effectiveness and planning its future.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Students at post-16 make outstanding progress because of high expectations, very skilful teaching, and the excellent relationships they have with each other and the staff. They enjoy the relaxed atmosphere within their base. The emphasis on independent learning gives them an excellent preparation for life after school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase pupils' multicultural awareness by including a multicultural perspective more often within lessons and assemblies.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Pupils attending the school have a wide range of learning difficulties and educational needs. This means that, when compared with national averages, standards are exceptionally low throughout the school, although pupils make excellent progress during their time at the school. The pupils' outstanding achievement reflects both their enthusiasm to learn as well as the highly skilful teaching they receive. Children in the Reception Year get off to a flying start and make excellent progress in all the areas of learning. All pupils, including those with autism, make first-class progress against their challenging individual targets and enjoy exceptional success in GCSE, ASDAN and other accredited programmes. As a result of their high achievement at post-16, almost all the pupils successfully transfer to further education programmes. A few pupils do so well that, having built up their skills and confidence, they quickly return to mainstream schools. One parent said, 'My son came on amazingly here. He's now back in mainstream taking 11 GCSEs!' Pupils do extremely well in English, mathematics and science but they also achieve very well in information and communication technology (ICT) and use technology very proficiently to enhance their learning across all the subjects. Pupils' tuneful and enthusiastic singing in assemblies and in music lessons demonstrates the skills of their specialist music teacher. Very good quality artwork brightens the corridors and classrooms, and pupils with special talents in music and drama and sport have further opportunities to excel in after-school activities and the well-received musical and dramatic public productions.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Abbey Hill puts pupils' personal development and well-being at the top of its agenda. Pupils attend well and their behaviour is exemplary because everyone has such consistently high expectations. Pupils understand what is expected of them and hardly

ever need to be prompted. They are caring and kind towards each other and to the adults. They offer to take visitors' plates away after they have finished lunch. Older pupils enjoy taking responsibility for different jobs around the school and help to look after younger ones. Pupils are proud to be elected as school councillors and take their responsibilities seriously. They put their ideas forward confidently during meetings.

Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is good overall, although there are one or two areas where the school has correctly identified it is not quite meeting its own high standards. Pupils' cultural development is good, and pupils enjoy a very good programme of visits to the theatre and musical events. However, there are fewer opportunities that enable pupils to appreciate the multicultural nature of Britain and so this aspect of their understanding is relatively less well developed. A few pupils have the opportunity to learn individually alongside pupils in mainstream schools, but not everyone who could benefit from this has the opportunity to do so. Pupils gain a wide range of skills to prepare them for their future lives

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Teachers very effectively use their thorough understanding of the pupils' current needs and past achievements to plan work that is both demanding and pleasurable. Teachers are always energetic and encouraging, and use their very detailed subject knowledge and a wide range of strategies to engage pupils in learning. Pupils respond very well to the staff, and learn very quickly. Behaviour management is often outstandingly good because staff recognise early on if a pupil is beginning to become upset. By responding sympathetically and discreetly, they are able to gently bring the pupil back into a position where they are again ready to learn. There is very good teamwork, with the teachers and teaching assistants acting as one in order to maintain the brisk pace of the lessons. Parents say how teachers are happy to give up their own time to support the pupils: 'The teacher surprised us when she turned up at Brownies to see my daughter being enrolled. What a kind, wonderful thing to do.'

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school offers a curriculum which very successfully promotes pupils' academic achievement as well as their personal development. The activities provided fully meet the needs of all its pupils from Reception to post-16, regardless of their individual learning difficulties and disabilities. An excellent range of cultural visits, residential experiences, after-school clubs and holiday schemes significantly enhance the lives of the pupils and their families. One parent said, 'My child's been to London loads of times, Anglesey, and France twice. That's much more than I could ever do on my own,

and the holiday schemes are an enormous help'. Visitors to the school, such as the Taiko drummers, contribute significantly to planned personal and social programmes. The school's specialist status in the performing arts means that the pupils have very frequent opportunities to attend artistic, theatrical and musical events. All pupils have a chance to join the choir, and the school has rightly identified that pupils who show some talent should be offered individual instrumental tuition. The curriculum at post-16 is very effective, and there are very strong links with local colleges and employers, who provide excellent opportunities for further education and work experience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The school has placed the principle that 'Every Child Matters' at the centre of its work. Adults rapidly build up excellent relationships with the pupils and this quickly creates a very positive environment in which all pupils can flourish. The school provides excellent support for pupils with autism so that they too thrive and make very good progress. There are consistent rules for behaviour, often set by the pupils themselves, which ensure that pupils feel secure and free from bullying. Teachers set challenging targets for pupils to achieve and show them how to improve their work. The school has recognised the need to set a more manageable number of individual targets for each pupil which are phrased in simpler language so that the pupils can be even more involved. This process has already begun in some classes. Teachers assess pupils' progress each week and make full use of this information to accurately plan subsequent lessons.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The senior staff and governors work tirelessly to keep the school's performance constantly under review. Teaching and learning are continually monitored by senior staff and subject leaders to give a clear picture of where improvement is necessary. Governors carry out their role as 'critical friends' very thoroughly and make regular visits to observe how well the school is doing. Pupils' and parents' views are fully taken into account when making decisions about major changes.

Senior staff set a very high standard and lead by example, not only through their own teaching but also through their full commitment to the pupils and their families. The senior managers operate very closely and effectively together as a team and the consistency of approach and sharing of common values are the keys to the school's continuing success. There is a constant striving to seek out and adopt good practice. Subject leaders are encouraged to seek out and lead new initiatives. The school is just introducing an electronic system for recording pupils' progress towards their targets as they move through the school. Next year, when the school has to apply to retain

its status as a specialist school in performing arts, it intends to add a second specialism – cognition and learning - to further enhance its status. The school is very ambitious not only for itself, but more importantly for all its pupils.

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

Achievement and standards

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

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	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1	1
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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	1
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	1
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

Thank you very much for making my visit to your school so enjoyable. A special thanks to the members of the school council who met me and told me very clearly how much you like your school, and what could be improved. I passed your comments about the toilets to the headteacher and governors and they will look at ways of improving them.

I was very impressed by how well you all behaved and the way you listen and always put your hands up to answer a question. You all told me how much you enjoy school and I can see why. Abbey Hill is an outstanding school, and you are right to be proud of it. The staff are very good at making you feel at home, giving you lots of encouragement as well as interesting lessons and this helps you to learn really well. There are very many great things to do even in the holidays which I know you appreciate. I really enjoyed listening to your very good singing in assembly and lessons. All of the adults take very good care of you and help you to do your very best. You help them by being polite and friendly to them and to the other pupils. I hope you will continue to work hard all the time you are at school.

The staff who run the school are doing a terrific job and are always looking for ways to make it even better. I have asked the school to see if it can give you an even better understanding of all the different cultures that you may come across in your lives.

With best wishes and good luck to you all in the future.