

Abbey School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	106967
Local Authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	309277
Inspection dates	13–14 March 2008
Reporting inspector	David Muir HMI

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	7–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Maurice Whitehouse
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Naylor
Date of previous school inspection	17 January 2005
School address	Little Common Lane Kimberworth Rotherham South Yorkshire S61 2RA
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

Abbey School caters for pupils with a variety of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. These include moderate to severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and complex difficulties including autism, sensory and language and communication problems, Down's syndrome and social and emotional behavioural difficulties, as well as some medical needs. The school is now taking in pupils with an increasing severity and complexity of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. All pupils have statements of special educational needs. Pupils are drawn from all areas of Rotherham, including some areas which have high levels of deprivation. There are seven looked-after children. The majority of pupils come from a White British background; however, there are also some pupils from other backgrounds, including Pakistani and Zambian. The school has gained a variety of awards, including Leading Aspect Award (for raising achievement through inclusive activities), Sportsmark, FA Charter Mark and local Healthy Schools Awards. The school is currently applying for specialist sports' college status. Presently the school is subject to reorganisation proposals by the local authority.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Abbey School is an outstanding school. The headteacher leads the school with a clear vision and direction, placing the pupils at the centre of all of the school's work. In this, she is very well supported by an extremely capable senior management team who enable the vision to be shared by the wider school community. The staff are managing the changing school population in an exemplary way, meeting the more diverse needs of its pupils very effectively. All aspects of the school's work are outstanding and combine to ensure that all pupils thrive, enjoy their learning and achieve to their potential. There is a palpable enthusiasm and dedication amongst staff to continue to improve their teaching and to provide the best possible education for the pupils.

When pupils join the school, their standards are very low compared with the national average for children of their age. This is due to their significant learning difficulties and/or disabilities. They make excellent progress as a result of the successful and determined efforts to continually develop the school's curriculum and to raise the standard of teaching and learning. This ensures that pupils reach their challenging targets and achieve in line with their capabilities. By the time they leave school in Year 11, all pupils achieve success in accredited courses such as the City and Guilds Certificate in 'preparing for employment'.

Pupils' attendance is well above the national average for all schools. This shows that pupils enjoy coming to school. Staff are very good at developing independence skills in the pupils, enabling them to make decisions in a safe and caring environment. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a significant strength of the school. Parents recognise the positive impact of the school's work on their children's personal development. They say that their children gain in confidence and self-esteem and that their behaviour and attitudes improve. Relationships are outstanding and the attitude of pupils helps to make the school a happy, safe and purposeful learning environment. There is a strong focus on being healthy and staying safe in all aspects of the school. This focus has also enabled pupils, and their families, to adopt healthier practices outside school, such as eating more healthily. The school council is very active and leaders take account of its views when identifying priorities for improvement in the 'developing excellence plan'.

Teaching is at least good throughout the school and a significant amount is outstanding. Lessons typically have a wide variety of activities and are well suited to the different needs of the pupils in the class. Teachers combine excellent relationships with a very thorough knowledge of pupils' abilities and levels of work. In all lessons seen, the child support assistants (CSAs) supported the learning of pupils very effectively. The school provides an outstanding curriculum which is increasingly innovative. It is adapted well so that it meets the needs of the pupils very successfully. At every stage, the curriculum places significant emphasis on developing students' self-esteem and confidence and every opportunity is used to celebrate achievement and recognise individual pupils' successes. A strong feature of the curriculum is the variety and effectiveness of partnerships with local colleges, schools and employers to ensure that all pupils are well prepared for life after school. For example, every pupil who left at the end of Year 11 last year went into further education or training. Care, guidance and support are excellent with well organised pastoral care in place at all levels of the school, which enables all pupils to feel safe and well looked after. Pupils' progress in all subjects is tracked in exacting detail to ensure that any areas of underachievement are rapidly identified and intervention strategies put in place that enable the pupils to quickly get back on track.

The headteacher and management team have a very clear understanding of where the school is in its development and what it needs to do to improve further. They are currently refining the role of subject leaders to enable them to contribute even more than they already do to driving up achievement. There is a strong ethos in the school, based on raising standards and respect for all. This ethos pervades all areas of the school's work and has had a significant impact on the rates of achievement. Pupils' and parents' views are actively sought and incorporated into the school's future plans. Staff feel valued by the management and their morale is extremely high. The governors are very involved in the management of the school and provide very effective challenge and support to the headteacher in her work to continually improve the school. The school has demonstrated good improvement since the last inspection.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop the curriculum to meet the changing needs of pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Increasingly, pupils who enter the school have more severe and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities than in the past. Their attainment on entry is very low for their age. Careful attention to pupils' individual needs ensures that, at each key stage, pupils make outstanding progress and all groups of pupils, including looked-after children, achieve in line with their capabilities. By the end of Year 11, all pupils achieve accreditation in a nationally recognised qualification, such as City and Guilds Certificates, AQA Unit Awards or BTEC construction courses. Last year, almost all school leavers attained entry level qualifications in subjects such as English, mathematics, science, religious education, information and communications technology (ICT), technology and art. The school also has effective systems in place to identify pupils who are gifted and talented in particular areas and it takes steps to meet their specific needs. For example, one pupil attained a GCSE art at grade C last year after taking lessons in the local mainstream secondary school. Furthermore, all pupils progressed into further education or training.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding across the school. Pupils thrive in the extremely positive environment, which is based on an ethos of respect and high expectations of behaviour and learning. The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and has an extremely successful impact on pupils in the school. This is exemplified by the school's 'adoption' of an orphanage in India following a visit to it by some staff from Abbey School. The pupils want to be in school and they have very good attitudes to learning. Children feel very safe in school and they know who they can talk to if they have a problem. Pupils observe safety rules in lessons such as science and these are reinforced well by all members of staff. There are excellent relationships at all levels and there is a strong atmosphere of respect throughout the school. Staff provide excellent role models for pupils and this supports personal development, especially for the significant number of pupils who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). Because of this modelling of behaviour, and the school's ethos, pupils make very good progress in learning to manage their own behaviour. Behaviour in lessons and around school is good and this is exemplified by the warm welcome extended to visitors by pupils. There is a good uptake for after-school clubs,

including a variety of sports. Pupils also show a keen awareness of healthy eating and extend this to their home lives. The pupils are very active in raising money for a variety of charities and organisations and are very aware of the work which is done by these organisations. They are extremely keen to take on responsibilities and contribute to the life of the school. They have worked hard to develop the outside areas of the school, such as the 'forest school' and the allotments to grow their own vegetables.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. Lessons are at least good and a significant amount is of an excellent quality. Work is very well matched to all of the pupils' learning needs and learning styles. In all subjects, teachers set very challenging targets for different groups of pupils in each class and pupils know what they need to do to achieve them. Learning is significantly enhanced by very good relationships between teachers and CSAs. They provide effective feedback to pupils so that they know what they can do to improve their work. Staff use their excellent knowledge of the pupils' individual education plan (IEP) targets to support them in achieving ever more challenging academic targets. Teachers manage their classes very well and relationships between pupils and adults are excellent, being built on an ethos of mutual respect. At the end of every teaching session, pupils and staff effectively evaluate how much progress has been made by each pupil. Pupils are guided to evaluate their work against three different learning goals for each lesson based on the difficulty of the work and the level of adult support required to complete it. This is then used as the starting point for planning the next lesson on an individual basis, to ensure that all pupils are progressing in line with their capabilities. The best lessons are lively and relevant to the pupils' knowledge of the world, making them an enjoyable and valuable experience for all involved. Pupils benefit from the dedication and commitment of the staff and they make outstanding gains in their learning, which are confirmed by the school's very detailed tracking systems. These systems are used very effectively and consistently by all teachers to inform the next stages of learning for pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an outstanding curriculum which meets the needs of all the pupils very effectively and meets all statutory requirements. At Key Stages 2 and 3, pupils study the full National Curriculum including French. The subjects are effectively modified to meet the individual learning needs of all pupils. There is an emphasis on establishing links between subjects and on active learning. These approaches stimulate pupils' interest and develop their enthusiasm for learning.

At Key Stage 4, pupils are offered a broad vocational programme leading to a variety of nationally recognised qualifications. The curriculum is innovative, offering a wide range of learning opportunities. The school is continually seeking to diversify the curriculum to match pupils' different needs. One example is the offer of a range of 'case study' options which pupils can choose to match their interests, thereby encouraging their progress towards being active and responsible citizens. Pupils have opportunities, through the school's very effective links, to study at other establishments such as local colleges. The curriculum is further enhanced by extremely well planned opportunities for work experience, which are supported by an excellent

partnership with Connexions. The curriculum is an excellent foundation for developing life skills and preparing pupils for life beyond school. The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils to take part in collaborative learning with pupils from other schools. For example, a joint project with local schools provides the pupils with outstanding experiences of working constructively with other pupils in a safe and caring environment. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including sports and ICT clubs, which have very good attendance by pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. These activities are regularly monitored to ensure that they are contributing to pupils' positive experiences. There is also a well planned programme of educational visits and visitors into the school to enhance the extra-curricular activities on offer.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school provides extremely high levels of pastoral care and academic guidance. The staff know the pupils very well and are dedicated to raising their achievements. Safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements and procedures for child protection, health and safety and risk assessment are fully implemented by staff. The school has extremely strong links with other schools, colleges, local employers and other agencies to ensure that pupils are fully supported in all aspects of their school lives. The school has outstanding systems for tracking the academic progress of individual pupils and excellent levels of support are put in place for any pupil whose achievement slips. The school makes very good use of the data that it collects on pupils' progress and has begun to monitor the progress of groups of children with different needs, such as autism or SEBD. Teachers provide pupils with clear targets for their personal and academic development. These are continually reviewed and revised to ensure that they remain challenging and continue to raise pupils' rates of progress. Parents are kept regularly informed about their children's targets so that they can support their learning at home.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and strategic direction which is firmly focused on raising standards. This vision is supported throughout the school by senior and middle management and other members of staff. From documents and discussions, it is clear that the school has a very good awareness of its own strengths and areas for improvement. These are effectively dealt with in order of importance. The work that senior leaders are currently undertaking to enhance the role of subject leaders has already led to an improvement in the monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning across the curriculum. The next step is to enable subject leaders to have an even greater impact on raising standards throughout the school.

The headteacher has an accurate knowledge and understanding of the quality of teaching and learning. There are robust systems in place for leaders at all levels and governors to monitor the work of teachers. This monitoring shows that staff use the school's detailed tracking evidence and their own knowledge of pupils' specific needs to ensure that lessons match pupils' interests, learning styles and learning needs.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you very much for welcoming me when I visited your school recently. I was very impressed to see how much you wanted to talk about your school and tell me what was good about it. It was very interesting to hear your views.

You are all very proud of your school and you are right to be. It is an outstanding school. Your headteacher leads the school very well and is clear about how she wants to improve it even more. Your teachers and other staff really enjoy teaching you and they make sure that you learn as much as you can at school. They understand very well what helps you to learn. Teachers know how well you are doing in each subject and this means that they can help you to improve. Your behaviour is good and I was pleased to see that you are very keen to learn new things. I was very impressed by how much you all knew about healthy eating and that some of you are even telling your families how to make healthier food at home. I also saw that when you are ready to leave school, you are well prepared to make choices for the future.

I have asked the school to improve in one area of the work to make your time at school even more enjoyable and successful:

- keep a close eye on the things they teach you to make sure that you are all learning as well as you can

You can help with this, by telling your teachers and CSAs how lessons can be even more enjoyable and how they can help you to learn more in your different subjects.

I wish you all success for the future in your excellent school and thank you again for your very warm welcome.