

Abbey Hill School Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111787
Local Authority	Stockton-on-Tees
Inspection number	325461
Inspection dates	27–28 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Lloyd Willday

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	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	254
Sixth form	78
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Whittaker
Headteacher	Mr Mike Vening
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2005
School address	Ketton Road Hardwick Estate Stockton-on-Tees TS19 8BU
Telephone number	01642 677113
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Age group	11–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a large special school. It is federated with a partner special school in Stockton Borough. Students have a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The majority of students have a statement of special educational need, reflecting their moderate learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or autistic spectrum disorders. A third of students are eligible for free school meals and a small minority are in public care. The students are predominately White British and there are twice as many boys as girls.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

The inspection team agrees with the school's view that this is an outstandingly effective, vibrant and happy school. Leadership and management are outstanding, and the senior leadership team is determined in its drive for excellence. They are supported by an enthusiastic and committed governing body who know the school well.

The school's effectiveness is nationally recognised. It was awarded Technology College status in 1999, became a Leading Edge school in 2004 and was awarded Applied Learning status in 2008 as a Higher Performing Specialist School.

These three specialisms have had a significant and powerful impact on the curriculum and on students' progress. Pupils make good progress and achieve well from Years 7–11 although in Years 10 and 11 opportunities are missed to fully channel their efforts into externally accredited courses. Progress in the sixth form is outstanding. The enriched curriculum has received many national awards including the Healthy Schools Award and the International Schools Award. Enterprise activities are a considerable strength of the curriculum and give students an opportunity to work in the community, with other schools, and to celebrate each others' abilities and differences. Students achieve well in English, mathematics and science and their progress in information and communication technology (ICT) and enterprise activities is a strength of the school. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, and in some lessons, outstanding. Teachers make lessons interesting although occasionally the pace is slow with lengthy introductions and too much talking by teachers leaving insufficient time for students to complete their activities. Excellent relationships help to boost students' confidence and, as a result, they make outstanding progress towards challenging targets. A culture of success where the achievements of all students are recognised permeates the ethos of school. Assemblies are a strength of the school and make a major contribution to students' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students care for each other, are enthusiastic about the school and celebrate this daily by sharing ideas, rewarding success and spending time in quiet reflection.

The outstanding curriculum has been recognised nationally through a wealth of awards. Enterprise education has a significant impact on students' enjoyment of their learning and their awareness of the needs of others in school and in the community. Opportunities for students to work on projects with students from other schools are well established and as a result, students' self-esteem and aspirations are continually being raised. Attractive displays in corridors and work areas recognise and celebrate students' achievement and demonstrate a positive community spirit.

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. Planning is a strong feature and helps ensure that students' wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities are fully met. The school works very well with parents, who are almost unanimous in their support, and with other professionals. One parent wrote that 'the staff is absolutely committed to their jobs, duties and sense of care towards young people'.

Issues raised from the last inspection have been fully addressed. The school has an outstanding capacity to continue to develop as it meets new challenges. The leadership team know the school's strengths and weaknesses and have an excellent track record of continual improvement. The school provides outstanding value for money.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

Provision for sixth form students is outstanding. High quality teaching and learning is matched exceptionally well to individual needs and effectively challenges students to work towards the next stage of education or work. Students make excellent progress and talk enthusiastically about their courses, for example, in hairdressing and land based studies. They thoroughly enjoy their GCSE studies and are keen to do well. They take great pride in their work; their science folders and art work are of a very high standard. Their excellent personal development is promoted by outstanding care, support and guidance. Comments such as, 'the sixth form is fantastic' and 'we get on really well with the staff and each other', are typical and demonstrate their mature and positive attitudes. Students are fully aware of their current levels of work and have a clear understanding of the ambitious grades that they require in order to progress to their desired course. Staff work very well with a range of agencies, for example, combining with a local school on a project to help improve the environment. This helps students to make excellent progress in the development of their independence skills. Very good opportunities exist for students to practise their skills in relevant work placements. The cafeteria lunch is a positive social event where students interact maturely in a busy and adult environment. Unfortunately, the provision of activities after school is limited by transport arrangements. However, students are keen to plan a series of residential visits and take an active part in their organisation. The accommodation is very attractive and provides the opportunity for students to flourish in an age-appropriate environment.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure there is an appropriate balance between teacher led and student activities in the classroom.
- Take every opportunity to accredit the good progress that students are making in Years 10 and 11.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Students' achievement is good. It is not appropriate to compare their attainment with national standards because of the students' learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The rigorous tracking of progress is used to establish challenging targets and the vast majority of the targets are achieved. There is no discernable difference in the progress of boys and girls or children in public care. Staff are very good at identifying any underachievement and finding ways to bring about improvement. There is strong promotion of literacy in all subjects supported by extra classes and individual tuition for students who require additional help. Students in Years 7 to 9 make good progress in English, particularly in their communication skills, reading and in mathematics. Progress in ICT is a strength of the school and reflects the excellent resources. Students in Years 10 and 11 also make good progress but opportunities are missed to fully channel their hard work into externally accredited courses. Students enjoy practical activities and were keen to demonstrate their work, for example, in photography and design technology where they were required to rise to the challenge of problem solving and decision making. Students' learning is enhanced by a range of clubs and visits to share their learning with students from mainstream schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' excellent personal development reflects the respect and trust that the school places in them. One student commented that 'We may be all different here, but we treat each other equally well.' Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Students offered each other support, for example, helping their friends in wheelchairs to sit comfortably during assembly. Students have an excellent awareness of global issues, and recently helped to raise funds for World AIDS Day; they are excited about future links with a school in South Africa. Many students benefit from excellent opportunities to work and socialise with students in mainstream schools, for example, helping with reading activities and games in local junior schools. Students learn the importance of healthy lifestyles through many well organised physical activities. 'We feel good about it', a group of students said. Behaviour is excellent. Students say they 'definitely' feel safe in school and that bullying is rare, but realistically comment that it occasionally takes place. Attendance is good and students enjoy coming to school. When asked to give a quote that might be used to 'sell' the school to new students, they immediately said, 'This school is too good to sell; we love this school and the teachers.' Students' acquisition of life skills for moving on to the next stage of their education is excellent. They are proud of their skills in making applications for funds for causes and activities they are interested in such as going on a theatre trip. Parents are thrilled that their children become 'mature and well mannered, confident and self-assured'. One parent commented that their child 'is supported by a wonderful staff whose primary concern is the progress and well being of the child'.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, and at times outstanding. Teaching is enthusiastic with high expectations for students' achievement and behaviour. Staff have good subject expertise and confidently use an extensive range of strategies and resources to meet students' wide range of physical and learning needs. Teaching assistants provide a very good balance of support and challenge which helps the students to make good progress. Excellent relationships give students the confidence to tackle challenging work and enable them to learn from their mistakes. Assessment information is used effectively to plan work that is neither too easy nor too hard and, as a result, keep students on their toes. Teaching makes imaginative use of resources and when combined with a busy and purposeful environment, leads to outstanding learning. In these lessons students make excellent progress and participate in activities which they find challenging yet enjoyable and subsequently are very proud of their work. Occasionally, a prolonged introduction to a lesson, and too much time spent talking by the teacher, slows down learning and the time for students to undertake activities is reduced.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. Learning is very carefully tailored to meet the wide range of students' learning needs. This is a strength of the school and in particular the staffs' ability to meet the needs of students with autistic spectrum disorders. As well as its national status for technology and applied learning the school has also achieved Healthy School's

Award, National Autistic Accreditation and the International School's Award. All these have had a very positive impact on the curriculum and the additional resources have encouraged staff and students to be inspirational and innovative in their approach to learning opportunities. The curriculum has quite rightly been recognised nationally through a wealth of awards. Enterprise activities are a major strength of the school and have a significant impact on students' enjoyment of learning. This has encouraged excellent team work, individual challenge and an awareness of the needs of others in school and in the wider community. An extensive range of opportunities are provided for the students to work on projects with students from other schools. As a result of these inclusive opportunities, students' self-esteem and aspirations have been raised. Additional resources and staffing have also helped to enhance the curriculum and raise expectations. Attractive displays throughout the school recognise and celebrate students' achievement. Assemblies are magical and demonstrate inspirational planning and promote a positive community spirit.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The care, guidance and support for students are outstanding. Students are encouraged to do their best by a dedicated staff in a secure and safe environment. Staff monitor students' self confidence and academic achievement closely and act swiftly to introduce appropriate support in focused intervention groups. Vulnerable and fragile students, including those in public care, are identified and well supported. All required safeguarding arrangements are in place. Students are encouraged to contribute to setting personal targets and staff give support to ensure success in reaching those targets. Excellent relationships between staff and students are a feature of the school and encourage students to work with additional confidence as they tackle new areas of learning. Staff have extremely close working relationships with external agencies which enhance the school's ability to meet the needs of a wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Students are very well prepared and supported as they move through school and have good opportunities to work alongside their mainstream peers. A strong focus on promoting good attendance has resulted in improving attendance figures. Behaviour management is consistent, with clear rewards and consequences which are understood by students. Staff are approachable and skilled in detecting concerns, especially where students have difficulty communicating. Parents are very supportive of the school and a comment such as 'my child is happy at school and has learnt to become more independent' is very typical of parents' appreciation. One parent commented that as a result of attending the school 'my child has blossomed, matured and grown in confidence'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The senior leadership team have a shared vision to do the very best for their students and ensure that good progress is maintained. The school successfully promotes a cohesive and harmonious society. The governing body are highly effective and challenging and make an effective contribution to school improvement. Middle management is a real strength and the teaching leadership team demonstrate outstanding levels of innovation and good practice. They are fully aware of areas for development in teaching and learning and are well placed to lead further improvement. Management at all levels has a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through rigorous self-

review. As a result, they have strategies in place that lead to very effective school improvement planning. The excellent provision for staff training ensures that they are well placed to meet the students' wide range of learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

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

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	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	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
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 learners' needs?	2	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

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	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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

1 December 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Abbey Hill School Technology College, Stockton-on-Tees, TS19 8BU

The inspectors really enjoyed their visit to your wonderful school. You made us feel very welcome and we would like to thank all of you for sharing your school with us. We would like to thank especially those students who gave up their time to talk to us and show us some of their work. We were very impressed with your enthusiasm for school and your ambition to work hard. We thought that the students in the sixth form were very ambitious. Well done!

I agree with you that your school is outstanding. Teaching is good and you are given outstanding care by all of the staff. You get on very well and support each other. I really enjoyed your assemblies which showed me how proud you are of your school and how much you wanted to celebrate each others' achievements. Staff clearly encourage you to do your very best, guide you in making good choices and ensure that you are safe.

I have suggested to your headteacher to make sure that you get recognition for all the hard work you make by being given the opportunity to do more national qualifications in Year 10 and 11. Some lessons need to be organised so that you have more time to get on with your own work and staff will make sure that this is part of their planning.

We are pleased that you are proud of your school and we hope that you continue to play your part by working hard, helping each other and celebrating your successes.

Best wishes

Lloyd Willday

Lead Inspector