

The Abbey School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125476
Local Authority	Surrey
Inspection number	328340
Inspection dates	11–12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Kay Charlton

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	88
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr A Melbourne
Headteacher	Mr C J Gardiner
Date of previous school inspection	16 May 2006
School address	Menin Way Farnham GU9 8DY
Telephone number	01252 725059
Fax number	01252 737300

Age group	11–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Abbey School caters for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, all of whom have a statement of special educational need. Many are on the autistic spectrum. Students come from Farnham and the surrounding district. The vast majority are White British and none speak English as an additional language. The school has achieved many awards, including the ICT Quality Mark for information and communication technology, and the Investors in Careers award. It is a member of Farnhamme Confederation of Schools and provides an outreach service to secondary schools for 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

The Abbey School provides an outstanding education for its students. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their views about the provision and make comments such as, 'We feel very fortunate to find a school that meets our daughter's needs so well and gives her so much opportunity to develop academically and as a person'.

As a result of excellent teaching, students achieve exceptionally well. Staff have very high expectations of every student, whatever their abilities, and they make sure that learning is enjoyable. In turn, students respond by working hard and giving of their best. The assessment and recording of their progress is very effective. It enables staff to identify strengths in students' achievements and intervene quickly if any slowdown in learning is detected. The curriculum is outstanding because teachers tailor activities very successfully to students' needs, abilities and aspirations. Staff and other professionals are very effective in creating a comprehensive range of activities that challenge students to learn to think for themselves. Excellent use is made of information and communication technology across all areas of school life. As a result, students tackle their tasks with enthusiasm. Significant improvement has taken place in the accommodation since the last inspection and this has enabled staff to provide a much richer curriculum. All courses lead to nationally accredited qualifications for students at age 16 and the programmes for English, mathematics, and information and communication technology in particular are key strengths. Combined with excellent teaching, these result in the students making outstanding progress in learning the basic skills needed for life once they leave school.

Students thrive within the school's caring ethos and make excellent progress in their personal development. They develop extremely positive attitudes to learning which help them to achieve their full potential. The school manages the students' behaviour very well and, as a result, it is exemplary. Students are exceptionally well supported and become confident learners who respect and value their own efforts as well as those of others. A good example was when Year 11 students critically evaluated their own artwork and indicated how much they appreciated that of Year 10. Students of all ages learn how to keep healthy and safe, and bullying is rare. Students say that they are proud of their school and this is evident through the excellent relationships they have with staff and their very high levels of attendance.

The headteacher and senior team provide extremely effective leadership with the drive and determination to ensure continual improvement. They have established a strong ethos of teamwork and a 'can do' approach. Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and work together very well to ensure that students have every opportunity to succeed. The very strong relationships established with others, including schools, colleges and the world of work, are central to the school's success. Middle leaders are enthusiastic and support their areas well. In line with the school's drive for continual improvement, it has identified that these staff do not yet take on enough responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the areas that they lead. The governing body challenges the school very well and acts as its critical friend. The school's rigorous self-evaluation ensures that everyone is clear about its strengths and areas that are in need of development. Along with the determination of all staff and governors to provide the best, the school has excellent capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the role of middle leaders in monitoring the areas for which they take responsibility.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Students of different backgrounds and abilities reach or exceed the challenging targets that staff set for them. Standards are well below those in mainstream schools but given students' very low attainment on entry these represent excellent achievement. The school has robust systems to track students' progress over time. These are used extremely well to gauge the next small steps in their learning and ensure that activities are very carefully adapted to their needs. By the time they leave, students attain a wide range of nationally recognised qualifications that stand them in good stead for life after school. Dependent on their needs and aspirations, students gain qualifications in both academic and vocational areas, including Entry-Level and GCSE qualifications. All leave with an Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualification in the development of personal and life skills and move successfully to college or employment once they leave school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Staff value students as individuals and they have high expectations of each one. As a result, students of all ages make significant gains in developing their confidence, independence and self-discipline. The ways in which students learn to think through their actions and the effects of these on others is impressive; for example when they talked about the different techniques they adopt if they feel that they need to calm down. This ensures that students improve their levels of self-discipline and work together in a very harmonious atmosphere. Students really enjoy school and particularly appreciate the friendships they make. As evidenced by the school's Healthy Schools award, students are clear about the need for a healthy lifestyle. They take an active part in a wide range of physical activities, such as basketball, football and dance. In all their activities, students pay particular attention to acting safely and look after each other very well. They make an excellent contribution to both their own and the wider community, for instance through the work of the student council and the Eco group. Work-related learning is very carefully organised and students develop skills that prepare them extremely well for their future economic well-being. A very positive Investors in Careers award is a testament to the quality of the school's provision in this area.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The school's rigorous programme for monitoring teaching and learning has been highly effective in bringing about improvements in classroom practice since the last inspection. It informs the well-thought-out programme of staff development so that all staff gain the skills and confidence they require to address the wide range of pupils' needs. This improved practice is reflected in the very thorough planning and assessment that are in place. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils, and a fully consistent approach to managing behaviour, form the bedrock of pupils' highly effective learning. Teaching is particularly well enhanced by the support staff who play an important part in helping pupils to develop the confidence they need to succeed and in assessing students' progress. The emphasis given to first-hand, practical learning is a key feature of the extremely effective teaching, as was seen in outstanding lessons in science,

art and Spanish. The school's excellent resources for information and communication technology are used very well by staff to support students' learning. A video made by students during one of their residential visits to Dorset exemplifies this particularly well.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is much improved since the last inspection. Increased flexibility ensures that programmes, including a range of therapies, are very successfully targeted to meet pupils' individual circumstances. A key focus is given to pupils' personal development and to the development of their skills in literacy, numeracy and particularly in information and communication technology. These are very successfully integrated into all aspects of the school's work so that every opportunity is taken to enhance students' achievements. Enrichment activities such as clubs and visits, some of which are abroad and many that are local, play a vital role in developing students' life skills. Access to learning in different settings, such as in local mainstream schools, colleges, the sports centre and different workplace settings make an important contribution to students' learning and increase their motivation and enjoyment.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

An exemplary level of care is given to students who say that, 'staff listen to us and help us'. The systems for supporting students' personal development are extremely effective. They ensure that students learn about people with different backgrounds and beliefs from their own, and develop the social skills needed to be successful members of the wider community. There is rigorous tracking of each student's academic and behavioural progress. This information is used extremely well to organise extra support for individuals, for example counselling, where appropriate. Students' records of achievement are of a very high quality and form a good basis for their annual review meetings. The way in which students review their own progress at these meetings is impressive. They often make use of a PowerPoint presentation with photos of themselves involved in a range of activities. Their comments show that they develop good understanding of their strengths and also the areas where they still need to improve. The school's work with parents and outside agencies supports students' development very well.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The energy and enthusiasm of the headteacher and senior team are driving the school forward on a path of continual improvement. All staff work together very effectively to ensure that pupils receive education of a very high quality. Governors challenge the school very well, for example through their regular monitoring visits to classes, and they ensure that it provides excellent value for money. The school's focus on developing the skills of all staff pays dividends, as evidenced by members of the support staff becoming teachers. The school is highly effective in promoting equality of opportunity and community cohesion. Students with a wide range of needs act very effectively as ambassadors for their school and promote the profile of those with learning difficulties across a wider community. A good example of this was demonstrated when they presented their views on Eco issues to a regional conference. The school's planned developments are well focused. As an important next step, it has rightly identified the need to extend the role of its middle leaders as part of its drive for further improvement.

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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/or disabilities make progress	1

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
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?	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

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 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
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**

23 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Abbey School, Farnham, GU9 8DY

Thank you for all the help you gave me when I visited your school. You told me that you think that you make really good progress. Indeed, one of you said your progress had 'improved dramatically' since joining Abbey School. You say that you have made friends, and that you enjoy all of the extra activities, such as the residential visit to Dorset and the many different clubs. You mentioned that the staff are always ready to listen to you and help you. I could also see that you are good at helping others and through the school council you make decisions that improve the school. The new school uniform is a very good example of this. I agree that The Abbey School is an excellent school where you do very well. Everyone helps you to improve your behaviour and to become confident and independent. Teaching is of a very high quality and, as a result, you gain a wide range of qualifications by the time you leave. These qualifications and the very effective programme of work placements, for instance when you work in local shops and nurseries, help to make sure you are extremely well prepared for life after school.

The headteacher and senior team are helping those teachers who have responsibility for curriculum areas to check more closely how well you are all achieving. You can help in the school's efforts to keep improving by always doing your very best.

Yours faithfully

Kay Charlton

Lead Inspector