

Abbot's Lea School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104736
Local Authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	336356
Inspection dates	14–15 January 2010
Reporting inspector	David Smith

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	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	120
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	18
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wendy Simon
Headteacher	Mrs Margaret Lucas
Date of previous school inspection	2 May 2007
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 17 lessons and observed 16 teachers. Each part-lesson observation lasted between 20 to 40 minutes. Around 60% of the time was spent looking at learning. They held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils and students. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at the school development plan, assessment data and 71 parental questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the contribution of staff and other key stakeholders to the school's capacity to improve
- the effectiveness of the collection, evaluation and use of data, in providing challenge and tailoring learning to meet the students' needs
- the school's strategy and planning to promote community cohesion
- the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including links with other agencies.

Information about the school

Abbot's Lea School provides for students that have an autistic spectrum disorder. The majority also have moderate learning difficulties and all have a statement of special educational need. There are significantly more boys than girls on roll. The vast majority of the students are White British. A very small minority are looked after by a local authority. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The school has been accredited by the National Autistic Society. It also provides an outreach service to support Liverpool schools with their provision for students with an autistic spectrum disorder. Their after-school clubs are managed by the governing body. The school has been awarded the Activemark, the Healthy Schools Award and the Extended Schools Award. It has also achieved Investors in People and Financial Management Systems in Schools.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Abbot's Lea is a good school. It has a number of outstanding features. Students thoroughly enjoy their learning and attend well. When the extent of their learning difficulties and other barriers to learning are taken into account, their achievement is good. Students make good progress in English and mathematics and particularly good progress in science. However, progress in writing in Years 7 to 11 is no better than satisfactory because there are too few opportunities provided for the students to extend the range of their writing. The students make good progress in information and communication technology (ICT).

Overall, the curriculum is outstanding and is enriched by an impressive range of activities. The after-school club provides a programme that is ideally matched to the students' needs and interests and makes an excellent contribution to community cohesion. The school ensures that students develop the skills and attitudes required to access their learning. Links with other schools are excellent. This provides the opportunity, for example, for some of the Years 10 and 11 students to study challenging courses alongside their mainstream peers. However, a few of the other Year 11 students are ready for more challenging courses, albeit in the supportive environment of Abbot's Lea School rather than in a mainstream school. Care, guidance and support are excellent and the arrangements for safeguarding students are good.

The effectiveness of the sixth form is good. The students respond well to the opportunities provided to extend their independence skills. From Year 13 onwards, there are good opportunities to study challenging courses at college and to take part in relevant work placements. A few of the students in Year 12 study courses which are too easy. This results in their overall progress being good rather than outstanding.

The governing body has a good range of skills and experience. They provide a particularly good balance of support and challenge to senior leaders. The recently extended leadership has a good blend of skills and experience and a strong determination to improve. Leaders are receptive to advice and very open to challenge. However, not all leaders are fully involved in the self-review process and strategic planning. This limits the school's capacity to improve to good rather than outstanding. The promotion of community cohesion and equal opportunities for all of the students is excellent.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that a few of the higher ability students in Years 11 and 12 are more effectively challenged by studying appropriate courses in Abbot's Lea School.

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- Boost the role of middle leaders in school improvement by involving them more fully in whole-school self-review and strategic planning.
- Increase the opportunities provided to extend the range of Key Stages 3 and 4 students' writing by decreasing the reliance on worksheets.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

Students make good progress from their various starting points. Variations in students' progress are linked to their special educational need and/or disability rather than, for example, whether they are a boy or a girl. By the end of Year 6, good foundations have been established for the students' future learning. They are developing the necessary communication and social skills to make good progress in their learning. There are good examples of writing by Year 6 students on display. The students respond well to practical activities and, as a result, their progress in science is particularly good throughout their time in school. They make strong progress in Years 7 to 9 in all aspects of their learning, other than writing. Progress to the end of Year 11 continues to be good. However, by the time they reach Year 11 a few of the more-able students are capable of making better progress. Students across the school make good progress in ICT, using it effectively, for example, to research information for their projects. Also, they respond well to the sensory experiences that the school now provides.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students feel safe in school and develop good relationships which help to promote their good attendance. The communal exercise at the start of the day helps to relax the students and to prepare them for their busy day ahead. They thoroughly enjoy their learning and take a full and active part in an extensive range of activities, which has helped the school to attain a number of awards, with a strong emphasis on staying healthy. For example, they develop the skills and confidence to tackle the school's climbing wall. Their sense of achievement when reaching the top of a climb is very evident. Also, they make good progress in their ability to cooperate in a game of chess, with the capacity to accept losing as well as winning. The residential trips are a highlight of the school year and one student commented, 'that it is great fun being with your mates'. Many cannot believe that they actually did some of the more daring activities. The students are well-prepared for the next stage of their education which is usually to join the school's sixth form. They take great pride in their work, develop their capacity to work independently and enjoy the opportunity work with others. This is good progress.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Most teaching is enthusiastic and accelerates students' development and learning. In the large majority of lessons the collection, evaluation and use of data are now good, indicating good improvement since the previous inspection. Behaviour is very skilfully managed, which helps students to access their learning. A good balance between structured activities and opportunities for independent learning effectively engages the students. In most lessons, the teaching assistants provide a good balance of support and challenge for the students' learning. In a few lessons, inspirational teaching boosts students' confidence and motivates them to make exceptional progress. Teaching is no better than satisfactory in some lessons due to an over-reliance on worksheets and limitations in the use of visual prompts to engage the students.

Overall, flexibly planned, personalised and tailor-made curriculum programmes meet the needs of the students exceptionally well. Practical activities, such as puppet making for the younger students, provide them with high levels of challenge. The promotion of literacy and ICT skills in other subjects is particularly good. The provision of activities, during the lunch break and after-school, provides a wealth of excellent opportunities for stimulating learning and for social development. The residential trips are a major success and reflect the high levels of staff commitment.

Very effective communication between the staff and professionals from other agencies ensures that the care needs of the students are met exceptionally well. The staff team is trained very effectively to manage challenging behaviour. Also, there are opportunities for parents to take part in training to develop their behaviour management skills. Excellent arrangements are in place to support the students as they progress through

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the school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and other members of the senior leadership team, supported by dedicated and hard-working staff, effectively strive to remove the obstacles to learning for their students. Inclusion in community activities and links with peers in mainstream schools, are strong features of the school's provision. The staff's work in other schools provides a valuable service for the local authority and is an example of excellent partnerships. Links with other schools, sporting networks and businesses are also examples of excellent partnerships which help to promote excellent community cohesion in the school, the local community and beyond. The school's excellent promotion of equality of opportunity and its outstanding effectiveness in tackling discrimination are evident in all aspects of its work. Effective management systems and procedures are in place to ensure students are secure and safe. At the time of the inspection, child protection procedures met government regulations. Risk assessments are detailed and thorough. The governing body plays a full and active part in school improvement. Their work helps to ensure that the school provides good value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1

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The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2
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Sixth form

The sixth form students enjoy their status as the school 'seniors'. Teaching is consistently good and promotes an adult learning environment where the students become increasingly independent. Learning is made relevant to everyday life and the students thoroughly enjoy discussing topical issues. The development and impact of enterprise activities is a growing strength in the sixth form. The use of humour is very evident in class and during the students' social time. There is a group of enthusiastic musicians who can be heard making music with 'gusto'. New technologies are used very effectively to engage the students in their learning. The curriculum in Year 12 does not fully challenge a small minority of the more-able students. However, the college courses and work-placements in Years 13 and 14 do effectively challenge the students and they make good progress during their time in the sixth form. These students choose their courses and this is good preparation for the next stage of their learning. Their excellent care, guidance and support are boosted by the strong links with other agencies such as Connexions. Good leadership and management are restricted by limitations in the self-review process leading to good, rather than outstanding, improvement in the sixth form.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

Returns of the Ofsted questionnaires indicate that the vast majority of parents and carers are delighted with what the school achieves for their children. Their views are exemplified by the comments, 'Abbott's Lea provides a high quality environment and learning community' and 'I could not wish for my son to be in a better school'. A small minority of parents would like to see more academic challenge for some of the older students. Inspectors agree with parents' views and evidence supports that they have every reason to be proud of what their children achieve in this good school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abbot's Lea School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspector received 71 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 120 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	49	31	44	2	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	57	80	11	15	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	50	70	17	24	2	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	39	55	25	35	0	0	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	50	70	17	24	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	42	59	20	28	3	4	1	1
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	43	61	20	28	5	7	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	48	68	20	28	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	50	70	18	25	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	51	72	13	18	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	62	20	28	2	3	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	51	72	15	21	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	54	76	11	15	2	3	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



18 January 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Abbot's Lea School, Liverpool, L25 6EE

Thank you for making us so welcome and we are sure that you are very proud of your school. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit and the opportunity to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

Abbot's Lea, including the sixth form, is a good school. The vast majority of you seem to enjoy school and your attendance is good. Your care is excellent and good arrangements are made to keep you safe. The members of staff are effective at helping you to improve your behaviour. We enjoyed watching you having a good time taking part in a wide range of activities. We were very impressed with the 'bravery' of the climbers and the 'patience' of the chess players. You all seemed to enjoy your exercises at the beginning of the day. Also, we could certainly hear the sixth form group practising their music.

The headteacher and staff work hard to help you. We think it is important that you make as much progress as possible and have asked the teachers to provide you with more opportunities to practise your writing. We have also asked the teachers to ensure that your courses in Years 11 and 12 are at the right level of difficulty for all of you. Finally, we have suggested that more of the staff could help plan your school improvement.

I hope that you will continue to try your best and wish you good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

David Smith

Lead inspector

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