

# The Abbey School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	118831
<b>Local Authority</b>	Kent
<b>Inspection number</b>	339310
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 December 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Patricia Metham HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1010
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	164
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mr D Parrett
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs C Woodend
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1 November 2006
<b>School address</b>	London Road Faversham Kent ME13 8RZ
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 35 lessons and held meetings with governors, staff and pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at pupils' attainment over the past four years, at schemes of work, policies, the school improvement plan, and reports from advisers working with the school. They also considered 223 responses to the questionnaire sent to parents, 312 responses to the pupils' questionnaire and 75 responses from staff.

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

- attainment and progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, with particular attention to the achievement of girls and of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- achievement in the sixth form, the appropriateness of courses undertaken by students and the effectiveness with which independent learning is promoted
- the impact of the school's business and enterprise specialism on the curriculum and on pupils' personal development.

## Information about the school

This is a non-selective school with a wide range of ability in an area where about a third of pupils attend grammar schools. It is one of two schools in Kent and Medway with a specialist unit for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder. The school as a whole has a higher-than-average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or difficulties. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage and very few pupils are in the early stages of learning English. The school's curriculum provision has been extended in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form through partnerships with other schools, including a grammar school, and two local colleges. In 2006 the school gained specialist status for business and enterprise and has vocational units on site for horticulture and catering, which provide services to the public. The school also has links with a local farm that manages the National Fruit Collection. In addition to the Investors in People and Healthy School awards, in 2009 The Abbey School gained the Investors in Careers award. The headteacher has been in post since September 2006.

**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

### Main findings

Under the dynamic and purposeful leadership of the headteacher and her senior team, The Abbey School has improved significantly since its last inspection and is providing a good quality of education. Parents, pupils and staff have great confidence in its rapidly improving capacity to challenge and support all abilities and aspirations. One parent spoke for many: 'The school's going places!'

Pupils enter with lower-than-average prior attainment. Attainment figures based solely on GCSE results are low. However, they do not take into account the many successes made by pupils in gaining a range of vocational qualifications that will serve them well in later life, or the qualifications gained by pupils not well served by the mainstream curriculum. Although GCSE results at the end of Year 11 are still below the national average, the school exceeded the government's target for the percentage gaining five or more subjects at grade C or above, including English and mathematics, and significantly exceeded predictions based on pupils' levels at the end of Year 6. Progress for pupils across Years 7 to 11 is at least good and is outstanding in mathematics. The school recognises that academic attainment needs to rise further. While the current range of vocational options engages more boys than girls, which explains differences in overall attainment, plans are in place to extend the choices offered. Levels of attainment observed by inspectors in three quarters of lessons seen, and in a scrutiny of pupils' recent work, were average and support a judgement that attainment overall is average. Pupils' overall achievement is good, including achievement by the pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, who form almost half the school's population. A notable strength of the school's curriculum is that it is responsive to the needs and potential of pupils with differing abilities and aspirations across each key stage, including the sixth form.

Pupils are emphatic that they enjoy school. They feel safe and take seriously the need to develop a healthy lifestyle. The behaviour seen in lessons and around the school was generally good. Pupils are exceptionally responsive to opportunities to make a positive contribution to the life of the school and to the wider community. They are confident of being well prepared for life beyond school, through the development of basic skills and through work-related learning and active links with local businesses. Pupils' growing confidence and personal effectiveness are clearly linked to exceptionally strong pastoral and academic guidance. Although the school has not yet established the full range of on-site services envisioned by the headteacher, its extended provision is already impressive.

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A persuasive and ambitious vision for the strategic development of the school is shared by governors, school leaders and staff. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning shapes a strong programme of professional development and is bringing greater consistency across departments. The best teaching observed combined secure subject knowledge with effective questioning skills, lively pace and an effective use of technology to engage and inform pupils. However, some unevenness remains in subject leaders' success in setting targets and monitoring the impact of teaching and curriculum in their area. Assessment of progress in lessons is uneven in quality and the marking of work does not routinely provide students with enough information on how to improve. There is, nonetheless, clear evidence that coherent strategies to raise standards, to improve teaching and to add breadth and variety to the curriculum are having a positive impact, which indicates that the capacity for continuing improvement is good.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Raise attainment further by
  - developing strengths throughout middle management so that best practice in teaching and learning is consistently disseminated, monitored and embedded
  - establishing an effective and regularly evaluated approach to oral and written assessment to support learning.

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

Progress, especially in Years 7 to 9, has been broadly satisfactory, and significantly better in English and mathematics. It is now good overall. Systematic tracking ensures that underachievement or loss of momentum is quickly identified and well-directed action then taken. Interventions include booster classes, one-to-one coaching in core subjects and a philosophy group to develop pupils' approach to critical thinking and problem solving. In 2007 the proportion achieving five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE increased sharply and this improvement has been maintained. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities progress as well and as willingly as their contemporaries. They take positive advantage of appropriate courses, including vocational options and courses focused on the development of functional skills. When success in these is taken into account alongside results at GCSE and the standards of work observed during the inspection, attainment overall is seen to be broadly average and achievement is good.

Pupils from all year groups said they felt very safe and were confident that any difficulties would be effectively dealt with by staff. They displayed a broad understanding of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle and appreciated the healthy options offered in the canteen. Take-up of sports and activities is good. Although a few spoke of low-level disruption in some lessons, behaviour observed during the inspection was good. Integration of pupils from the autism centre into mainstream classes is successful partly because their contemporaries are so supportive. Pupils take pride in what they recognise to be a fast-improving school. They are keen to do well. Rates of attendance

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are improving and the number of exclusions is falling.

Pupils make a highly positive contribution to the school, for example through peer mentoring and involvement in the school council. They contribute most effectively to their local community through, amongst others, 'eco warrior' activities like the 'adopt a street' scheme. In addition, older students work extremely well with primary schools and provide much-appreciated services for the community, such as the on-site restaurant where they cook and serve healthy but inexpensive meals to the public. Effective participation in the wider community has been very energetically and effectively promoted through the school's business and enterprise specialism. Through such activities and through their development of sound literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills, pupils are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Inspectors found three quarters of teaching to be good or better, which matched the school's own assessments. There was a positive rapport between teachers and pupils,

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

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and teachers' subject knowledge was generally secure. The most effective teaching seen was supported by detailed and well-judged planning and was characterised by lively pace, a variety of approach and high expectations. Open questioning, feedback after group work, and peer and self-review reinforced pupils' learning. Learning support assistants were well deployed, often to support pupils with particular needs. In less effective lessons, progress from one point or one activity to another was slow and pupils' concentration flagged. The level of challenge was not always well matched to pupils' abilities, and opportunities for pupils to show initiative and to reflect on their own learning were not well exploited. The quality of questioning was also less productive in weaker lessons. Marking of written work was uneven in quality, ranging from the detailed highlighting of what had been well done, with specific guidance on how to improve, to uncritical praise or ticks without comment.

The school provides a broad range of experiences and well-presented pathways for pupils as they reach Year 10 and again as they enter the sixth form. A combination of academic and vocational options and is complemented by timely careers advice. Recent and well-planned curriculum development includes an additional curriculum now offered to pupils who would otherwise struggle with mainstream provision and 'taster' vocational courses for Year 9. The business and enterprise specialism has a strong and very productive influence. 'Enterprise days' and input from national companies and local businesses successfully encourage pupils to make connections between the world of work and learning in school and to be collaborative and inventive in their problem solving. The varied extra-curricular and enrichment programme meets most interests and supports the curriculum effectively.

The range and the quality of pastoral care are impressive and include very effective support for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder, work with external agencies and close liaison with parents and carers. Links with local primary schools ensure that transition into Year 7 is well managed. The needs of vulnerable pupils are very carefully assessed and steadily supported. Teachers are aware of sensitivities and priorities when planning lessons and know where to seek advice if needed. Learning mentors carefully track the progress and monitor the personal development of pupils, responding very promptly to signs of disaffection or distress.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

**How effective are leadership and management?**

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Staff, pupils and parents have justifiable confidence in the school's leadership. The following comment from a parent represents many: 'There is a happy atmosphere at this school. Senior leadership is on the ball and sets a good example for the rest of the staff and pupils.' Governors share a clear strategic vision, with a focus on inclusiveness and excellence in a range of academic and vocational provision. The school has raised its profile and standing locally through an energetic and appealing programme of community links and partnerships, by improving resources on site and demonstrating a more aspirational approach to teaching and curriculum development. Rising numbers of pupils, both in the main school and in the sixth form, indicate that this strategy is highly effective. Members of the senior leadership team rigorously monitor the performance of subject leaders, drawing on evidence from lesson observations and information about progress and standards to establish appropriate priorities for staff training. There are examples of very effective subject leadership but best practice is not yet securely embedded in all areas.

The school is a thoroughly cohesive community. Its ethos, the range of facilities provided and the inclusiveness of the curriculum ensure that equality of opportunity for all is exceptionally secure. The school's enterprising engagement with the surrounding community ensures that pupils understand the nature and priorities of the area. Through the curriculum and through links with schools overseas, the school successfully extends pupils' awareness of themselves as part of a global community. Plans are in place to establish links with schools in very different settings in this country so that pupils build up an understanding of the nature of modern multicultural Britain, but this is as yet relatively undeveloped. The school has yet to evaluate the range and impact of strategies used to promote community cohesion.

Concern for the safety and well-being of pupils underpins all planning. Exceptionally effective procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure, including those relating to child protection, are in place and well understood at all levels.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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



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<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Sixth form

Overall, standards on entry to the sixth form are in line with national averages, and some students are particularly talented in areas such as sport or music. Boys and girls make good progress in lessons, and the school is rightly proud of its many successes with students who have been working in the specialist unit. Good teaching and excellent relationships with adults lead to good progress, and personal development is also good as students move towards employment or further study.

Most students in the sixth form progress from Year 11 at The Abbey School and, once in the sixth form, almost all complete their courses. The school works in partnership with other local schools to offer a broad range of academic and vocational courses. Overall, this is a good curriculum, which is well matched to the needs of students, whatever their aspirations. There are valuable opportunities for them to act as role models in the rest of the school, for example as lunchtime supervisors, as mentors to younger students, and through the Sports Leader programme. Of particular note is the Football Academy, through which sixth form footballers are able to experience high-level professional coaching.

Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The head of sixth form has a secure understanding of her students' needs and works closely with colleagues to create an environment in which students can develop into positive and well-rounded young adults in line with their abilities and aspirations.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>2</b>
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

The level of response to the questionnaire was low. Although a small number of parents commented that school-to-home communication is not always sufficiently prompt or appropriate, the majority of those who responded felt well informed and greatly valued being included in planning how best to support their children. A few expressed concern about the distracting behaviour in lessons of a minority of pupils. However, almost all agreed that they were happy with their children's experience at the school and many

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Year 7 parents made a point of stressing how quickly and happily their children had settled in. Inspection evidence supported the majority's positive assessment of the school's provision for pupils.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Abbey 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection received 233 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1010 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	77	35	126	57	16	7	2	1
The school keeps my child safe	75	34	132	59	4	2	8	4
The school informs me about my child's progress	66	30	127	57	16	7	5	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	65	29	120	54	28	13	2	1
The teaching is good at this school	57	26	139	62	17	8	1	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	51	23	128	57	25	11	9	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	36	16	158	71	14	6	7	3
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)	54	24	135	61	10	4	1	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	67	30	127	57	16	7	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	61	27	214	56	19	9	8	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	39	17	127	57	26	12	7	3
The school is led and managed effectively	67	30	133	60	9	4	3	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	87	39	113	51	12	5	6	3

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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



4 December 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of The Abbey School, Faversham ME13 8RZ

Thank you for your cheerful readiness to answer questions and show my team of inspectors your work when we visited your school. I welcome this opportunity to let you know about the judgements we reached.

Yours is a good school. You are being taught well and benefit from a broad curriculum that meets your varied needs and interests. Amongst The Abbey School's particular strengths are the care and support you are given and the opportunities you have to make a positive contribution to your school and to the wider community. We were impressed by the variety and the quality of the links your school has established with other schools and colleges and with the world of business. The Abbey School's business and enterprise specialism is effectively managed and provides you with experiences and skills that will serve you well in the future. We could see that you have a good understanding of the importance of keeping healthy and were pleased to find that you feel very safe in school.

To support your school's continuing improvement, we have asked your headteacher to:

- encourage subject leaders to learn from each other about ways in which to help you raise your levels of attainment in all subjects
- ensure that, both in lessons and in the marking of your written work, your teachers always help you progress by balancing encouragement with guidance as to how you can improve.

You can help by having high expectations for yourself and by having the confidence to show initiative and independence in your approach to learning.

I look forward to seeing your school go from strength to strength.

Yours sincerely

Patricia Metham

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools

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