

Abbey Hill School and Performing Arts College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124500
Local Authority	Stoke-On-Trent
Inspection number	340583
Inspection dates	15–16 June 2010
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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	2–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	220
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Smith
Headteacher	Mr Philip Kidman
Date of previous school inspection	28 November 2006
School address	Greasley Road Bucknall Stoke-on-Trent ST2 8LG
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors observed 17 lessons involving 16 teachers. They held meetings with groups of pupils, governors, and staff. The inspection team observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents such as safeguarding policies and records, assessment information, and the school improvement plan. The 89 responses to the questionnaire for parents and carers were analysed.

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

- How effectively teachers use assessment information to meet the learning needs of all pupils and improve their outcomes.
- The impact of the school's specialist status on pupils' outcomes, the curriculum and its engagement with the community.
- The extent to which the school's actions to promote pupils' awareness of diversity in Britain affect their cultural development.
- The quality of accommodation for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and its impact on children's outcomes.

Information about the school

The school caters for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The largest groups are those with moderate learning difficulties or autism but a few have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is higher than average. Most pupils are White British. A very small minority speak English as an additional language. More pupils than average join the school at other than the usual times of admission. The school became a high performing specialist school in 2007, adding a specialism in communication and interaction to its designation as a performing arts college. Its recent awards include the Eco-Schools Silver Award, National Healthy School Status, Artsmark Gold, Inclusion Quality Mark, and the Quality in Study Support Award.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

This remarkable school equips pupils exceptionally well for their future lives. Expert teaching leads them to make outstanding progress from their individual starting points. Additionally, they acquire self-confidence in abundance and develop other personal qualities to a striking degree. Pupils' determination and enthusiasm for learning help to ensure that they leave at the end of Year 11 or Year 13 with a wide range of accreditation which for some includes GCSE passes. Their extremely strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development means that pupils understand how their actions affect others and hence their behaviour is often exemplary. The school gives the highest priority to caring for pupils and keeping them safe. This results in young people who are fully confident that the staff will look after them but are at the same time ready and able to take some responsibility for their own safety. From the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, pupils are offered a curriculum tailored as closely as possible to meet their needs, its scope enabling them to develop into well- rounded individuals. For example, they appreciate the impact of lifestyle choices on their health and well-being. Again, high numbers eagerly pursue interests such as singing or drama, through the extensive range of clubs. Pupils' keen sense of responsibility is the trigger for the significant and exceptionally strong contribution they make to both the school and wider community. However, they have few planned opportunities to develop leadership skills and apply them to projects of their own devising that will benefit others.

Systems to monitor and evaluate the school's work are extremely rigorous and provide leaders including governors with a highly accurate view of its performance. Leaders' ambition for the school and each pupil drive them to seize every opportunity to build on the school's notable strengths, tackle energetically and systematically the slightest comparative weakness and provide all groups of pupils with equal opportunities to succeed. Consequently, for example, the progress made in reading by higher attaining pupils has recently become even more rapid following a set of carefully judged and thoroughly planned actions. Its second specialism together with its excellent work to promote performing arts, has supported the school's exceptional contribution to community cohesion and enabled it to extend further its extremely positive links with a host of partners, and parents and carers. All in all, the school's outstanding capacity to sustain improvement is confirmed absolutely.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance pupils' contribution to the community by increasing opportunities for them to initiate and lead activities in school and beyond.

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Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Pupils are enthusiastic learners. They are invariably keen to take part in activities, no matter how unfamiliar or challenging. Pupils in Key Stage 2 eagerly responded to visiting Peruvian musicians, applying self-discipline as they recreated the flight of the condor through the medium of dance. Pupils try very hard to be independent, for example, collecting the resources they need for the task in hand and using tools such as scissors sensibly. Their ability to work as part of a team is quite evident and pupils frequently support each other. In addition to sharing ideas and lending a helping hand, they readily take turns and listen attentively when others are speaking. Pupils concentrate as hard as they can on their work, following instructions carefully.

By the end of Year 11, pupils' learning is enhanced significantly by their ability to apply a variety of important skills to help them solve problems they might encounter in everyday life. A group of these older pupils used information and communication technology (ICT) with great efficiency to help them organise an imaginary weekend with friends. They confidently employed skills such as reading text on websites, interpreting railway timetables, and writing their plans, demonstrating clearly the outstanding progress made during their time at the school. Assessment information and comparisons made with national guidance show clearly that all groups of pupils, such as those with autism, progress faster than might be expected in English and mathematics. The levels reached by groups of pupils by the time they leave are rising year on year as are their scores in the ever-growing range of accredited courses. The achievement of every pupil, including those with the most significant autism, is fully recognised by external accreditation.

Pupils' enthusiasm for school is reflected in rates of attendance that are above the average for mainstream schools, a real achievement when pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities are considered. They typically say that they like everything about the school, especially their friends and teachers. Although a few pupils initially need significant help with their behaviour, they nearly all take great strides forward in learning to control their emotions. Pupils report that bullying is not an issue. They know exactly how to respond if they or other pupils have any concerns. The school's diverse population forms an extremely close-knit and supportive community. A prime example is the confidence pupils show in each other during their many, frequently joyous, public performances. They are self-assured and considerate when interacting with people who appear different to themselves, for example, when students from other schools join lessons and clubs or share performances with them. Pupils take their many and varied responsibilities very seriously. Occasionally, individuals identify opportunities to make a difference in school, for example, by helping to supervise in the dining room. However, despite their overall excellent contribution to the school and wider community, pupils do not learn how to lead others or projects, particularly in the wider community

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

A key strength of teaching is the choice of motivating activities that are relevant to pupils' present and future needs. Skills are seldom taught in isolation but are linked imaginatively to everyday life or to work in other subjects, enabling pupils to appreciate their significance and to enjoy learning. Teachers use assessment information extensively in order to meet the needs of individual pupils. They are adept at questioning in order to check pupils' understanding, prompt them to think hard, and encourage them to communicate either through speech or by exchanging symbols. Pupils are reminded about their individual targets and how they will know if they have learned as well as they could. Resources are chosen carefully. For example, pupils with autism are often provided with real objects, whether a Muslim prayer mat or sandwich ingredients, to help them understand the nature of tasks. Teachers and teaching assistants, known as special school practitioners, share the same high expectations and work together closely to support pupils but encourage them to be independent. Right from the start, pupils' experiences are closely aligned to their interests. For example, investigations into types of armour and terrain stemmed from a pupil's response to the 'Lord of the Rings' trilogy. Accredited courses, which begin in Key Stage 3, are chosen carefully to provide pathways through the school, into the sixth form and beyond. Work-related learning, independent travel training and college courses are

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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significant in smoothing pupils' transition to adult life. The performing arts specialism enables the school to employ staff with particular expertise in dance, drama and music, enhancing lessons throughout the school and supporting events such as a week devoted to Peruvian culture. Lunchtime and after-school clubs are extensive and respond to pupils' interests, for example, in street-dance. Some are targeted at particular groups, for example boys whose reading needed an extra boost or pupils with autism. The school is working towards involving pupils in leading clubs. Visits, including residentials, and visitors to school are extensive and significantly support learning and personal development, such as pupils' awareness of diversity in Britain.

All groups of staff know each pupil as an individual, so care and support surround them from the moment they arrive each morning. The school's specialist pupil support team is the focus for intensive work with pupils, and advice for staff and parents or carers. Its members ensure that programmes, for example to modify behaviour, are meeting particular needs and agreed strategies are used consistently. They work on an individual basis with pupils who are at any one time especially vulnerable and have established excellent links with a range of professionals and agencies so any necessary specialist support is quickly put in place. For example, clinical psychologists spend two days each week in school, providing advice regarding pupils' mental well-being and working directly with individuals and small groups. Support for families is readily available and comes in many forms. This includes parents and carers of new entrants with autism who are linked with mentors in the form of other parents whose children have attended for longer.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1
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?

There is no hint of complacency within the school. On the contrary, leaders and staff are continually striving to perform even better and thus they set themselves demanding targets, for example through precisely detailed action plans to drive forward every aspect of the school. External verification, the views of pupils, parents and carers, and comparisons with other schools are employed extensively to inform self-evaluation. Provision and outcomes are scrutinised closely and frequently to ensure no groups of pupils are unduly disadvantaged. As a result, for example, opportunities for pupils with the most significant autism now mirror those of other pupils and are often shared. Governors are extremely well informed and have a direct impact on the school's future

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development. The specialist expertise of the leading professional ensures that all aspects of safeguarding policies, practice, recording and staff training are of the highest order and under constant review. The school's specialist status is a strong element of its work to promote community cohesion. For example, the music for a concert to celebrate a visit to Stoke-on-Trent by Archbishop Desmond Tutu was organised by the school in partnership with 'Black Voices'. The school uses its second specialism in communication and interaction to provide effective and extensive support to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities in mainstream schools.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
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	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Before children join the school, staff begin to develop their excellent awareness of the needs and circumstances of each one, by establishing very close links with families and other settings. This helps to ensure that transition is smooth and children can participate fully from the outset, ensuring a rapid boost to their learning and development when they join the school. Learning opportunities are carefully tailored to build on each child's skills and provide a well-judged balance between activities led by adults and those chosen by children. Tightly focused adult support ensures that children have ample time to follow their individual programmes, enabling them to make outstanding progress across the areas of learning and towards their personal targets. Progress in personal, social and emotional development is often especially rapid because this, and developing children's communication skills, is a thread running through all activities and routines. The two teachers work very effectively together, for instance to maintain excellent

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arrangements for children's welfare. The outdoor accommodation is used flexibly, because the space dedicated to one class is currently small for children's needs. As a result of staff's efforts, children's outcomes are not adversely affected.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

Sixth form

By the end of their time in the sixth form, students are articulate and positive about moving on when they leave school. They consider that the school prepares them very well for employment, particularly by helping them gain the confidence needed when meeting new people and going to different places. The curriculum and teaching are firmly focused on equipping students with the skills they need in their daily lives. As a result, for example, all of last year's leavers were able to travel around independently. Students' eyes are opened to the range of options available to them, through college courses and work experience, plus the use of community facilities such as a leisure centre. In addition to gaining a range of relevant accreditation, students benefit from opportunities to explore very personal issues associated with adulthood. This means that they develop their ability to make informed choices about a range of topics. Residential visits provide excellent opportunities for students to practise the independent living skills they learn in school. Strong and informed leadership has driven initiatives such as compulsory study support after school hours, to help prepare students for the extended working day they will encounter in the future.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	1
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

Most of the questionnaires returned by parents and carers were entirely positive and reflected the inspection findings. A few parents and carers are disappointed by the

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amount of progress their child is making. The inspectors found that although the pupils tend to move forward in extremely small steps, when their special educational needs and/or disabilities are taken into account this amounts to outstanding progress overall in their learning and personal development.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abbey Hill School and Performing Arts College 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 inspection team received 89 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 220 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	66	74	19	21	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	74	83	13	15	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	60	67	26	29	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	52	58	29	33	4	4	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	64	72	22	25	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	60	67	23	26	4	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	67	27	30	1	1	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)	55	62	21	24	2	2	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	76	16	18	3	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	64	72	20	22	2	2	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	61	69	19	21	3	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	62	70	22	25	2	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	67	75	18	20	1	1	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

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 is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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.



17 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbey Hill School and Performing Arts College, Stoke-on-Trent, ST2 8LG

Thank you all for being so friendly and helpful when the inspectors visited your school. We really enjoyed our short time with you and we have some lovely memories of it. The choral speaking and the singing in assembly were amazing!

You told us how much you like your school and we could see why. We have judged the school to be outstanding. Here are some of the things that helped us to decide this; they are all outstanding too.

- The progress you make and the certificates the oldest pupils earn.
- The teaching you have.
- The activities, visits and clubs arranged for you.
- Your behaviour and the things you do to help other people.
- The way you feel so safe in school, because of the care taken of you.
- The work done by the staff to get you ready for leaving when you are old enough.
- The way the school's leaders, staff and governors are always working to make the school even better.

We have asked the school to do one more thing. We want you to learn how to be leaders so that you can pass your skills on to other people, both in school and in the area round and about.

I send every one of you my very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Rosemary Eaton

Lead inspector

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