

Abbey School

Little Common Lane, Kimberworth, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S61 2RA

Inspection dates

9–10 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and senior leadership team have a very clear and bold vision for the future, building on the current high standards of teaching and learning and outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders, governors and the trust share an unrelenting and common focus to ensure that every pupil in school achieves their very best.
- Leaders make very regular checks on the work of staff and pupils' progress. They encourage staff to work in different ways and to think constantly of the best ways to meet the needs of each pupil.
- The exceptional curriculum is innovative and inspirational. Meticulously careful planning ensures that the needs of each pupil are addressed.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. Support staff and teachers work very closely together in each classroom, setting tasks for pupils which inspire and engage them to make rapid progress.
- Pupils' well-being is at the heart of all that the school does. For example, the school's mindfulness programme makes sure pupils are ready to learn at the start of each school day.
- Pupils often see the world differently from others because of, for example, autism or mental health issues. Staff are exceptionally good at understanding this. They put in place a wide range of support to enable pupils to learn strategies to manage their behaviour successfully.
- Pupils feel that they could be even fitter if there were more opportunities to exercise at playtime. The highly active school council has recognised this and is wholeheartedly supporting a bid for improvement to outdoor facilities.
- Leaders are clear about the need for pupils to develop strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills and understanding. While pupils are clear about some of the communities that pupils who attend the school come from, they have less understanding of others outside.
- The school has recently put in place a post-16 facility on a site in the centre of Rotherham. Students that attend enjoy the freedom and independence the town centre affords them, as well as enjoying learning in a more college-orientated environment. School leaders recognise that the curriculum in this provision needs further work to ensure that it is as strong as that in the main school.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve further the quality of leadership and management by:
 - improving the outside play area in order that pupils can increase the amount of exercise they take during break and lunchtime
 - ensuring that pupils have more opportunities to learn in depth about other communities outside those represented within the school
 - developing stronger relationships with the very small number of hard-to-reach parents who feel the school could do even better.
- Improve sixth-form provision by developing the curriculum so that it meets the needs of lower- and middle-ability pupils more fully.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher has a clear and very strategic vision for the future of the school. With the unerring support and help of other senior leaders, she has brought about significant improvement since the predecessor school inspection.
- Staff believe in leaders' vision and are constantly aiming even higher in their quest to make sure pupils achieve their absolute full potential and bring the school's motto, 'Inspire, Believe, Achieve', into every classroom.
- Leadership is a concept which the headteacher believes is within everyone. Pupils are encouraged to develop leadership at every turn. For example, pupils are given leadership roles in every classroom for daily tasks, such as making sure all the pencils are sharpened. This develops in pupils an early understanding of the importance of leadership in society and the independent role they can play, rather than developing a culture of dependency.
- From the word go, pupils are encouraged to think about their future. Wall displays show pictures of pupils stating their future aspirations as soon as they join the school. Senior leaders believe that this enables pupils, from the outset, to recognise and strive for a goal and fosters independence. Pupils spoken to were confident that they will succeed in their chosen ambition.
- The school curriculum takes a holistic approach and addresses the needs of the whole child. The curriculum for all pupils is based on three equal strands, academic, enterprise and employability, and well-being. Each strand is equally weighted and is used to plan learning for each child around a common theme. While the academic element ensures that all areas of the curriculum are planned for, the well-being element ensures that pupils are ready to learn through, for example, some mindfulness training or a trip to the sensory room. The enterprise element ensures that pupils develop a range of skills required in the world of work, including being punctual and organised. This approach inspires pupils to become confident and independent learners who are not afraid to take on new challenges.
- Leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. Staff are mentored, encouraged, supported and challenged by leaders to believe they can achieve whatever they set out to do. Staff spoken to said leaders provide endless support and build the confidence of all staff to succeed and 'reach for the stars' for all pupils. This could clearly be seen as pupils practised Bollywood-style dancing as their teacher modelled moves with great skill and confidence.
- Pupils' progress is closely monitored using a system developed by senior leaders. Analysis of progress is carried out by middle leaders in discussions with staff. Both academic and well-being interventions are quickly put in place to support those falling behind. Where leaders identify trends for improvement across the school, they are made into termly priorities and become whole-school targets.
- Leaders ensure that extra funding received by the school is used effectively to support pupils' needs. For example, pupils eligible for pupil premium have individual plans with challenging targets. As a result, last year this large group of pupils made stronger

progress than other pupils. Current school data shows a similar picture emerging this year.

- Staff and pupils are exceptionally pleased by the range of sporting accolades the school has achieved recently. These include achieving the Youth Sport Trust outstanding SEND school award for 2019. This clearly demonstrates effective use of the physical education and sports funding.
- Parents spoken to during the inspection were highly positive about the work of the school. Those who responded through Ofsted's online text service were also highly positive overall. The vast majority of parents that responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were also highly positive about the school's work. However, a small number of parents were less positive. School leaders are aware of this group but as yet have not been entirely successful at engaging them and dispelling their concerns.
- Pupils told the inspection team they are very proud of their school. The highly active school council feels it plays an important role in making sure the school leadership does its job properly. Regular weekly emails to the headteacher announce their activities, which recently included a learning walk to check on e-safety. A current concern is about the school playground, which they feel does not offer pupils enough opportunities to play and exercise at break and lunchtime. School leaders agree but as yet have not put in place a plan for the improvement.
- Pupils are offered a wealth of opportunity to develop spiritual, moral and social understanding and skills. They are also clear about the values important to being a good citizen. However, currently pupils do not have enough opportunity to learn about other cultures in modern Britain.

Governance of the school

- The school is part of a multi-academy trust as well as having a governing body bespoke to the school.
- Trust leaders are clear about the importance of supporting and challenging the school leadership team. In discussions with the lead inspector, the chief executive (CEO) and deputy CEO demonstrated clearly how they accomplished this task.
- Trust leaders have a strong understanding of the school and the quality of leadership and this has enabled them to help and guide the school to making the very strong improvement since the inspection of the predecessor school.
- The newly implemented governing body is highly supportive of the work of the school and offers relevant challenge when needed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school safeguarding team is highly motivated and effective.

- The deputy designated safeguarding lead (DSL) adheres very closely to all aspects of the requirements of the legislative guidance in 'Keeping children safe in education 2018'.
- Staff are well trained and have a clear understanding of what to do should a child seek help from them.
- Notes kept in pupils' safeguarding records are detailed and evidence the active role played by leaders in championing the needs of pupils and their families in safeguarding meetings.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Staff are a highly motivated team who have a very strong understanding of the needs of pupils in their care. Their skilled use of questioning enables pupils to develop independent thinking skills despite their levels of need.
- Teachers meticulously plan pupils' work for each topic covered by carefully weaving a range of different experiences into their planning for learning. For example, a recent topic around caves started with a darkened classroom devoid of all adornments. This was closely followed by a trip to a cave. This approach ensures that pupils are immersed in actual experiences which give them deeper understanding when they write or carry out follow-up work.
- Leaders ensure that pupils learn skills for life at an early age. For example, leaders recognise that because of their needs, pupils' vocabulary may not be as well developed as their peers. A word-rich environment in which pupils are given 12 new words to learn in each subject area helps to develop a vocabulary for life and not just for writing.
- Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils will achieve and plan lessons to maximise learning time. Pupils recognise the need to work to succeed and comments such as: 'We don't waste a minute because minutes are precious' typify their clear understanding of the route to achieving their goals.
- Pupils' behaviour is managed very well because they are engaged by the captivating curriculum offered, clear rules and staff's high expectations.
- From the very start when pupils join the school, staff challenge pupils to try hard. A comment from a pupil encapsulated the views of others well. 'My teacher started encouraging me to try harder things by setting challenges every day. Then the challenges got bigger and bigger and now they are very big. Luckily I like challenges.'
- Staff check pupils' understanding systematically in lessons. Timely support is offered when needed, but a clear focus on independent learning is in place at all times.
- Pupils have a range of communication needs which are successfully met using a variety of different strategies. For example, Makaton signing is used, as are electronic aids with voice synthesizers as well as 'low-tech' systems such as pictures and symbols. These systems are embraced by all staff to ensure that pupils have a voice in all classrooms.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are confident at speaking to adults. They are most often very courteous and considerate to each other, adults and visitors. Those spoken to during the inspection were keen to tell inspectors how much they loved coming to school and how proud they were to wear their uniforms.
- Pupils feel they have a voice that is listened to in school. The exceptional school council seeks to represent the views of all pupils and has put in place a wide range of initiatives to support others. For example, at break each day, they offer support to others who may be worried. They have, so far, dealt with a range of pupils' concerns including relationship issues and friendship fallouts.
- The school council development plan shows much thought for the future. For example, the chair of the committee and the vice-chair are in Year 11 so are due to leave the school soon. They have already started planning for their successors. This demonstrates the confidence and leadership skills already gained by pupils.
- Pupils feel that bullying does occur occasionally, but is sorted out either by teachers or the school council.
- Pupils take great pride in their work and know how to make it even better. Pupils are also encouraged to help improve each other's work, through kind but frank evaluations.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Despite their levels of need, pupils are very well behaved inside and outside school.
- Pupils are often unable to manage their behaviour when they first arrive at school. However, behaviour records show that once they settle into the nurturing environment of school their behaviour improves, often dramatically.
- As pupils develop confidence in staff and make friends, they also begin to relax and enjoy school. Targeted support for their well-being improves their ability to learn and be successful. This also contributes to the improvement in pupils' behaviour.
- Parents and carers say their children are happy at school, often for the first time, because they feel wanted and understood. This, parents comment, improves their behaviour at home.
- Pupils' attendance is very close to others nationally and is well above the average for special schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils make very strong progress from a wide range of starting points.

- Many arrive in school with gaps in their education after difficult mainstream experiences. They settle into school and start to engage with learning once again. Work in books shows that once this happens many make excellent progress over time.
- School leaders' relentless focus on checking pupils' progress ensures that progress for all groups is measured and monitored. Current data shows that pupils are making very strong progress particularly in mathematics, English, science and art.
- Leaders' highly effective use of extra funding has ensured that disadvantaged pupils are making very strong progress overall.
- Last year, pupils left with a wide range of accreditation including GCSEs. Staff and leaders work closely with pupils to help them to make the right choices at the end of Year 11. All pupils who left last year remain in employment or further education. This is clear evidence of the school's success at ensuring that pupils are well prepared for their chosen futures.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The school's post-16 provision is in its second year. The siting and design of the unit away from school was a deliberate policy on the part of leaders. This was done to ensure that students experienced the transition between school and the next phase in their education or training.
- The unit leadership is closely linked to the school and is monitored by the trust in the same way as the school. Senior leaders ensure that the provision is well run and managed and monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment with the same vigilance as the main school.
- School leaders work hard to ensure that students access a range of work experience often dictated by the early emphasis on students' choice of future employment.
- Students spoken to said how much they enjoy coming to the unit. Their thoughts, feelings and aspirations for their future are captured at the start of the year and are displayed on the wall. Students and staff refer back to them frequently in order to check progress towards their goals.
- Staff recognise that post-16 is a time of transition for students. Developing students' independence skills is seen as a key to success later on in life. Students learn how to travel independently and visit a range of locations in order to broaden their horizons. For example, students visit the university library and café regularly and are gaining confidence in this environment. Others go out at lunchtime independently to eat lunch or to shop. Staff are often on hand, but recognise the importance of students learning how to behave in a range of social settings.
- Students receive highly personalised and independent careers advice which helps them to make effective choices. As a result, at the end of their time at the unit, students progress to a variety of different destinations including apprenticeships, college and the workplace.
- Leaders recognise the unit is still developing. The two groups who attend follow different pathways according to their level of need. While a pathway of accreditation

for the most able students is clearly defined, accreditation for middle- and lower-ability students is not yet securely in place.

School details

Unique reference number	142768
Local authority	Rotherham
Inspection number	10087481

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	149
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	13
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	John Coleman
Headteacher	Luci Windle
Telephone number	01709 740 074
Website	www.abbeyschool.com
Email address	Abbey.admin@nexusmat.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Abbey School joined Nexus Multi-Academy Trust on 12 June 2016. When its predecessor school, Abbey School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- The trust provides leadership and management support, guidance and challenge. The school governors hold leaders to account and are also responsible for the school budget and health and safety matters.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan for moderate and severe learning difficulties. Some have other associated difficulties such as autism or social, emotional and mental health needs.
- A high proportion of pupils who attend the school are from White British families. Other pupils come from families representing a range of other ethnic groups.
- A large proportion of pupils are from a disadvantaged background.
- Pupils who attend the school come not only from Rotherham but several other local authorities including Sheffield and Nottingham.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed learning in all classrooms with members of the school leadership team.
- The lead inspector and team inspector spoke to more than 50 pupils during the inspection and gained their views of the school.
- The lead inspector met with the school council and heard about the contribution they make to leadership and the running of the school.
- The inspection team also met with four members of the governing body and the CEO and deputy CEO of the multi-academy trust.
- The inspection team analysed a range of school documents including safeguarding documents, the school's system for measuring pupils' progress, safeguarding and curriculum documents.
- The views of 56 parents who completed the online survey, Parent View, and/or sent text messages, and the views of 11 staff members were taken into account.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Janis Warren

Ofsted Inspector

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