

Abbey Court Community School

Rede Court Road, Strood, Rochester, ME2 3SP

Inspection dates 24–25 October 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Pupils make outstanding progress, particularly in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).
- Those with speech, language and communication needs make significant strides in developing and improving their communication skills through signing, the use of picture symbol cards and the use of a range of new technologies.
- Children attending the part-time sessions in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress, which prepares them for learning and enables them to proceed successfully to the next stage of their education.
- The outstanding sixth form provision enables older students to continue their seamless progress through the school and achieve nationally recognised qualifications. They improve their independence and social skills and this prepares them successfully for life beyond the school.
- As a result of a robust and sustained focus on improvement by the senior leadership team since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching across the school is now outstanding. Other strengths of the school's work identified at the last inspection have been sustained and further improved.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning and behaviour are excellent, which is a result of highly effective class management by teachers and other adults supporting in the classrooms.
- Pupils told the inspectors that they are safe and well looked after, which is further confirmed by the school's own surveys, which are carried out regularly.
- The headteacher's inspirational leadership of the school, together with the support of her highly effective senior leadership team, ensures the school meets fully its vision and aims and lives up to its motto, 'We grow people'.
- The highly experienced governing body is outstanding in its role as a critical and supportive friend and successfully ensures the school is financially stable.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 18 lessons, seeing all full-time teachers and all classes, bar one. Twelve of the lessons were observed jointly with the senior leadership team.
- Meetings were held with a small group of younger pupils at the Rainham site and a group of older students at the Strood site. Meetings were also held with the headteacher and deputy headteachers, the Chair of the Governing Body and a community governor, a representative of the local authority and a number of staff, including heads of sections and those with subject leadership responsibilities.
- Inspectors took account of eight responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) as well as the results of the school’s own regular parental surveys. There were 87 responses to the staff questionnaire which were also considered.
- Inspectors observed the school’s practice and looked at a range of documentation, including the school’s self-evaluation and improvement planning, information on pupils’ progress, documents used by leaders to monitor and evaluate the school’s work, governing body documentation and records relating to attendance, behaviour and safeguarding.

Inspection team

James Bowden, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Diane Rochford

Additional Inspector

Victoria Turner

Additional Inspector

Carol Vant

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Abbey Court is based on two sites, some 12 miles apart. The Rainham site provides for Early Years Foundation Stage, infants and juniors. The Strood site provides for secondary and students aged 16 to 19. Currently, the school has more than its official capacity of 150 places.
- Pupils have severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties as their main need. Some have additional needs such as visual impairment, hearing or sensory impairment, severe autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) and physical disability. A few have life threatening medical conditions. All have statements of special educational needs. The school continues to experience a shift in the complexity of levels of need, including severe challenging behaviours. A minority of pupils require a minimum of full time one-to-one staff support to meet their needs.
- Currently, the large majority of pupils are boys and most are of White British heritage. A few have English as an additional language. The proportion known to be eligible for the pupil premium (extra money provided to schools by the government for students looked after by the local authority and for those eligible for free school meals) is well above the national average.
- The school has specialist school status for cognition and learning and has gained numerous awards for different aspects of its work and provision. Most recently, it has received the British Council's International School Award in recognition of its involvement in global activities.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Work with the local authority to increase opportunities to share outstanding practice beyond the school.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is outstanding

- As a result of their diverse range of special needs, children's attainment on entry to the Early Years Foundation Stage is significantly below that in mainstream settings. Notwithstanding this, children make particularly good progress in improving their communication skills, which prepares them well for learning in the infant section. By the end of Year 6, a few pupils are successfully transferred to other special schools. All others continue to the end of Year 14. In relation to their starting points, pupils and students make excellent progress and achieve outstandingly well.
- Whole school data, linked to national progression guidance data for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, show that over time excellent achievement is particularly the case in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). The great majority makes the expected progress and many exceed this level. Whole school data show there are no significant differences in the rates of progress made by boys and girls or those supported by pupil premium funding.
- In addition, pupils make great strides in improving their speech, language and communication skills, as well as in their all-round personal attributes and physical competencies. They improve their ability to communicate through using visual prompt cards, signing, auditory responses and using new technologies. The more capable older pupils are able to communicate using short phrases and sentences. In a physical education lesson, pupils were beginning to understand how to work as small teams when playing indoor football, and individual physical skills were being improved in a lunchtime indoor boccia club.
- In almost all lessons seen, all-round progress was outstanding, which endorses the school's judgement based on detailed and highly effective monitoring and evaluation. Assessment and data tracking procedures confirm this level of progress over time, including small steps in learning for those with the most severe needs. All pupils have high quality individual targets which are regularly reviewed and modified when appropriate in order to sustain their high levels of progress.

The quality of teaching

is outstanding

- The main strength in teaching is the way in which all teachers and adults in the room work together to enable pupils to make the best progress possible in relation to their individual learning targets. Because of careful tracking and evaluation of progress being made, each lesson is planned highly effectively in order to build on previous learning and to provide challenge for the next steps in learning. This ensures that the work is suitable for all individual needs.
- Activities provided keep pupils interested and involved and there is a consistent approach in all lessons to develop and improve the key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. In a sixth form lesson, for example, students were prepared well for their shopping trip to a local supermarket to help them prepare lunch the following day. This involved such issues as deciding what foods to buy from visual and simple written prompts, ensuring they had sufficient money to pay for the goods and considering issues of safety such as the need to sign out before leaving the school.
- Use of an excellent range of resources, including auditory, visual and tactile, enlivens learning. In a history lesson, pupils dressed up as Victorians and used visual symbol cards to create two tables contrasting life then and now. A variety of artefacts was introduced to enable them to experience washing using a washing tub and to prepare gruel.
- Teachers and adults are adept ensuring the speech, language and communication needs of pupils are improved. In a Reception class, children's communication skills were developed through being encouraged to touch, vocalise, point, sign and use new technologies.
- In all lessons, teachers and adults encourage pupils to be independent and make choices. In a lesson with a small group with profound and multiple learning difficulties, pupils used new

technologies and auditory prompts to help them choose different colours, whilst others chose which colour to paint with. Improving physical development and competencies is also a focus and 'rebound' therapy sessions using a trampoline, prior to which pupils practice stretching, are highly effective.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Consistent routines, high expectations, respect for pupils' dignity, support for their well-being and highly effective behaviour management techniques result in largely outstanding behaviour in lessons and around the school. Typically, behaviour over time has been outstanding, there having been no permanent exclusions and only two short-term exclusions during the last 17 years. Unauthorised absence is minimal.
- Individual behaviour programmes and risk assessments, including, where appropriate, individual handling plans, are used to excellent effect. This ensures that the school's aim of keeping pupils safe, secure and comfortable, and able to learn, is fully met.
- Smiling faces and an eagerness to enter the building are the norm on arrival in the morning. Adults greet pupils with knowing looks and a genuine sense of warmth. This immediately puts pupils at ease. The few reluctant ones are gently and successfully coaxed into entering the building and then do so with growing confidence. At the end of the day fond farewells are the norm prior to pupils meeting their escorts for the journey home.
- Movement around the buildings and play areas during the day is safe and sensible because of high levels of sensitive and appropriate staff supervision. Particularly well organised lunchtimes provide opportunities for pupils to be independent and make choices. Sixth form students, for example, take turns to collect the food trolley to take to their social area.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. This is because teachers and other adults enliven learning with a wide variety of well-chosen activities. Opportunities are offered for choosing, supported independent work and, when appropriate, small group activities. This increases pupils' self-confidence and interest in learning.
- Without exception, those parents who responded to Parent View felt their child was happy and safe at school. Similar views are the norm in the school's own parent surveys. Pupils too feel they are safe and well looked after, as shown in their responses to the school's annual pupil survey and the comments they made to inspectors. They commented, for example, that they are able to tell an adult if they feel 'sad'.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and her deputies are passionate and supportive of all staff, drawing out the best from heads of all key stages, heads of subject areas, classroom teachers and other support staff. The senior leadership's drive and ambition and annual reviews of staff performance underpin the work of the school and sustain its capacity for continuing improvement.
- All staff are dedicated and have a high level of commitment to ensuring the best outcomes possible for all pupils. Staff appreciate the professional development opportunities open to them and staff turnover is low. Systems for performance management are used effectively in order to reward staff.
- A rigorous programme of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching has enabled the leadership team and governors to identify strengths and any areas in need of further improvement. As a result, the quality of teaching, judged to be 'good' at the previous inspection, has now become outstanding.
- Self-evaluation involves all staff, governors and parents. It is robust and accurate and enables the leaders to produce well informed action plans for continuing improvement. The issues at the previous inspection have been successfully dealt with.
- The highly effective curriculum ensures the learning needs of all pupils are fully met, whilst at the same time adding excellent breadth. This contributes significantly to their all-round personal

development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, the latter recently recognised by the International School Award.

- Leadership has ensured the split site provides a high quality, well-resourced learning environment. The school and the local authority recognise that there is scope for further work together in order to share and spread the outstanding practice in the school.
- The local authority knows the school well and offers a light touch and provides effective support for continuing improvements. However, the exemplary practice evident in the school is not widely shared with other providers.
- **The governance of the school:**

The governing body is highly effective in supporting the school, whilst at the same time holding it to account for its performance and outcomes. It is closely involved in school improvement, target setting and monitoring and evaluating the performance of the headteacher, the quality of teaching and ensuring safeguarding procedures are of a high standard. The finance committee is very effective in monitoring the allocation of pupil premium funding which, in order to improve further rates of progress, is being spent on extra staff on fixed-term contracts to support children looked after, those entitled to free school meals and supporting the work of therapists employed by the school.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	119052
Local authority	Medway
Inspection number	403795

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

Type of school	All-through
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	146
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	21
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen James
Headteacher	Karen Joy
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 July 2010
Telephone number	01634 338220
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