

The Abbey School

London Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 8RZ

Inspection dates 9–10 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Examination results are good in an increasingly wide range of subjects and students make good progress in lessons.
- Teaching is typically good and sometimes outstanding. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and this sets a good basis for effective learning.
- Teachers and students have high levels of mutual respect. This has resulted in a positive learning atmosphere across the school.
- Behaviour is good in lessons and during social time. Students are exceptionally well cared for and feel safe.
- Members of the governing body, the headteacher, senior leaders, and other leaders and managers are ambitious and driven in their pursuit of excellence. Their efforts are particularly evident in terms of students' improved GCSE attainment and good-quality teaching.
- School attendance has improved continuously. The need to use fixed-term exclusions has reduced considerably.
- The sixth form is good. Good leadership and teaching result in good achievement so that students are well prepared for higher education, training or employment.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The proportion of lessons where the teaching is outstanding is too low. Some teachers do not provide all students with opportunities to fully extend their thinking.
- There is not always sufficient time for students to find things out for themselves.
- Students' work is not marked helpfully enough in all classes, so that some students do not understand exactly what they have to do to improve.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 42 lessons, of which nine were observed jointly with senior staff.
- Discussions were held with groups of students from different age groups.
- As well as evaluating students' written work and teachers' marking during lessons, a selected sample of books was also scrutinised by inspectors.
- Meetings were held with representatives of the governing body, the headteacher, senior staff and middle leaders.
- Inspectors evaluated school documentation including information on GCSE and sixth form results, students' current progress, the curriculum and improvement plans, as well as procedures and records on safeguarding, behaviour and attendance.
- Inspectors took account of the 83 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), parental surveys carried out by the school and 47 questionnaires completed by staff.
- Inspectors studied the school's self-evaluation, development plans and achievement tracking procedures.

Inspection team

Philip Storey, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Sue Cox

Additional Inspector

Simon Hughes

Additional Inspector

Paul Metcalf

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Abbey School converted to become an academy in August 2011. When its predecessor school, of the same name, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- The school is an average-sized secondary school with a small sixth form. It accepts students of all abilities in an area where there is selective education.
- The school provides specially resourced provision known as the Autism Centre for 32 students with special educational needs.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress in secondary schools.
- The majority of students are of White British heritage. A small number of students come from minority ethnic groups.
- A very small proportion of students speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of disabled students and those with special educational needs supported through school action is high.
- The proportion of students supported at school action plus or who have a statement of special educational needs is also high.
- The proportion of students for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals, children in the care of the local authority and those from service families) is above average. Currently, there are 10 children in the care of the local authority and there are no service family children on the school roll.
- Over one third of students who did not achieve the expected level in reading and/or mathematics at the end of primary school are funded for the Year 7 catch-up programme.
- As part of the 'Coastal Collaboration', the school works in partnership with two universities, two local schools and a college. As a result, a small number of Key Stage 4 students attend off-site work-related courses in hair and beauty and construction, motor vehicle and outdoor education. Some students from the other schools attend The Abbey School for horticulture and catering courses.
- The school has a Business and Enterprise specialism.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and learning by making sure that all teachers give a strong focus to providing:
 - even more challenge, particularly for the most-able students, by setting more-inspiring and stretching learning activities
 - sufficient time during lessons for students to find things out for themselves
 - detailed written feedback in their marking, so that students are clear about how they can improve their work.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Students join the academy with significantly below-average attainment. Taking into account their starting points, students make good progress in lessons and achieve well.
- Although overall GCSE attainment was below average in 2012, it is rising faster than nationally in most areas. As a result of good teaching, close monitoring and well-targeted support, the large majority of students make good progress and achieve well by the end of Year 11.
- Students' achievements in GCSE English, science, statistics, BTEC Sports Science and BTEC business studies are particularly strong and rising.
- Although the average points score in GCSE mathematics actually increased in the summer of 2012, the proportion of students achieving good grades reduced slightly. However, staffing issues have been resolved and additional measures have been put in place, and under relatively new mathematics leadership, the progress in lessons is now clearly good. Students feel strongly that they are taught well in mathematics. The school's own data provide strong evidence that attainment is now rising rapidly.
- The school has provided additional tuition and support specifically for students who are eligible for the pupil premium and this is now having a marked impact on their progress, particularly in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 in English, the gap in attainment between these pupils and the others reduced in 2012 so that it was half a grade behind. The school's current data show that in GCSE mathematics standards are rising rapidly so that the attainment of this group of students is now closing the gap on others. Taking into account the lower starting points in this school, students eligible for the pupil premium make good progress in both English, mathematics and science. The progress of these students is now accelerating.
- Where appropriate, students are entered for mathematics GCSE examinations early. Those students who do not achieve their potential continue to study mathematics until the end of Year 11 to improve their grades. The most-able students are carefully selected to study GCSE statistics, which results in impressive outcomes.
- In other GCSE and BTEC subjects, there has been a reduction in the variation in achievement since 2011. Where inconsistencies remained in 2012, the school has taken appropriate action, resulting in recent improvements. Students are now making good progress in most GCSE courses.
- The school is extremely effective at equipping the less-able students with skills and relevant qualifications, so that they are well prepared for the next step in education or work.
- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs make good progress by the end of Year 11 compared with the national average for students with low Key Stage 2 results. This is due to an appropriate curriculum, good teaching and effective additional literacy support.
- The small number of students who take the construction or hair and beauty courses at other local schools develop good skills, so that they are well prepared if they opt for higher-level work in these areas.
- The school has a strong emphasis on improving reading and writing skills for students with low Key Stage 2 attainment (most of whom are eligible for Year 7 catch-up funding), as well as for those from minority ethnic backgrounds who speak English as an additional language. This has had a marked impact on these students' levels of confidence and how well they access learning across the curriculum.
- The small proportion of students who speak English as an additional language make better progress than the national average for those students. This demonstrates the school's commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and tackling discrimination.

- The relatively small number of sixth form students, many of whom either study level 3 BTEC work-related courses or work to improve their GCSE grades, make good progress in lessons and over time. In a few academic subjects, where achievement patterns have been less consistent, the new head of sixth form has responded appropriately to address the causes. As a result, rates of progress are accelerating and achievement is rising. Students are well prepared for their next steps, resulting in an exceptionally high proportion remaining in education, training or employment after leaving school.

There is careful monitoring to ensure students who attend part of their education through the 'Coastal Collaboration' make good progress and that this provision meets their individual needs.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good across all subject areas, particularly in English, mathematics, science, business studies, history and physical education. Teaching in English and mathematics is a notable strength. In an English lesson, where students were analysing an article, the teaching was outstanding. The teacher used highly skilled questioning to stretch and check thoroughly the understanding of students before they embarked on challenging, productive and enjoyable group work which was well resourced.
- The marking in English is a considerable strength but this good practice is not consistent across all subjects, as not all students are clear about how they can improve their work.
- Reading and writing skills are supported particularly well in English, humanities and science. Students have sufficient time to practise their literacy skills, and specific additional support and tuition is provided where appropriate.
- Careful deployment of teaching assistants across the school, but particularly in English and mathematics lessons, supports learning well. The assistants provide effective support by asking guiding questions in order to develop students' understanding. As a result, they make a significant difference to the learning of lower-attaining students, disabled students and those who have special educational needs.
- When teaching is good, teachers:
 - plan carefully to match work to students' different abilities and needs
 - use effective questioning to challenge students and check their understanding thoroughly, and then adapt their teaching accordingly
 - set up well-organised and well-supported independent learning activities which promote good progress
 - provide a variety of interesting and thought-provoking tasks
 - have a clear awareness of examination requirements which are used to good effect in preparing students for external examinations.
- On the few occasions when teaching is less effective:
 - learning activities are not sufficiently inspiring or challenging and the pace is too slow, particularly for the most-able students
 - teachers do not provide sufficient time during lessons for students to find things out for themselves.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The school is a calm and welcoming environment where most students are polite and thoughtful. Students move around school sensibly and safely.
- Students' relationships with staff are good and high levels of mutual respect are very evident. This is a direct response to the high quality of care and support that staff provide.
- Students' good behaviour in class generally contributes to their learning. In the few lessons where teaching is less inspiring, students can become passive.
- Students feel safe, happy and enjoy coming to school. The school has effective procedures in

place for monitoring and improving attendance, with a particular focus on those students who regularly miss school. As a result, attendance continues to improve and is close to the national average.

- The school's records show that the use of fixed-term exclusions has declined rapidly over the last two years, and specific support is in place to address any potential behaviour issues.
- Bullying is rare and the school deals effectively with the few incidents that do occur. Students and staff are very aware of how to deal with bullying and good procedures are in place. Students know about different forms of victimisation, such as cyber-bullying, racist behaviour and homophobia, as well as how to keep themselves safe.
- Students make a strong contribution to the positive atmosphere in school by taking a very active role in successful clubs and activities as well as a wide range of fund-raising events. Parent View indicates that most parents and carers feel there is a high standard of behaviour at the school. Parents and carers agree that their children are kept safe and say they would recommend the school to other parents and carers.
- Staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire were extremely positive about students' behaviour and are proud to work at the Abbey School.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is well supported by the senior leadership team and the governing body. Together, they demonstrate an ability to improve outcomes further. In particular, there has been a notable increase in the proportion of students achieving five good passes at GCSE including English and mathematics.
- Leaders of English, mathematics and the sixth form have been appointed within the last 18 months and they have contributed well to recent improvements.
- The headteacher has created a highly cohesive, positive and hard-working school community which strives to improve. Staff morale is high.
- The headteacher and senior and other leaders are clear about how the school can improve further and detailed plans are being carried out to make sure that these improvements are fully secure.
- The school offers a broad range of academic and work-related qualifications for students with a variety of aspirations and abilities. At Key Stage 5, in Year 12, approximately a fifth of students attend classes to improve their GCSE grades before accessing higher-level courses either at the school or with other providers. In Key Stage 4, a very small number of students attend successful off-site courses in addition to other subjects.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is strongly developed in assemblies and through lessons. A comprehensive range of clubs and fund-raising activities also make a positive contribution to these aspects of students' personal development.
- The school secured significant funds and organises an impressive range of international trips to a variety of destinations through the Comenius project. This makes a significant contribution to the celebration of diversity already promoted strongly within the school community.
- Students are provided with good guidance and support as they move into the sixth form, further education colleges or other schools for post-16 provision. This means that the proportion of students continuing in education, employment or training is significantly higher than the local and national averages.
- Staff are particularly positive about the quality of training they receive. The quality of teaching is monitored rigorously. School leaders' observations about the quality of teaching are accurate, and they have already identified and started to act on the need for a greater emphasis on challenging the most-able students.
- A more-rigorous system for monitoring the quality of written feedback has been introduced, but the impact of this is not yet evident.
- Arrangements for managing teachers' performance, together with a tailored training and

development programme, have been effective in improving teaching. Only those teachers who meet the required high standards move up the salary scale.

■ The school has had less contact with the local authority since it became an academy, but still receives advice from a School Improvement Partner.

■ Safeguarding and child protection procedures meet statutory requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

– Members of the governing body are astute and provide good support as well as challenge for the headteacher. They have a clear understanding of the school's performance information and about the achievement of students across year groups and subjects. This information is used well to hold senior leaders to account by asking challenging questions. They make sure, in coordination with senior leaders, that the pupil premium funding is used effectively, and more recently have been tracking the academic performance of this group more carefully. Governors are kept well informed about students' progress, the quality of teaching, behaviour, attendance and exclusions. They know about the targets that are set for teachers, and what the school is doing to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance. The budget is managed well.

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	137154
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	412866

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,003
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	138
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Phillips
Headteacher	Catrin Woodend
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable (converter academy)
Telephone number	01795 532633
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Email address	info@abbey.kent.sch.uk

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