

Abbey College, Ramsey

Abbey Road, Ramsey, Cambridgeshire PE26 1DG

Inspection dates

23–24 February 2016

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The attitudes of a significant minority of pupils to their learning are not good enough. These pupils do not comply with the school's new behaviour code.
- Attendance levels of disadvantaged pupils are too low.
- Leaders' raised expectations, in particular in relation to pupils' behaviour, have not been clearly communicated to pupils and parents.
- Progress in science is not as strong as in other subjects due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- Pupils are not sufficiently stretched in their learning because the level of challenge is variable across different subjects.

The school has the following strengths

- Senior leaders are ambitious for the school. They have renewed and raised expectations of staff and pupils.
- Leaders have prioritised the right areas for improvement. Their actions to improve the quality of teaching have been effective.
- The funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent effectively to improve their learning and progress, especially in key stage 3.
- Pupils receive helpful feedback that helps them to deepen their learning and make good progress.
- Pupils make strong progress in English, history, geography and mathematics.
- The sixth form has improved since the previous inspection. Achievement in vocational subjects remains good and the proportion of pupils gaining academic qualifications has improved in the last two years.
- The school's actions to keep pupils safe and secure are effective. Almost all pupils say that they feel safe in school.
- Governors provide an effective overview of the work of the school. They have a clear understanding of pupils' achievement.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish consistently good behaviour and positive attitudes to learning for all pupils, ensuring that communications provide all stakeholders with a clear understanding of school leaders' raised aspirations for pupils and the standards of behaviour expected.
- Improve the quality of teaching in science so that pupils make better progress.
- Ensure that pupils are stretched by matching the learning activity more closely to the needs of pupils across all subjects.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The senior leadership has a clear focus and determination to improve all aspects of the school's work. Leaders have high aspirations for pupils and staff. Most staff who were at the school during the previous inspection feel that it has improved.
- The school has drawn on support from partner secondary schools, from Thomas Deacon Academy and external consultants in order to develop senior leaders' skills and to see best practice in effective schools.
- The school's records show that the monitoring of teaching has been increasingly effective as it uses a variety of information, including the impact it has on pupils' progress. Leaders' judgements on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have been validated by external consultants and senior colleagues from their partner schools. Where teaching is not good enough, a programme of support and development is put in place so that improvements are achieved swiftly.
- Senior leaders carefully track pupils' progress. Pupils who are falling behind in mathematics and English receive additional support in small groups.
- Department and subject leaders are monitoring effectively the standards within their areas. They produce self-evaluation and improvement plans and they are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses within their subject. Some subject leaders, such as those in the humanities department, visit colleagues' lessons informally, on a very regular basis. This provides them with a very clear understanding of how pupils are getting on.
- The school makes good use of the pupil premium funding to support disadvantaged pupils. In addition to extra support with their learning, the school provides mentors and also financial support so that they have access to a full range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils in key stage 3 are supported by a 'champion' who works with both parents and their children.
- The school works in partnership with off-site providers to ensure that the small number of pupils who require some alternative provision are supported to best meet their individual needs. The school checks that they attend and that they are in a safe environment.
- The school is making effective use of the Year 7 catch-up funding (additional money to support pupils who did not reach the expected levels in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6). Progress in reading is especially rapid.
- The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. From Year 8, pupils receive impartial careers guidance and in Year 10 have access to work experience. Pupils have an understanding of their options when they are preparing to leave school. Almost all pupils go on to further education, or employment and training.
- A wide range of enrichment activities is available after school and during the day. These include sporting, musical, art and study activities.
- The school promotes well the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through taught personal development lessons, religious education and collective worship, and through discussion about current events in form time.
- Around half of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire expressed concern about the school and would not recommend it to other parents. Many also contributed their views in writing. The bulk of the concerns were associated with the revised behaviour code; many parents feel that it is too strict and that their children are receiving punishments such as detentions for trivial matters. A considerable proportion of pupils who spoke to inspectors echoed these views. School leaders acknowledge that their communication systems around such changes have not been good enough. The school's own feedback from parents, gathered in a variety of different ways and over a lengthy period of time, shows a much more positive and supportive response from a much larger proportion of parents.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors provide an effective oversight of the work of the school. They are appropriately trained and make use of their expertise, for example in monitoring the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
 - Governors closely check pupils' achievement and challenge leaders when subjects are not performing as well as they would expect.

- Arrangements for performance management are well understood by governors and they scrutinise all pay awards carefully.
- Governors know how the additional funding is spent and check the impact this is having on improving outcomes for pupils.
- Governors are very aware of their responsibilities to keep children safe. They regularly check that the school's procedures relating to safeguarding are robust.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has appropriate procedures in place for the vetting of staff. The chair of the governing body checks monthly to ensure that any adult working with pupils has been appropriately checked. Staff are fully trained according to the latest guidelines.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- In most lessons, good relationships between pupils and teachers ensure that time is well used and teaching is well paced.
- The strongest teaching in the school is characterised by teachers using their good subject knowledge to ask probing questions, allowing pupils to deepen their understanding. For example, in a Year 11 art lesson, the questions the teacher was asking made pupils think about the techniques they were using and refine their work accordingly.
- The feedback and guidance that pupils receive are generally useful. It helps pupils to know what they need to do in order to improve and how to improve their grades.
- Pupils are developing resilience. Inspectors saw many examples where pupils were working hard to improve the quality of their work. For example, in an English lesson, pupils demonstrated the ability to analyse the text and explain how the writer used language in order to describe a character.
- Teaching in classrooms is well supported by a range of clubs and classes, including, for example, excelling in English, homework club and booster support.
- Homework is set regularly and most pupils said that it was relevant to learning in their lessons.
- Teachers keep track of pupils' progress and the areas they need to develop in order to improve their work. Most teachers use this information to plan challenging tasks for pupils. On occasions, these tasks are not as well matched as they need to be to ensure that all pupils make rapid progress.
- Pupils take pride in their work and in almost all lessons it is well presented. However, some pupils are making basic spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors in their work that are uncorrected by teachers.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- Pupils' personal development and welfare require improvement. Attitudes to learning are mixed, and around a third of pupils that inspectors spoke with would not recommend their school. This is largely because they do not like the revised behaviour code. Pupils say that there are too many supply or temporary teachers. For some pupils, this has a negative effect on their attitude to learning.
- The great majority of pupils said that they feel safe in school. They told inspectors that bullying does happen, but most feel that staff deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils say they have confidence in talking to adults if there is something worrying them. They learn about how to keep themselves safe in a variety of situations.
- The school closely monitors the attendance and behaviour of the very small number of pupils who are educated away from the school. Liaison with external agencies is effective.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.

- Although the majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school site, a small number challenge the rules and disrupt lessons. The revised behaviour code has raised expectations about the standard of pupils' behaviour, and there is much less tolerance of any form of disruption. Many pupils acknowledge the reasons for this change but non-compliance from some pupils undermines the effectiveness of the code. A considerable number of pupils said that behaviour was not good in some of their lessons, but added that this was generally limited to a small number of pupils.
- Almost all pupils are calm and orderly when moving around the large school site, and get to lessons on time. They respect the environment and look after their school; there is very little litter around the site.
- Overall levels of attendance have improved in the last year. The current level of attendance is in line with the national average for secondary schools. The attendance of pupils with special educational needs, which was previously low, has improved and is now above the national level for this group.
- The attendance rate of disadvantaged pupils is below average. Additionally, the proportion of disadvantaged pupils who are persistently absent from school is high. The school has started to address this issue, but it is too early to see any impact of this work.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils start the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment that are broadly in line with national figures. In 2015, Year 11 pupils made similar progress to that of other pupils nationally and left with standards that matched the national averages.
- The achievement of pupils currently in the school indicates that the actions taken by senior leaders to improve pupils' outcomes are having a positive impact. The school's assessment information is externally verified to ensure accuracy. Current progress information for all pupils indicates that outcomes for pupils across most subjects are showing marked improvements. The scrutiny of pupils' work across a range of subjects confirms the good progress that pupils are making in key stages 3 and 4.
- In 2015, the proportion of Year 11 pupils making the expected, and more than expected, levels of progress in English was in line with that found nationally. The proportion of pupils making expected progress in mathematics was above the national average. The school's assessment information shows that outcomes are likely to be similar for the current Year 11 pupils.
- As a result of well-targeted support, the progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving, especially in key stage 3. Work in pupils' books shows that they are making particularly good progress in English, history and geography, and improving progress in mathematics and science. From low starting points, disadvantaged pupils in Year 11 did not make as much progress as their classmates, and the attainment gap between these pupils and others did not narrow in 2015.
- The small number of pupils who are currently attending off-site vocational courses will all have the opportunity to take mathematics and English GCSE examinations. They are all on track to achieve their vocational qualification, which will give them the opportunity to progress to further training.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability did not do as well as they could have in 2015. As a result of more focused support, progress for these pupils is improving.
- The achievement of the most-able pupils is improving. In 2015, the proportion of pupils gaining the English Baccalaureate was well above average. These pupils are making good progress in mathematics and improving their rates of progress in English.
- The progress of pupils in science and modern foreign languages is improving but not as rapidly as in other subjects. This is because pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to do as well as they can. Staffing instability and difficulties with recruiting high-quality teachers, including the use of temporary and supply teachers, have impacted on outcomes in science.

16 to 19 study programmes

are good

- All aspects of the sixth form have improved since the previous inspection. New leaders have brought with them determination and a clear vision for improving the provision. Appropriate systems are in place to support improvements.

- The sixth form offers learners a range of A-level subjects and vocational BTEC subjects at level 3. The progress of learners on vocational courses has been strong, and it continues to be above average. All vocational learners who complete their courses successfully gain at least a pass grade, and the proportion gaining the higher distinction and distinction star grades is above average.
- Historically, the progress of learners studying academic courses has not been as strong as those on vocational routes. In 2015, the school achieved its highest set of A-level results as the number of learners gaining the higher A and B grades improved considerably. Assessment information for learners in Year 13 suggests that results will continue to improve.
- Teaching is good because teachers have high expectations of learners. They use their strong subject knowledge to plan challenging activities that deepen learners' understanding. Detailed written and oral feedback ensures that learners understand what they have to do to improve their knowledge and understanding.
- Suitable arrangements are in place to ensure that any learner who enters the sixth form without a grade C or above in mathematics or English has the opportunity to study and re-sit these examinations. The pass rate is above that nationally for post-16 learners.
- New systems are being introduced to identify learners who may be falling behind in their progress. These learners are provided with supervised study sessions to help them catch up.
- In the past, the number of pupils entering the sixth form from Year 11 has been low, and a high proportion of learners did not stay on to complete Year 13. More Year 11 pupils are now choosing their school's sixth form. The proportion of learners completing their studies has also improved.
- The quality of careers information, advice and guidance has improved. Learners receive impartial advice and get the opportunity to attend careers fairs and visit universities. Most learners progress to university, including those in the Russell Group, with one student progressing to Oxbridge. The school also helps learners who may wish to follow alternative routes such as apprenticeships.
- Sixth-form learners are enthusiastic about taking on responsibilities and developing their leadership skills. One learner spoke to the inspectors about the creation of the sixth-form newspaper.

School details

Unique reference number	137377
Local authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	10001959

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,084
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	116
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Madeline Jackson
Headteacher	Andy Christoforou
Telephone number	01487 812352
Website	www.abbeycollege.cambs.sch.uk
Email address	http://abbeycollege.cambs.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 November 2013

Information about this school

- The school is larger than the average-sized secondary school.
- Most pupils are from a White British background and very few speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is below average. The pupil premium is additional funding for those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is below the national average.
- A very small number of pupils are taught away from the school site in alternative provision at ACE (an alternative provision base in Peterborough), The Red Balloon Learning Centre and Peterborough Regional Centre.
- The headteacher has been in post for 16 months. Prior to his appointment, he was deputy headteacher at the school.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.
- The school receives support from the principal of Thomas Deacon Academy, Peterborough, as part of the Cambridge school improvement programme.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 27 lessons to observe learning. Senior staff accompanied inspectors for 22 of these observations. The inspectors also looked at the work in pupils' books in lessons and conducted eight work scrutinies, four of these with senior leaders. Inspectors completed six learning walks to look at learning across a range of subjects.
- Inspectors listened to a small group of pupils read aloud.
- Inspectors attended one assembly and visited form time.
- Formal discussion was held with groups of pupils, along with informal conversations with others at break- and lunchtime. Inspectors also considered the 37 responses to the pupil online questionnaire.
- A range of documents was examined, including the school's analysis of its own work and its improvement plan, information on pupils' academic progress, and documents relating to the quality of teaching, staff training, behaviour, attendance and safeguarding.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, head of sixth form and three members of the governing body and the school's improvement adviser.
- The inspection team took account of the 158 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, two emails, the school's own parental surveys and spoke to a parent.
- The inspection team received and considered the views of the 65 staff who completed questionnaires.
- Following the original inspection in February 2016, Ofsted decided that additional evidence was needed to secure the judgements. On 15 March 2016, two of Her Majesty's Inspectors visited the school to gather the additional evidence. During this visit, inspectors spoke to over 200 pupils informally, visited short parts of lessons, looked at pupils' work and held meetings with senior leaders.

Inspection team

Caroline Pardy, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Alison Dominey	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Whear	Ofsted Inspector
Helen Loughran	Ofsted Inspector
Caroline Dawes	Ofsted Inspector
Chris Moodie	Her Majesty's Inspector
John Lucas	Her Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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