

Abbeywood School

Rother Way, Hellaby Industrial Estate, Bramley, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S66 8QN

Inspection dates

4–6 June 2019

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| Overall effectiveness | Good |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Good |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Good |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Good |
| Outcomes for pupils | Good |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- In the short time the school has been open leaders have established a calm, supportive and welcoming school ethos. This enables pupils to settle quickly and consequently their personal development, and outcomes improve rapidly.
- Leaders, teachers, therapeutic staff and assistants have a deep understanding of each pupil's needs. This informs all aspects of their work and is of great benefit to the pupils.
- Parents and carers comment that the school has transformed their children's lives. They value the regular communication and support that the school provides.
- Pupils are courteous and well behaved. They attend regularly and have pride in their school and their appearance. Pupils' attendance improves quickly after they join the school.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered well.
- Safeguarding is particularly effective because staff are well-trained and vigilant, and pupils feel supported and safe.
- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met.
- Staff teamwork is very strong. Teachers and assistants work closely together to ensure that pupils learn well.
- Assessment information shows that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Teachers are effective in meeting pupils' identified needs. However, more opportunities are needed for pupils to improve their writing skills.
- Planning to meet the needs of each pupil is extensive but leaders have recognised that some streamlining of the process is needed to ensure that teachers can continue to plan their lessons well.
- Leaders have devised a relevant, broad and balanced curriculum with a thematic approach at key stage 3. However, it requires further development at key stage 4.
- Teachers value the opportunities that leaders provide for professional development. Leaders are aware of the need to further develop the staff's knowledge and skills of how to work effectively with the wide range of special educational needs that the growing school population presents.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, by:
 - streamlining the planning processes in place to meet pupils' needs, as identified in their education, health and care (EHC) plans, so that teachers can design lessons more efficiently and effectively
 - further developing the detailed rationale and schemes of work for the key stage 4 curriculum.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning and assessment, by:
 - enhancing teachers' and support assistants' knowledge, skills and understanding of how best to work with the wide range of pupils' individual special educational needs
 - improving pupils' writing skills, including the quality of their handwriting.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Leaders ensure that the school meets all of the independent school standards.
- The headteacher uses passion and vision to bring together an ambitious team. Together, they offer a fresh start for pupils with complex needs, many of whom have been out of education for considerable periods of time.
- Since registration, the school has invested in staffing, considerable levels of training and resources. They have created a welcoming and modern learning environment. Training has focused mainly on positive behaviour support, safeguarding and developing staff skills in nurturing and stimulating pupils with EHC plans to help them make good progress both personally and academically.
- As the school grows there is an expectation that a wider range of pupils' needs will be identified. Leaders agree that there is a need for further staff training in order to enable teachers to have the knowledge, skills and understanding to meet pupils' individual special educational needs.
- Staff form a cohesive team. They greet pupils at the start of each day, play games with them at break and lunchtimes, and are very supportive of each other during lessons.
- A team of clinical and therapeutic professionals are employed to work with pupils to address a wide range of needs including mental health, occupational health, and speech and language difficulties. Regular meetings ensure that information about pupils' progress, needs, behaviour and attitudes is passed on appropriately.
- Parents who made their views known value very much the work that the school does for their children. They comment on the transformations that have taken place in a relatively short period of time. Children who previously had very difficult school experiences are now happy, want to attend school, and are more communicative.
- Parents are also grateful for the support that they get. They regularly receive telephone and email communications together with informative reports. These include a record of attendance and behaviour in addition to constructive comments about their children's academic progress and attainment.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum and assessment approach designed to build pupils' trust, resilience, engagement and enjoyment. This is broad and balanced with a strong focus at key stage 2 on literacy and numeracy. A thematic approach at key stage 3 enables teachers to integrate personal and social development, British values and spiritual, moral, social and emotional aspects of learning. Pupils have enjoyed 'The Great Adventure' which has included a novel look at the story of 'Peter Pan', work on pirates, making 'dreamcatchers' and planning holidays in exotic places.
- A varied programme of motivating visits and activities extends pupils' experiences and has a positive effect on their development and progress. These range from museums and parks to bowling. Pupils take part in a variety of physical activities from team games to the use of fitness equipment on the school site. Leaders plan to expand this offer further.
- Leaders have also sensitively developed pupils' understanding of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010. Pupils are confident to talk about issues

around gender and sexuality and feel supported by staff.

- Curriculum approaches and associated schemes of work for key stage 4 are underdeveloped. It is not yet clear how the school will approach the introduction of accredited courses of study.

Governance

- The Witherslack Group has been highly supportive of the school prior to its opening and maintains a strong oversight of its development.
- A school board has been established, which will monitor all aspects of the school's life. Although it has only met once so far, it is clear that this body will hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is on its website and is compliant with the latest government guidance.
- Leaders ensure that all staff receive training including about the 'Prevent' duty. Staff are knowledgeable about their roles in protecting pupils. Leaders carry out all appropriate checks on adults who work with children. Leaders record these checks on a single central record.
- Leaders foster a strong safeguarding culture. Pupils spoken with say that they feel safe and know that they have staff to speak to if they need help. Staff take every opportunity to teach pupils how to stay safe. In an information and communication technology (ICT) lesson, for example, pupils explored aspects of cyber bullying and how they can stay safe online.
- The school has appropriate filters in place to protect pupils from accessing inappropriate material from the internet.
- Leaders have thorough systems for risk assessment and the management of health and safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- There are strong relationships in the school between adults and pupils, and this creates a calm and purposeful learning environment in the classroom.
- Teachers are effective at managing behaviour. They have high expectations and together with support assistants they are quick to recognise subtle changes in behaviour and act quickly to keep pupils on task.
- In conversations with the inspector, parents particularly emphasised that teachers understand their children. As a result, they said they have seen considerable progress in their children's ability to trust, their resilience, and ability to make decisions. In one 'Great Adventure' lesson, a teacher introduced pupils to the idea of risk and risk management through consideration of a mountaineering expedition. Through the use of video, probing questions, and discussion he strongly addressed a number of needs identified in the

pupils' EHC plans.

- Teachers are also confident to give pupils new experiences. In art, for example, some pupils are using clay for the first time. They are given tools to experiment with and create new shapes and textures.
- Teachers regularly assess pupils' work and focus strongly on successes to gain their confidence. Pupils receive merits for good work and contributions to lessons. In science and food technology, for example, teachers effectively use photography to capture pupils' achievements and celebrate successes.
- Teachers are carefully using the school's assessment framework to accurately record achievements across the curriculum. This is helping them to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding and to plan more precisely for future progress.
- In a few lessons, teachers have very good ideas to foster pupils' learning and engagement but select resources which do not fully allow the lesson objectives to be achieved. In science this is exacerbated by a temporary lack of laboratory equipment.
- Although most work is appropriate for the age and ability of each pupil, occasionally it is not challenging enough. In particular, a heavy reliance on worksheets means that pupils do not have enough opportunities for extended writing. In some cases, pupils are reluctant to write because their handwriting is poor.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and use the many and varied additional plans for each individual pupil to inform their lesson planning. This process is currently manageable, because pupil numbers are smaller than the maximum capacity. Moving forward, leaders are looking to streamline this process to ensure that it remains effective and efficient.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Staff take every opportunity to promote pupils' personal development and welfare. Together with social, moral, spiritual and cultural education, this area is a strength of the school.
- Pupils spoken with say that there is no bullying. School data supports this.
- Pupils are respectful and speak highly of the staff at the school. They wear their uniform with pride. Many pupils have mature attitudes and value the opportunities that the school provides in a safe environment.
- Pupils enjoy learning about healthy eating and their work in lessons is reinforced by displays around the school. They learn how to stay safe and, for example, said that they were reminded about road safety while on a trip out of school. Many enjoy physical activity and play outside or use the supervised fitness equipment at lunchtimes.
- Pupils' EHC plans show that many face personal challenges such as anxiety. However, in a short time after starting at the school, their confidence is rebuilt, and most pupils become articulate and self-assured.
- The school works hard to promote pupils' emotional and mental health. Staff and the

therapeutic team are very sensitive to individual pupil's needs. Their holistic approach makes a positive difference to the lives of the pupils, as they begin to understand their own emotions and how to respond appropriately. The 'Palm Room' is a safe place where pupils can go if they have any anxiety or problem and there is always a member of staff available to provide support.

- Although a careers programme is in place, until recently pupils had not had impartial careers guidance. The school has now addressed this, and a new external provider has started to work with the school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct in lessons and around school is positive. They are polite and courteous to staff and to each other. Classrooms provide a calm environment where there is very little disruption to learning
- Instances of poor behaviour are usually limited to minor incidents that have been quickly resolved by staff using restorative justice techniques. There have been no exclusions of pupils from the school.
- Positive behaviour support plans, high expectations and the trusting relationships that pupils build with staff contribute to a considerable reduction in the number of physical interventions needed with individual pupils.
- Most pupils had poor attendance records at their previous schools or had been out of education for some time. From their arrival at this school all pupils attend well and are punctual and none are persistently absent.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The school receives little information about pupils' prior attainment when they arrive. This is because many have been out of education for considerable lengths of time. Baseline assessments provide some information but may be inaccurate as a result of pupils' emotional conditions. The school works hard to establish reliable attainment data which teachers can use in setting targets and planning their lessons.
- Most pupils start the school considerably behind the standards attained by their peers nationally. However, school data shows that all make at least expected progress. In reading, writing and mathematics more than half exceed the school's expectations. This is because of the expertise of the staff in building pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
- In mathematics, mastery in number work is strongly developed and problem-solving is grounded in real world examples. There is evidence of care taken in the presentation of pupils' work.
- Pupils read well. Most are fluent and can read with expression and attention to punctuation. A well-stocked library has books covering a range of interests available for pupils to borrow. The school especially fosters opportunities for reading through a daily 'Drop Everything and Read' activity, which all pupils enjoy.
- Additional challenges by the teachers are instrumental in encouraging further progress,

particularly in pupils' verbal and listening skills. One parent commented that after being at the school for a short period of time her child was using and understanding new vocabulary in everyday speech. While this is heartening, it is not embedded in pupils' writing, which is less well developed, as is the standard of pupils' handwriting, which is weak.

- Pupils have made progress in science, particularly resulting from the use of engaging, practical lessons. However, a temporary staffing issue has effectively slowed down what was initially strong progress. This has been exacerbated by a temporary lack of science resources.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 146571 |
| DfE registration number | 372/6000 |
| Inspection number | 10100345 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Other independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 10 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 10 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Witherslack Group Ltd |
| Chair | Mike Barrow |
| Headteacher | Sarah Douglas |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £54,743–£79,475 |
| Telephone number | 01709 916900 |
| Website | www.witherslackgroup.co.uk |
| Email address | abbeywood@witherslackgroup.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | Not previously inspected |

Information about this school

- Abbeywood School is an independent special school which is part of the Witherslack Group.
- The school was first registered by the Department for Education in February 2019. This inspection was its first standard inspection.
- The school is registered to accept up to 50 pupils from the age of 10 to 18 years. Pupils are referred to the school from local authorities.
- The school currently has 10 pupils on roll aged between 10 and 14 years. All pupils have

EHC plans.

- The school is situated on an industrial estate in Rotherham. The large site is contained within high metal fencing which is then contained within a further fenced-in area.
- The aims of the school are, 'to provide a happy, secure and supportive environment where pupils are valued and can develop their confidence, self-esteem, independence, self-discipline, respect and concern for others and that achievement will be celebrated in all its forms'.
- Pupils attending the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities; for example, behavioural and emotional needs, learning difficulties and/or an autistic spectrum disorder diagnosis. Some have spent considerable lengths of time out of education.
- Pupils currently take part in physical education on the school premises. The school plans to access local leisure centre facilities for additional physical education activities.
- The school does not use any alternative education provision.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out over two and a half days, with a day of notice.
- The inspector toured all buildings currently used by the school, both inside and outside.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning in a range of lessons and made some shorter visits to classrooms. The headteacher observed some lessons jointly with the inspector.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, pastoral manager, pupils, the chair of the school board and the regional director of the Witherslack Group.
- The work of several pupils was reviewed.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school was observed. The inspector met formally and informally with pupils. No pupils responded to Ofsted's questionnaire for pupils.
- The inspector evaluated a range of documentation, including leaders' evaluations of the effectiveness of the school and development plans, admissions and attendance registers, policies, monitoring information, child protection and safeguarding information, and minutes of the school board. The inspector also looked closely at all other documents and policies required as part of the independent school standards.
- Consideration was given to the school's evidence of its communication with parents. There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View. However, the inspector spoke with several parents and a representative of one local authority. No staff responded to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.

Inspection team

Steve Rogers, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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