

Abbey Court Community Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119052
Local Authority	Medway
Inspection number	291299
Inspection dates	19–20 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	106
6th form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Eileen James
Headteacher	K Joy
Date of previous school inspection	21 October 2002
School address	Rede Court Road Strood Rochester ME2 3SP
Telephone number	01634 338220
Fax number	01634 338221

Age group	4–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Abbey Court is the only school in the local authority for pupils with severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. An increasing number of the pupils also have very complex medical conditions or extremely challenging behaviour. All of the pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are twice as many boys as girls on roll. The vast majority of the pupils have a White British heritage and virtually all of them have English as their first language. A few pupils are in public care.

In addition to taking pupils from its own area, the school also has on roll a very small minority of pupils from Kent local authority. These are all based at the Strood site, which caters for pupils aged 12 to 19 years. The site for primary aged pupils is 12 miles away at Rainham.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Abbey Court is a good school. Some features of its work are outstanding and it has an excellent capacity for further development. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress as they flourish in a stimulating and caring environment. The provision for post-16 students is good. All the pupils, irrespective of their age or the nature of their learning difficulty, benefit greatly from the time that they spend in school. This is because leadership and management are good at all levels throughout the school. Leaders evaluate the school's work well and with an effective governing body, use this information productively as they have a very clear vision of the school's continuing development. This has enabled leaders to engineer good improvement since the last inspection and to establish a climate within which all staff have high expectations. The school has excellent partnerships with local schools and enjoys the overwhelming support of its parents: 'Abbey Court is more than a school. It is a community which cares for all its members and their families.'

Pupils receive the highest levels of care, guidance and support. Their personal and medical needs are met in a dignified way and they are treated with respect at all times. Consequently, they make outstanding progress in their personal development. This is evident in many ways, ranging from their excellent attendance and enjoyment to their awareness of others and the development of self-help skills. The pupils' and students' standard of work is exceptionally low in national terms because of the extreme nature of their learning difficulties, but all of them make good progress during their time in school. As a result, post-16 students obtain some nationally accredited qualifications.

The pupils' good achievements are made possible by the quality of teaching and learning and the curriculum. The pupils are taught well and they make good strides in their learning, although the rate at which they do this on the secondary school site is sometimes reduced by adults' inconsistent use of additional communication methods. The pupils receive a good curriculum that meets the wide range of learning styles, needs and ages of learners. It is supported well by activities both in and out of school that extend and enrich the pupils' experiences. However, on occasions time is not planned and used as effectively and efficiently as it could be.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The post-16 department is well managed and its students receive a good quality of education. They are well taught, receive an outstanding level of care, guidance and support and follow a good curriculum. They make outstanding progress in their personal development, acquiring the key skills associated with living as independently as possible. Students have many opportunities to practise their communication and mathematical skills and acquire new ones in a variety of settings. They make good progress in doing this. Their achievements are evident in their success in gaining Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualifications.

The students are prepared well for leaving school and, in a few cases, for moving into continuing education or employment. Their personal development and academic progress are enhanced considerably by the work-related learning programme and very good links with local secondary schools. These partnerships enable students to work alongside mainstream students, such as in art lessons, and provide some work experience opportunities, like gardening, in a caring and

supportive environment. The most capable students do exceptionally well on work experience placements in the community, such as in charity shops.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Ensure that all staff on the secondary site use communication approaches that meet the needs of every pupil at all times.
- Make the most of the time available for learning by making sure that all sessions designated as taught time are planned and structured.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The extreme nature of the pupils' learning difficulties and disabilities means that their standard of work is exceptionally low in national terms. The education of many pupils is interrupted by the management of their personal and medical needs. Some are daily occurrences, such as feeding programmes and toileting, and others are pupils' regular attendance at clinics for medical management or surgical intervention. Even so, the pupils make good progress because staff maintain a watchful eye on every pupil's achievements. Very good assessment procedures and careful tracking of pupils' successes give staff the information they need to give all pupils opportunities to advance their learning at a good rate. Their potential to do this even quicker is sometimes reduced because the available taught time is not used productively.

Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress in all areas of learning and against their individual educational plan (IEP) targets. The excellent progress that they make in their personal development enables them to become more aware of others. This, in turn, allows them to learn alongside other children and to develop their communication skills. Primary aged pupils build on these achievements well and show their increasing confidence and abilities in many ways. For instance, they find the appropriate clothes to take on holiday and respond to phrases such as 'more' and 'less' when pouring water into containers. Secondary aged pupils are more confident communicators and more adept at making decisions so that some name food items and put them into the correct food group from a choice of five.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

The pupils love going to school. Primary aged pupils join in enthusiastically with singing and clapping activities. Secondary aged pupils are proud of their work and are happy to show it to visitors. The pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they show extremely positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of eating healthy foods and of taking regular exercise. They develop a very good awareness of personal safety too as they walk or steer wheelchairs around the school with growing competence and independence. Their excellent acquisition of self-help skills is particularly impressive. In the Foundation Stage, this means using cutlery independently while in the secondary department it involves running a mini-enterprise scheme. The pupils make an excellent contribution to different communities. They do this in their own class by handing out drinks, in the whole school through membership

of the school council and in the wider community by becoming involved in raising funds for charity.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They make excellent progress in becoming aware of others' needs and knowing what constitutes acceptable behaviour. They know about their own and others' cultures through activities such as studying Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat and examining African art. Pupils' outstanding spiritual development stems from them doing things outside their normal day-to-day experiences, such as shrieking with delight as they put their bare feet in a bowl of baked beans when learning about the colour orange.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Teachers use their very good knowledge of pupils' prior achievements and current targets to provide activities with an appropriate level of challenge. These activities encourage good learning as they stimulate and engage pupils because they are well matched to their needs. Teachers and teaching assistants are skilled at recognising when learning has taken place and pupils' successes are celebrated by all. Relationships are very strong and all adults have a very good understanding of their pupils' many and varied needs.

Staff on the primary site routinely use a variety of communication approaches to make sure that all pupils are able to participate and contribute to lessons. This is not always the case in the secondary department and so on a few occasions pupils are not able to express a view or make a choice in the most effective way. Lessons are fun because staff use a wide range of resources to motivate pupils. At one level this might mean grabbing their attention with information and communication technology, such as simulating a thunderstorm when setting the scene for Macbeth. But pupils are equally enthralled and learn just as well when simpler resources are used creatively. For example, the use of a sheet of bubble wrap to represent the rough on a golf course resulted in howls of giggles when pupils' wheelchairs were pushed over it.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

The curriculum is well planned to give pupils a good variety of learning experiences. It maintains a balance between promoting the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills and personal development and giving pupils creative, aesthetic and practical experiences. Subject leaders are responsible for their subject across the whole school and so they are able to implement a progressive plan of work that meets the needs of pupils of different ages and capabilities. For instance, the Foundation Stage curriculum focuses on encouraging children's communication skills and personal development, while the secondary aged pupils' curriculum has a good work-related learning component. This prepares them well for leaving school. Planning also ensures that the learning needs of pupils with the most profound difficulties are met through innovative sensory approaches and resources, such as the excellent sensory garden. Leaders and managers check curricular planning and although they also monitor how it is implemented

there has been some slippage in using time most efficiently. Some sessions, such as at the beginning of the day and at breaks, are counted as taught time but planning is too sketchy for the sessions to be productive. This has an adverse effect on pupils' potential to make even better progress.

A very good range of additional activities enriches and extends pupils' learning and experiences. Links with other schools provide valuable social experiences and use of the community encourages pupils to practise in different situations what they have learned in the classroom. Many pupils benefit from a good range of lunchtime activities that includes art, drama, music and sports clubs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Grade for sixth form: 1

Senior leaders have developed a climate in which pupils' care, welfare and support are at the forefront of everything that the school does. Staff make every effort to ensure that pupils' medical, personal, therapeutic and learning needs are met. All aspects of care are treated with the utmost importance. Routine risk assessments are rigorous and safeguarding and child protection procedures are very robust. Very close liaison with other agencies, such as health professionals, allows detailed knowledge of individual pupils' personal and medical needs to be shared. This ensures that pupils are comfortable and at ease and, therefore, in the best possible position to learn. Parents confirm this: 'The atmosphere is soothing, warm and safe. They have helped my son become the person he is today.'

The school uses all available information to provide exceptionally high levels of pastoral and academic guidance and support. Very good IEPs provide challenging targets and pupils' progress towards achieving them is monitored and evaluated very closely. P level targets are set in all subjects and the pupils' achievements are tracked closely through the maintenance of progress files and progress meetings. Staff use this information very effectively to help pupils raise the standard of their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 2

Leaders and managers at all levels monitor and evaluate features of the school's work well. Governors are full participants in this process as they, too, have an annual monitoring plan. Leaders have routine procedures for examining how well pupils' learning is promoted by the quality of teachers' planning and the effectiveness of teaching. Whilst these are effective in most respects, the monitoring did not pick up the issues raised by this inspection. A striking feature of leadership and management is leaders' analysis and use of the information that they gather. For instance, pupils' assessment data are scrutinised by the leadership team, key stage managers and subject leaders. Inconsistencies in individual learners' progress are questioned and any variations in the achievements of different groups of pupils are explored further. This reflects leaders' determination to ensure equality of opportunity although currently the inconsistent use of communication approaches on the secondary site is reducing this in practice.

Abbey Court School is very forward looking. The leadership team is constantly striving to improve the school's provision. The brand new and hugely impressive hydrotherapy pool is testament to their ability to do this. There are exciting developments in the pipeline too. Approval has already been given for a nursery to be built on the primary site and the school is now seeking specialist status for cognition and learning.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The attendance of learners	1	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

21 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbey Court School, Strood ME2 3SP

We loved visiting your school. Thank you for being so kind and making us feel welcome. It was nice to talk to you and to hear about all the good things that you had to say about your school.

We can see why you like your school so much. Abbey Court is a good school and some things about it are really good. The staff look after you very well and make sure that you are safe. Lessons are good fun because the teachers give you lots of exciting things to do. You go to school as much as you can, work really hard and behave very well. That means that you learn a lot.

The staff also help you to grow up as sensible young people and make sure that you know a great deal about being healthy and staying safe. Lots of you do things to help other people. You help to hand out drinks to your friends and some of you work really hard on the school council. The oldest students do very well when they learn about work by doing jobs in the gardens or in shops. All the people in school want to make sure that you are ready for leaving school.

The senior staff do a good job in running the school. They have lots of ideas of how they can make Abbey Court even better. We have given them two more:

- Make sure that all staff always use things like signing, switches and symbols.
- Plan parts of the day better so that you can learn even more.

We know that you are all looking forward to using your lovely new pool when it opens soon and we hope that you enjoy it. Thank you once again and we wish all of you lots of luck in the future.

Mike Kell Lead inspector