

# Abbey Court Community Special School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	119052
<b>Local Authority</b>	Medway
<b>Inspection number</b>	339332
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 July 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Lynne Kauffman

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.  
The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	138
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	25
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Eileen James
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Karen Joy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	19 June 2007
<b>School address</b>	Rede Court Road Strood Rochester ME2 3SP
<b>Telephone number</b>	01634 338220
<b>Fax number</b>	01634 338221
<b>Email address</b>	office@abbeycourt.medway.sch.uk

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**Boarding provision****Social care Unique Reference Number****Social care inspector**

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 10 lessons and observed 10 teachers. Meetings were held with governors, staff, pupils, health professionals, teaching assistants, other education professionals and parents and carers. They looked at the school's procedures and policies regarding safeguarding children, data on pupils' progress and the 74 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- how well time for learning is planned and structured
- how effectively the school uses the data on pupils' progress in its Whole School Performance Report to raise achievement and track pupils' progress
- the impact of accommodation on pupils' learning
- how successfully the school has tackled its recruitment problem through 'growing its own' teachers
- whether all stakeholders are involved in the school's specialist status.

## Information about the school

Abbey Court is based on two sites 12 miles apart. It has a capacity for 150 pupils aged from three to 19, all funded by Medway local authority. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs including severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties. An increasing number of pupils joining the school have very complex medical conditions or extremely challenging behaviour. There are fewer girls than boys. The vast majority of the pupils have a White British heritage. A few pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and have English as a second language. A small minority of pupils are looked after in public care. Secondary pupils, including sixth-formers, are based at the Strood site. The site for primary-aged pupils is in Rainham and this has recently added a nursery to its provision. The school has specialist school status for cognition and learning.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

Abbey Court is an outstanding school. Despite the sites being 12 miles apart, it is very much 'one school' with a cohesive and determined drive to get the best out of its pupils. It capitalises highly effectively on the move to the 'big school' on the secondary site by 11-year-olds to facilitate any subsequent transitions pupils make to mainstream schools. The gaining of specialist school status for cognition and learning has made the school a leader in these areas. The accuracy in its self-evaluation and the outstanding procedures for all aspects of the school give it an outstanding capacity for further improvement.

The school is led with passion and commitment by the headteacher, which underpins the outstanding outcomes. All pupils make at least good, and the majority make excellent, progress in their personal development. Pupils' behaviour, attitudes and manners are exceptional. Pupils make excellent progress and achieve extremely well in their work. In the words of a typical parent, 'We have nothing but praise for the staff of Abbey Court School. Our children love attending and their confidence is growing all the time.'

Pupils love school and want to do their best. Their joy and enthusiasm for learning is striking. Teaching is good overall but much is excellent, as indicated by both inspectors' and the school's own observations. However, this is not consistent due to the school's recruitment difficulties. Unable to recruit staff of sufficient calibre, the school made a decision to employ staff on the Graduate Teacher Programme. It has been extremely successful in 'growing its own' staff to ensure they match the very specialised teaching approaches needed in the school. While this professional development is in progress, it means teaching is to some extent inconsistent in quality as staff are developing their professional skills during their year of training. The excellent management of teaching and learning provides targeted training to staff to accelerate their development. New colleagues are superbly supported through the excellent teamwork that runs through the school. Teachers' flexible planning provides in most cases exciting experiences for pupils, and carefully integrates the skills of teaching assistants, therapists and nurses in a seamless approach to meeting the needs of all pupils. The relatively weaker elements of classroom practice relate to planning work that fully interests all pupils and ensuring skills in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are practised across the curriculum. The pockets of slightly weaker teaching do not significantly impede the pupils' rapid progress due to the excellent use of assessment data to match work to pupils' learning needs and the highly engaging and innovative curriculum. The emphasis on personal development raises confidence and self-belief. Underpinning everything is the high quality of care, guidance and support for both pupils and their families. The quality of education is as strong in the Early Years Foundation Stage and

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sixth form as in other years.

Community cohesion has been a central thread of the school for many years and the school is a very strong community in its own right. However, the school has not fully evaluated its extensive evidence of strong engagement with the local community or explored fully the possibility of increasing its international links.

The outstanding leadership and management of the school by the headteacher have ensured highly effective management is found at all levels of the school. All staff see their management roles as contributing to the school's success. The rigorous follow-up to delegation of responsibilities, through interview and observation, continually helps to build managerial capacity. The excellent presentation of the school sites, for example, has a huge impact on learning, and the site management teams understand and execute their responsibilities with efficiency yet sensitivity. Outstanding governance includes key contributions by governors towards strategic development. The school offers excellent value for money through well-tuned and rigorous financial management systems.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Drive the quality of teaching further forward so that its increased consistency makes it an outstanding feature of the school by:
  - ensuring all planning relates to the interests of pupils so that all are fully engaged in their work
  - capitalising on all opportunities to develop cross-curricular numeracy and ICT skills.
- Consolidate the school's promotion of community cohesion through evaluating the evidence collected from its local activities and extend its international component.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**1**

As Abbey Court pupils start their day chatting and renewing friendships in the newly designed waiting area at the entrance to the school, they have a look of anticipation on their faces that indicates they almost can't wait to get into class! The doors open and in a flurry of hellos and warm greetings from teachers and teaching assistants another great day begins.

Pupils are keen and enthusiastic learners because their learning is mostly so finely tuned to their needs, however complex. Well-structured and flexible planning enables all to take an active part in their learning in most lessons. Behaviour is excellent because pupils understand the staff's expectations and in many cases take on responsibilities themselves.

In the majority of lessons, pupils make rapid progress, especially in socialising, communication and independence. For example, during a sixth form lesson on making choices about a recipe for lunch, students demonstrated thoughtful decision making about healthy eating and safe practices, developing new skills using sharp tools under

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Careful supervision. On occasions, owing to their physical conditions and disabilities, pupils feel tired or unwell but still manage to concentrate because of the support from their teaching assistants, therapists, nurses and, in some cases, their friends. In Key Stage 3, very tired pupils were stimulated into response by the use of a fine water spray which was part of this music class's sensory learning about water; they went on to play musical instruments, dance and sing, so establishing new skills and enjoying community activity. In the Nursery, free exploration in the classroom and the outdoor space stimulates children's imagination and curiosity. In one pupil's independent play, he used a wooden clock to show different times. These moments of inspired learning develop life skills that are carefully recorded and fed into teachers' records and the home link book. Members of the school councils talk thoughtfully and share ideas about feeling safe, being involved in the community outside school and learning how to interact with a range of people. Because pupils love coming to school, their attendance is good despite problems many of them have with their personal health. They do all they can to contribute to their own and other communities. For example, pupils complete reviews on disability access for other schools, making very professional reports that are highly valued. Outstanding achievement and enjoyment are clear through pupils' facial expressions and gesticulation, even if they are unable to respond verbally.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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<p><b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b></p> <p>Taking into account: Pupils' attendance<sup>1</sup></p>	<b>1</b>
	<b>2</b>
<p><b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b></p>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

The school's strong commitment to professional development and a learning culture has consolidated the excellent teamwork across the school. Through the very well-structured planning of lessons, most teachers adapt work exceptionally well to meet the needs of all and to create the 21 targets that each pupil is challenged with during a year. The pace of lessons is lively and exciting. They challenge pupils and get their active participation through interactive equipment such as switches, and teachers seize on any special moments when unexpected progress occurs. Less experienced teachers do not as consistently find ways of engaging pupils so fully in their work or plan for the use of mathematics and ICT across the curriculum.

Assessment of all pupils is very thorough and integrates the excellent contributions from specialists providing speech and language, music therapy and visual impairment advice. The Whole School Performance Report, which is an accurate and detailed tracking of every pupil through every subject, is used highly effectively to identify any difficulties individuals are having with their learning. This document is used by managers as part of their staff and departmental annual reviews and has a major influence on developing pupils' individual education plans and reporting to parents and carers.

Parents say they are 'wowed' by the photographs of their children interacting with a curriculum that tests, challenges and excites them on so many levels. Pupils become engrossed in their activities and are prepared extremely well for their future challenges in life through the rich mix of experiences the school provides. They include the 'trim trail' and state-of-the art swimming pool to test fitness, storytelling using 'story sacks', and working with numbers and modern technology in real-life situations across the curriculum. The curriculum offers a full experience using P levels and, for some pupils, National Curriculum levels. Pupils enjoy the free choice of club activities, many of which are very popular, including dance and Boccia; pupils experience taking turns and being fair to each other. A strong thread in this inclusive curriculum is the work in personal and social education, with its highly successful focus on personal development and citizenship.

The excellent care, guidance and support for pupils is based upon the very close understanding that staff have of each pupil and the way they treat them with great respect. The comprehensive interventions by health and therapy professionals are closely integrated into teachers' planning to support specific needs. Teaching assistants make a substantial contribution to pupils' learning, for example in supporting pupils and families who speak home languages other than English.

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*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<p><b>The quality of teaching</b></p> <p>Taking into account:</p> <p>The use of assessment to support learning</p>	<p><b>2</b></p>
	<p>1</p>
<p><b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p>
<p><b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b></p>	<p><b>1</b></p>

## **How effective are leadership and management?**

The drive and ambition of the headteacher spearhead a 'can do' culture that tackles any barriers to learning. Governors' outstanding grasp of the school's strengths and areas for development, and their breadth of knowledge about the school, ensure they challenge the senior team with relevant and searching questions that drive the strategic management of the school.

Management does not stop with the senior team. All staff see they have a management role; this drives them to reach their personal potential and to ensure all pupils have the very best opportunities and support. In an interview with a team of teaching assistants, they described management as 'involving everyone - the sky is the limit!'

High expectations of key stage coordinators and subject leaders focus on analysis of results tracked through the Whole School Performance Report. Middle managers' in-depth interviews with the senior team involve subject evaluation, and include searching questions where data show any drop in achievement. The rigour and excitement of the exercise ensures staff are motivated to drive up pupils' academic achievements and personal development. Development planning is exemplary and integrates the work of the school's specialist status across the whole curriculum.

All adults who work in the school aspire to gain further qualifications and experience. Some teaching assistants have developed their skills achieving higher level teaching assistant recognition, and a few are going on to train as teachers. The school makes excellent use of the Graduate Teacher Programme to follow the school motto 'growing people' and to alleviate the problem the school has experienced in recruiting high quality staff. During the training year, the staff develop their professional qualities very well.

Community cohesion is not new to the school, as it has pursued this from the mid-1990s. The school's own community and links with the locality provide excellent examples of community cohesion. Specialist status has enhanced the school's contribution to national community cohesion, which is very strong. The school has explored, but not done so much, to develop international links and it has not fully analysed the range of evidence it has collected from current programmes.

Safeguarding procedures follow statutory requirements but are exceptional in the quality of their policies and their application to ensure all aspects of safeguarding, and health and safety, are understood and practised by all. All required procedures are in place and



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rigorously applied. The application of policies is thoroughly monitored by senior staff and governors. Inclusion is at the heart of all the school's work. Promoting equality and tackling discrimination are supported by excellent policies that are reviewed biannually and include consultation with the parents and carers via their regular newsletter.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>1</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children benefit from excellent teaching which enables them to make outstanding progress. Home visits and observations ensure staff make clear judgements on a child's starting point, which enables them to tailor experiences to each one's needs and measure accurately the extent of the progress made. The environment provides an exciting mix of indoor and outdoor activities. The Nursery is particularly stimulating. Outstanding attention is given to children's personal development and they make excellent progress towards their early learning goals. Learning is fun, and teachers maintain a good pace, with a wide range of free and guided activities. Behaviour is good because the children are always busily involved in experimenting and finding out, but also much enjoy having quiet times for learning and stories.

Welfare is paramount in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the repetition of good habits and hygiene means they are well remembered. First aid and links to the health and therapy teams are maintained to help to deal with children's individual needs. Safeguarding is as strong as in the main school. Leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage are outstanding, with high expectations that drive the aspirations of the team.

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*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	1

## Sixth form

The sixth form is a culmination of 14 years at the school and students feel the school is like part of their family. On this strong, secure basis, students make outstanding progress in their sixth form years. They really enjoy school and love the many challenging activities; for example, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award sets exciting challenges, including an expedition and camping overnight. The Youth Award Scheme and the Transition Challenge add to students' wider experiences and personal development. Teaching in the sixth form is outstanding, as is the broad and diverse curriculum. Work experience and visiting a further education college help students have experience of the world of work. Often, pupils get an individual challenge; for example, one male student is a member of the Medway Youth Parliament. Pupils in the sixth form take a leadership role in fund-raising. The quality of provision is outstanding and the sixth form setting is similar to a mainstream sixth form with a common room, kitchen area and work spaces in the three rooms that make up the department. Leadership and management are excellent because of the way that equality of opportunity is promoted, the excellent teamwork and the capacity to respond to needs as they arise.

*These are the grades for the sixth form*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the sixth form</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	1
The quality of provision in the sixth form	1
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

## Boarding provision

### National Minimum Standards (NMS) to be met to improve social care

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*This is the grade for the boarding provision*

<b>The effectiveness of the boarding provision</b>	<b>1</b>
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## **Views of parents and carers**

There was a good level of response to the questionnaire. The views expressed were very positive. Typical comments were that 'Teaching is to such a high standard, every achievement is celebrated' and 'There is very good communication between home and school.' Parents and carers are very grateful for being able to have paediatric appointments in school. A very few raised concerns but these were not borne out by inspection evidence.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abbey Court School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school. In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 74 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 158 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	62	84	12	16	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	56	76	15	20	1	1	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	57	77	17	23	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	51	69	20	27	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	57	77	15	20	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	53	72	18	24	1	1	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	55	74	16	22	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	46	62	23	31	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	53	72	16	22	2	3	1	1
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	40	54	29	39	1	1	1	1
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	59	20	27	4	5	1	1
The school is led and managed effectively	51	69	18	24	1	1	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	52	70	19	26	1	1	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



16 June 2010

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbey Court School, Rochester, Kent ME2 3SP

We would like to thank you all for making us so welcome when we visited and inspected both sites of Abbey Court School earlier this week. Both schools are such exciting environments that we could see what makes you want to work so hard. We agree with your parents and carers that Abbey Court is an outstanding school. Your teachers and other staff work very hard to provide you with many interesting things to do.

Our meetings with the school councils were very informative and we heard about your many visits to interesting places such as the local rare breeds farm. The councils also told us about your excellent swimming pool and new sensory area.

You and your teachers, teaching assistants and therapists work very hard to make life at school safe and happy. We heard that some of you raise funds for charity, for example Red Nose Day. Before we left, we asked your teachers to do two things to make your school even better:

- Make all your teaching as good as the best.
- Develop more international links and keep a close eye on how well all your activities outside school are working.

Lastly, I was thinking of everyone on Thursday night and the awards evening. I hope it was a great success and that your parents and carers enjoyed celebrating your awards and achievements.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Kauffman

Lead inspector

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