

Inspection of a good school: Abbeyfield School

Mereway, Northampton, Northamptonshire NN4 8BU

Inspection dates:

14 and 15 September 2021

Outcome

Abbeyfield School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Abbeyfield School serves a diverse community. It is a welcoming and inclusive school. Effective support is provided for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and pupils for whom English is an additional language. Leaders are determined to help pupils achieve their best. The curriculum is broad. There is a wide range of academic and vocational subjects available for pupils to study at GCSE level and in the sixth form. Expectations are high in most subjects. Most pupils achieve well at this school, especially in English, performing arts and modern foreign languages.

Pupils are happy at school and say that they feel safe. The school environment is calm and orderly. Pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous. Occurrences of bullying are rare. Pupils and most parents are very confident that staff will deal effectively with any bullying that does happen.

Leaders care about pupils' well-being and their readiness for life in modern Britain. They do not shy away from sharing important messages about how pupils can keep themselves safe in school and in the local area. Leaders passionately believe that pupils should be well informed about personal safety. Issues discussed include substance misuse, hate crime and harmful sexual behaviour, for example.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

As one member of staff wrote, 'Leaders present a strong, unified and motivated team.' Leaders have established a collaborative and inclusive culture. Leaders have high expectations of staff. They also care about staff well-being. Staff morale is high.

Senior leaders have worked well with subject leaders in the school and with trust leaders to redevelop the curriculum. They have focused on ensuring that pupils learn 'powerful knowledge'. Subject leaders have made sure that their plans for what pupils will learn and when are ambitious. In some subjects, including English, plans go beyond what the national curriculum requires. As one pupil said, 'Lessons can be intriguing when the

teacher doesn't let us know what will be happening next.' There are wide-ranging opportunities for staff training to support the teaching of the curriculum. Leaders check the impact of this training. Staff value the training.

Teachers' subject knowledge is strong. In most subjects, they use this to question pupils in depth about their learning, including students in the sixth form. In subjects such as Spanish, history and performing arts, teachers teach with infectious enthusiasm. In these subjects, teachers inspire pupils to achieve highly. Teachers' precise and tailored questioning ensures that pupils engage well with their learning.

Most pupils are willing to take part in whole-class discussions, although they do not always have the opportunity to do so. Teachers do not always check that the learning of all pupils is secure before moving on to the next task. This is the case in science and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, for example. In these subjects, not all pupils can recall the important knowledge they need to complete tasks teachers set them. On occasions, pupils leave work incomplete or wait for suggested answers rather than having a go themselves.

Recently, leaders have raised expectations of pupils' achievement, attendance and behaviour. The school's new policy for managing behaviour has had a positive impact. Relationships between pupils and staff are positive. Instances of low-level disruption have decreased over the past three years. Exclusions, which leaders use appropriately, have decreased over the same period. Permanent exclusions are higher than that seen nationally. However, leaders use these as a last resort. Levels of attendance are good. Leaders are taking all reasonable steps to ensure improved attendance from those pupils who are regularly absent. The appointment of a family support worker is having a positive impact in this respect.

The school's systems for pastoral care and support are strong. Many parents who expressed a view were positive about the support their children receive. Pupils feel well cared for. They receive effective guidance, particularly when choosing options for GCSE and in the sixth form. Leaders ensure that they look after pupils with protected characteristics well and that these pupils feel safe. A newly launched forum for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender pupils (LGBT+), for example, has begun to raise pupils' awareness of diversity.

Pupils in all year groups enjoy extra-curricular opportunities. School productions such as 'The Wizard of Oz' and 'School of Rock' are particularly popular.

Leaders cared for pupils and staff well during the national restrictions due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic. As one member of staff said, 'The rapid and responsive way that leaders have responded to the pandemic is a measure of the commitment of that leadership.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have established a strong culture of vigilance at this school. Staff take their responsibilities seriously. Leaders know what the local safeguarding priorities are. Staff receive training on these priorities. Pupils learn about them through their personal development programme. This helps pupils to know how to keep themselves safe. Leaders have responded well to rare occurrences of hate crime and harmful sexual behaviour. Pupils know who their 'go to' staff are if they have any worries or concerns. Leaders work well with external agencies to keep vulnerable pupils safe from harm.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In science and PSHE, teachers do not always check that pupils have the knowledge they need to be able to complete written tasks, assessments or contribute towards discussions. When this is the case, pupils sometimes opt out of completing tasks or do not participate as fully as they might. Teachers should ensure that pupils' understanding of concepts taught are secure before setting tasks or moving on so that pupils remember and apply more of what they have been taught.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 11 and 12 May 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138858
Local authority	West Northamptonshire
Inspection number	10199759
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1392
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	156
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Anderson
Principal	Siona Robson
Website	www.abbeyfieldschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	11 and 12 May 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Creative Education Trust which it joined in 2015.
- At the time of the inspection, the school was not using any alternative education providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors met with the principal and other members of the senior leadership team. Meetings were also held with subject leaders and the coordinator for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The lead inspector met with three representatives

from the trust, of which two additionally serve as members of the school's local academy council.

- To check the school's arrangements for safeguarding, the lead inspector met with designated leaders for safeguarding. Policies, procedures and record-keeping were scrutinised, including an evaluation of the checks made when recruiting staff.
- Inspectors completed deep dives in English, history, science and PSHE (called 'key life skills' at the school). In each subject, inspectors visited lessons, scrutinised the work in pupils' books and held discussions with subject leaders, teachers and pupils. Inspectors observed two whole-year-group assemblies.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils informally around the school site. The lead inspector also met with a small group of pupils leading the school's new forum for LGBT+ pupils.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including policies and record-keeping for behaviour management, exclusions and attendance.
- The lead inspector held telephone conversations with the school's local police community support officer and a lead tutor from the Northamptonshire Schools Tuition Centre.
- Inspectors considered 100 responses to Ofsted Parent View, including 72 free-text comments. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff or pupil surveys. The lead inspector reviewed 62 responses to the school's staff survey conducted in January 2021.

Inspection team

Chris Stevens, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Hardy

Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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