

Inspection of Abbot's Lea School

Beaconsfield Road, Woolton, Liverpool, Merseyside L25 6EE

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 November 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to Abbot's Lea School. They look forward to learning with their friends. Pupils are happy and safe. Staff provide effective support to new pupils so that they settle in quickly.

Pupils, and students in the sixth form, benefit from a well-planned curriculum. Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They follow pupils' individual support plans carefully. Teachers are successful in ensuring that pupils work towards their education, health and care plan (EHC plan) objectives. Consequently, pupils progress well through the curriculum.

When pupils are upset or anxious, they receive effective support from staff. Pupils know that staff will quickly resolve any occasional fallouts or incidents of bullying. Most pupils behave well throughout the school day. All pupils, and students in the sixth form, said that they felt safe in school.

Pupils carry out their leadership roles well. More pupils now serve on the school council, increasing pupils' involvement in decisions that affect them. Pupils are keen to help others.

Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education. Older pupils, and students in the sixth form, receive high-quality careers information, advice and guidance. Pupils learn to travel independently, manage their time and write an effective curriculum vitae.

Currently, there are unresolved tensions between leaders and some staff. While this is not affecting the overall quality of education for pupils, it is preventing ongoing school improvement.

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

Leaders and governors have set out a clear and ambitious vision for the school. A significant majority of staff share leaders' and governors' vision. They appreciate the training and support that leaders provide so that they can do their jobs well. However, a significant minority of staff do not support the changes that leaders have made to how the school operates.

Leaders and governors continue to work with staff to find a path forward to maintain the smooth operation of the school. However, there remain some issues that require ongoing mediation to resolve. These relate to the school's policies and procedures. While inspectors found that these issues are a concern, they are not currently having a detrimental impact on pupils' learning and welfare.

Leaders have introduced new curriculums in English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). These curriculums successfully build on already established curriculums to enable pupils, and students in the sixth form,

to achieve well. Effective curriculum planning ensures that teachers are able to break down learning into small steps. Teachers frequently review pupils' progress to check that they remember what they have been taught.

Even though the curriculum is ambitious, in some subjects, leaders do not ensure that some older pupils, including sixth-form students, work towards a full suite of recognised qualifications. Leaders are in the process of reviewing this aspect of their curriculum.

All pupils in the school have an EHC plan. Specialist staff provide effective support and advice when pupils are struggling with their learning and behaviour. They identify any additional needs efficiently and effectively and then plan and deliver bespoke programmes to help pupils catch up. All pupils move on to education, employment or training when they are ready. Staff keep in touch with pupils and students as they move into the next stage of their education, employment or training to check that they settle in well.

Leaders ensure that every pupil learns to read as soon as possible. Younger pupils have daily phonics sessions. Older pupils who have not yet learned to read continue to follow the school's phonics programme. Leaders keep a close eye on each pupil's progress. They make sure that additional support is in place for those pupils who are struggling to keep up. Pupils enjoy listening to the stories and poems that their teachers read to them. Pupils relish visits to the library.

A minority of staff raised concerns about pupils' behaviour. However, inspectors found that pupils typically behave well, both in class and around school. The majority of staff work together well to provide support that is carefully tailored to meet individual pupils' needs. When a pupil is in crisis, staff provide effective care to help the pupil calm down and get back into class quickly.

Carefully planned activities promote pupils' wider personal development. Trips and visits to local landmarks help pupils to learn about the city in which they live. Pupils in key stage 3 have attended taster days at a local university. All pupils enjoy taking part in the wealth of clubs on offer across school, such as Lego club, yoga club and coding club.

Despite the issues between leaders and a minority of staff, leaders routinely check whether there are any issues that are impacting negatively on their colleagues' well-being. Leaders and governors invest considerably in supporting staff's career development. Leaders provide effective support for teachers who are at the early stages of their career.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders prioritise staff's training so that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities to keep pupils safe. The safeguarding team follows up all

safeguarding concerns. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families receive the timely support that they need.

Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, both in school and in the community. Leaders ensure that staff know how to report any concerns about any adult's behaviour that may pose a risk to pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is ongoing tension between a minority of staff and leaders. While it does not directly affect the quality of education that pupils are receiving, it has created a divide in the staff. This is hindering ongoing school improvement. Leaders and governors should continue to engage meaningfully with these staff to resolve the ongoing tensions.
- Leaders do not ensure that some pupils in key stage 4 and students in the sixth form work towards a full suite of recognised qualifications. On occasions, this hinders some pupils and students from achieving as highly as they could. Leaders should continue to review the qualifications that pupils and students can access to enable them to fulfil their potential and career aspirations.

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	104736
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	10199583
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	265
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Robert Lowe
Headteacher	Ania Hildrey
Website	www.abbotsleaschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	13 and 14 January 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Information about this school

- A new headteacher and chair of governors have been appointed since the previous inspection.
- All pupils attending the school have an EHC plan, indicating autism spectrum disorder. All have social and communication difficulties and the vast majority have cognitive delay or deficit. Some pupils also have social, emotional and mental health needs, dyslexia, dyspraxia and/or sensory processing difficulties.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspectors deemed the inspection a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- During the inspection, inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, class teachers and support staff. Inspectors spoke with a representative of the local authority. Inspectors also met with members of the governing body, including the vice-chair of governors.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, the online questionnaire, including the free-text responses. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered 134 responses to Ofsted's staff questionnaire. Inspectors also spoke to over half the staff individually, or in small groups, about the concerns raised in the staff survey.
- Inspectors met with those responsible for safeguarding at the school. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation in relation to safeguarding. They spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour at the start of the day, during lessons and at playtimes. They spoke to pupils about bullying, behaviour and leaders' expectations of pupils' behaviour.
- As part of this inspection, inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics, geography and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders, reviewed curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, met with teachers, spoke with pupils about their learning and reviewed samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also listened to pupils read.

Inspection team

Pippa Jackson Maitland, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Martin Hanbury	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Bentham	Her Majesty's Inspector

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