

Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College

Abbs Cross Lane, Hornchurch, Essex RM12 4YB

Inspection dates

19–20 September 2017

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	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Senior leaders have tackled the school's weaknesses with determination and rigour. New and effective systems have strengthened management. As a result, improvements since June 2015 are significant.
- School leaders have created a culture where pupils thrive. Pupils' positive attitudes and increasingly high aspirations are raising standards.
- Leaders have taken bold decisions about the curriculum. It is carefully planned and provides a broad range of experiences. This is starting to have a positive impact on pupils' outcomes and their readiness for the next stage of their education.
- Middle leaders contribute strongly to the school's improvement. They know the areas that need to be better and understand their role.
- Leaders, including governors, place a strong emphasis on pupils' welfare. Pupils are cared for effectively. Vulnerable pupils are supported well to overcome barriers to learning.
- Typically, pupils are polite, courteous and highly respectful of others. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good.
- The school takes its duty to promote equality very seriously. Pupils understand how fundamental British values underpin modern Britain. They have a strong sense of right and wrong and a maturity that is beyond their years.
- Teaching is effective especially in English, humanities and physical education (PE). However, teaching quality in science and mathematics remains inconsistent. This means that some pupils do not reach the highest standards.
- Pupils' achievements are improving, especially in English. Progress is improving. However, the legacy of poor teaching means that progress lags behind improvements in teaching. As a result, pupils' outcomes require improvement.
- The progress of disadvantaged pupils is improving steadily. Achievement is moving closer to other pupils nationally.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving. Better support means that pupils' achievements are improving. However, this support is not consistent in all classes.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' outcomes, especially in mathematics and science by:
 - ensuring that all pupils, including the most able, make similar progress to that made in English
 - providing suitable support for all pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they make significant progress from their starting points.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teaching is consistently strong across all subjects and that work is suitably challenging for all pupils, including the most able and disadvantaged pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The determination and commitment of the headteacher has turned the school around. New systems and procedures are driving improvements to teaching, learning and pupils' outcomes. For example, senior and middle leadership has been streamlined so that responsibility for pupils' outcomes are clear.
- Senior leaders, governors and the trust are ambitious for the school. They have created a culture where everyone is supported to achieve their potential. Teachers have high expectations of their classes and pupils are aspirational for their future. This is having a positive impact on raising achievement.
- Senior leaders have an in-depth knowledge of the school's strengths and identify weaknesses accurately. Their evaluation of teaching quality is incisive. For example, annual curriculum reviews are thorough and use a wide range of information such as work in pupils' books, lesson observations and assessments. Leaders use these evaluations to take swift and effective action to tackle underperformance and improve pupils' outcomes. Since the school became part of the Loxford Trust, pupils and teachers agree that behaviour, teaching and the curriculum have improved significantly. As one pupil noted, 'teachers now take their work seriously'.
- Middle leaders play a crucial role in improving the school's performance. Subject leaders take a front seat in ensuring high standards in their subjects. Pastoral leaders work effectively to identify pupils who are falling behind and provide targeted support where it is most needed.
- Changes to the curriculum are improving pupils' aspirations. The broad range of subjects is well planned and suits the pupils at Abbs Cross. It enables pupils to extend their knowledge and deepen their understanding in ways that interest them. For example, the rich English curriculum is giving pupils the knowledge and skills to tackle more advanced work after the age of 16. In drama and dance, pupils develop their creative skills and in PE the ability to evaluate their work thoroughly.
- Leaders have introduced rigorous procedures to check pupils' achievements and track their progress. They analyse thoroughly a wide range of assessment information, including about pupils' attendance and behaviour. This enables leaders to pick up quickly those pupils who are falling behind and ensure that they get the right support to catch up with others. The checks made on the progress and well-being of those pupils who attend alternative provision is similarly rigorous.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. A range of visits and events contributes well to pupils' cultural and spiritual development, for example trips to local and West End theatres. Pupils' understanding of the fundamental British values, including mutual respect and tolerance for other faiths, is well developed. Through the school council and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) pupils learn about democracy and leadership skills are developed through the prefect system. Careers education ensures that pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education.

- The leadership of special educational needs has improved a great deal over the past year. The money for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is used effectively. There are robust systems to identify those pupils who need additional help and teachers are quick to give support. This is enabling leaders to better target support and ensure that pupils make enough progress from their different starting points. The legacy of poor leadership of special educational needs means that there is still more to do to improve provision. For example, not all pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are given enough help to understand the work they are given. Senior leaders recognise that more needs to be done but have well-founded plans for further improvement and use the expertise of the trust effectively.
- The additional funding the school receives for disadvantaged pupils, and for those in Year 7 who need extra help to catch up with others, is used effectively. The differences between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and those in other schools is reducing.
- Support from other schools in the Loxford Trust has been used effectively to improve standards of teaching. Visits to Abbs Cross from other teachers has been central in raising teachers' expectations and modelling successful approaches to teaching and learning. In addition, visits to other schools in the trust, and the programme of lectures and training have supported improvements in teaching. The trust has also given considerable support to the school, including using its staff to provide additional leadership capacity. For example in English, mathematics and science the trust has secured middle leaders from other schools. This work has been successful and has enabled the school to improve behaviour, teaching and learning well.

Governance of the school

- The arrangements for governance are effective. The balance of responsibilities between the work of the local governing board and the trust board works successfully. Governors and trustees gather information from a range of sources to hold the school's leaders to account and ask probing questions. This includes written notes of the visits governors make to the school. As a result, they have a realistic understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This enables governors to give priority to those areas most in need of improvement.
- Governors take their responsibilities for safeguarding seriously. Through the trust there are secure procedures for recruiting and vetting new staff. Governors have ensured that all the necessary checks are carried out in line with their legal responsibilities. Similarly, the trust has well-developed appraisal procedures that link performance and salary progression effectively.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders take their responsibilities seriously and have robust procedures to identify pupils experiencing difficulties. They are vigilant in ensuring that pupils do not fall through the net. As a result, all pupils, including the most vulnerable, are cared for successfully.

- Safeguarding procedures are robust and there are close links with outside agencies. Leaders are rigorous in following up referrals to the local authority and this helps to ensure that pupils' needs are met effectively.
- Staff have an up-to-date understanding of child protection and receive regular training. They have a thorough knowledge of issues such as radicalisation and extremism, and the 'Prevent' duty. Staff can identify the signs of abuse and know who to go to if they have a concern. There are relevant and up-to-date trust policies that provide a suitable range of guidance for staff. As a result, safeguarding is a central part of the school's everyday culture.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching and the school's assessment procedures have a positive impact on pupils' learning. However, the legacy of poor teaching means that while achievement is improving in many subjects, it remains too low in others.
- Teaching in English is especially strong. Teachers use their detailed subject knowledge to make lessons interesting and to challenge pupils' thinking. As a result, pupils are not just learning how to pass examinations. They are also deepening their understanding of how to use the English language in a variety of different contexts.
- Teaching is also strong in many other subjects. For example, in PE teachers provide expert support and coaching, enabling pupils to make clear progress from their starting points. Similarly, in drama, dance and humanities, teaching is challenging and pupils are highly motivated.
- Despite significant improvement in teaching, there remain some inconsistencies. Occasionally, teaching fails to motivate pupils or develop their understanding and skills sufficiently. This is particularly the case in science and, to a lesser extent, in mathematics where the need to tackle the legacy of poor teaching has been most acute. Where this is the case, pupils' progress suffers.
- Senior leaders have pushed hard to raise teachers' expectations. The success of this work is clear in pupils' improving achievements and in the way teachers provide challenging tasks. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson pupils deepened their understanding of how to evaluate the book they were reading for their GCSE examination. This level of challenge is also evident in subjects where achievement is still not strong enough such as mathematics and science. Teaching is improving in these subjects but has not had enough time to plug all the gaps in pupils' learning, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- One of the strengths of teaching is the way teachers use questions to explore pupils' understanding and deepen their knowledge. Often, teachers use pupils' answers to change their teaching so that a difficult or new idea can be explained more carefully. This ensures that pupils have a firm grounding in the basics of the subject before moving onto more advanced work. At other times, teachers ask questions that are matched to pupils of different levels of understanding. This ensures that pupils of all abilities are enabled to learn and make progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are especially positive. They are highly motivated and keen to do well. Pupils' attitudes make a significant contribution to their achievements

enabling them to work in lessons without interruption to their learning. This is also because teachers know their pupils well and classroom routines are well established. As a result, pupils know what is expected of them.

- Another strength is the way teachers help pupils to improve their work by giving them clear feedback in line with the school's policy. Pupils use this feedback well to modify and improve their work. As a result, pupils are making better progress than in the past.
- In many subjects, assessment is used effectively. Peer assessment, where pupils check each other's work, is particularly successful in getting pupils to discuss their work and develop their understanding. This is especially noticeable in PE but also in other subjects such as history, geography, design and technology and drama.
- The teaching for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is improving but varies between subjects. In PE pupils are fully involved, especially those with disabilities, and this has a noticeable impact on their enjoyment and achievement. Leaders provide teachers with information about pupils' additional needs and many use this to plan their lessons. However, this is not always the case and in some lessons pupils are not being given the right support to ensure that they understand what to do.
- Literacy is being developed well across many subjects including dance, design and technology, drama and humanities. Opportunities for pupils to discuss their work with others enables them to think more deeply about what they are doing and how to develop their ideas. A culture of reading is being encouraged successfully by the decision to use one English lesson each week to read for pleasure. This is having a strong impact on pupils' love of books and their literacy skills.
- The development of numeracy is less well developed and is not used routinely across subjects. However, improvements are underway and mathematics is used effectively in some subjects, for example in science and design and technology.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils have especially positive attitudes to school and are increasingly aspirational. They are respectful of their teachers, other adults and their peers. The opportunities for pupils to work together and discuss ideas enables pupils to develop constructive relationships. This makes for a calm and positive climate right across the school and one in which all pupils are valued.
- Vulnerable pupils are supported well and the school does a great deal to help those with particular concerns or difficulties. Leaders check that those pupils who attend the alternative provision are properly supported. The school uses a range of external agencies to provide support for pupils. As a result, pupils' care and welfare is robust.
- Leaders are especially active in promoting equality and pupils have a clear understanding of the need to guard against the discrimination of those who are different from themselves. This is particularly so in relation to gender, race and gender reassignment and is evident in the positive relationships between pupils of different backgrounds and between boys and girls.

- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including the dangers of cyber-bullying and to ensure they are safe online. The programme of assemblies and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) provide pupils with advice about bullying, sex and relationships education and how to keep themselves safe and healthy. These topics contribute well to pupils' personal development and welfare.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders have done much to improve behaviour and their hard work has paid off. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is consistently good. Behaviour is especially strong when pupils move between lessons where they walk calmly from one classroom to another. Similarly, pupils behave well during break and lunchtimes. As a result, there is very little disruption around the school and pupils get to their lessons on time. Pupils are polite and courteous and relationships between pupils and staff are respectful. This ensures that there is a positive climate right across the school that encourages learning.
- Pupils are clear that bullying is rare and that it hardly ever happens. They confirm that behaviour has improved in the last few years and that bullying is no longer a problem. However, pupils are confident that if there was any bullying it would be dealt with effectively by teachers and leaders.
- Procedures to check pupils' attendance and follow up absence are secure. The reorganisation of the pastoral care system has helped to ensure that these procedures work effectively. As a result, attendance has improved and is in line with other schools in England.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Most pupils start at Abbs Cross with starting points that are at least average and often above other pupils nationally. At the last inspection in June 2015, pupils' learning was affected by poor teaching. As a result, pupils' achievements were low. While there have been some significant improvements in standards, there are still subjects where pupils do not make enough progress and thus do not reach the higher levels. This is because improved teaching in these subjects has not yet had time to ensure that pupils catch up with their learning.
- The 2017 GCSE results were much improved in English and positive in many other subjects, including history, geography and PE. However, they were disappointing in mathematics and science where teaching quality has been slower to improve than in English. Assessment information about current pupils shows that progress is improving, especially in mathematics. Progress in science is beginning to improve but is still less than that made by pupils in other schools with the same starting points.
- The achievements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are improving. This is the result of more focused support for pupils and detailed information about their additional needs for teachers. Sometimes, support for pupils

who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is not sharp enough and their achievement suffers.

- The relatively small number of disadvantaged pupils are making better progress than previously. The difference between the achievements of disadvantaged pupils and others nationally, and in the school, is shrinking. This is the result of the school's aspirational climate and improved teaching and assessment arrangements.
- The most able pupils, including the most able disadvantaged pupils, are beginning to make improved progress from their starting points. This is because of the successful work to improve teaching, challenge the most able and raise pupils' aspirations. There are some who do very well and achieve excellent results. However, there are others who are not reaching the higher levels and are underachieving.

School details

Unique reference number	136663
Local authority	Havering
Inspection number	10031655

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	820
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David Low
Headteacher	Nicola Jethwa
Telephone number	01708 440 304
Website	www.abbscross.net
Email address	enquiries@abbscross.net
Date of previous inspection	3–4 June 2015

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- Abbs Cross Academy and Arts College is an average-sized school for pupils aged 11 to 16.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average.
- The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below average.
- The proportion of pupils who receive special educational needs support is above average. The proportion with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan is above average.

- Six pupils currently attend alternative provision on other sites. The names of the alternative provisions are:
 - The Bridge (medical needs unit for Havering) – Frances Bardsley School
 - Lambourne End and Wellgate Farm
 - KORU – alternative provision run by Havering
 - Motorvations.
- The school is part of the Loxford Trust.
- The local governing body has recently taken over from the interim executive board.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in each year group. Many of these were seen jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work across the range of subjects.
- Inspectors listened to pupils from Years 7 and 8 reading.
- Inspectors looked at behaviour at break and lunchtime.
- Discussions were held with senior leaders, governors, the chief executive of the trust, subject leaders and pupils.
- A range of documentation and policies was scrutinised which included the school's self-evaluation, records of pupils' behaviour and attendance, assessment information and the minutes of the meetings of the interim executive board and local governing body.
- Inspectors scrutinised records relating to the quality of teaching and the school's website, including information about extra-curricular activities.
- Records, policies and procedures relating to safeguarding were reviewed.
- Inspectors took account of 72 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. They also considered 19 written responses by parents.

Inspection team

Brian Oppenheim, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Charles Rice	Ofsted Inspector
Anthony Wilson	Ofsted Inspector
Bruce Goddard	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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