

The Abbey School

Address: London Road, Faversham, Kent, ME13 8RZ

Unique reference number (URN): 149893

Inspection report: 13 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- **Met:** The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- **Not met:** The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Strong standard ●

Personal development and wellbeing

Strong standard ●

Leaders show deep passion and firm commitment to providing rich opportunities for all pupils, particularly the most disadvantaged. They provide a well-planned, coherent personal development programme that they review and adapt in response to current affairs and pupils' interests. Leaders revisit key themes to ensure that pupils know how to keep themselves safe online and in the community.

The school enables pupils to reflect on their beliefs and experiences, respect others' values and understand right and wrong. Pupils engage thoughtfully with ethical issues through discussion, debate and curriculum themes. The school builds pupils' social skills effectively, promoting cooperation and helping pupils to resolve conflicts with maturity. Pupils embrace important values, such as respect. They show great care for each other. For example, older pupils choreograph dance lessons for younger pupils. Community links provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to contribute locally, such as through environmental projects. Pupils develop an appreciation of cultural diversity and heritage through themed enrichment days and creative and cultural experiences, including theatre visits.

The extra-curricular programme is extensive and well attended. Clubs such as the ADHD Club, alongside sports and creative activities, reflect pupils' needs and further develop talents and interests. Leaders track participation closely and seek to reduce barriers to regular involvement, particularly for disadvantaged pupils. They remove financial barriers through careful use of pupil premium funding.

Pastoral support is a strength. Pupils trust staff to help them manage worries, and regular opportunities to 'check in, check up and check out' help pupils feel safe and supported. Those needing additional help receive thoughtful and bespoke support.

Sixth-form students gain meaningful life skills through work experience, leadership roles and targeted lessons on finance, relationships, drug awareness and sex education.

Careers education is well established, woven through the curriculum and valued by pupils. Leaders adapt provision based on pupil voice, including creating leadership opportunities that allow pupils to shape school life.

Post 16 provision

Strong standard ●

Leaders have cultivated a broad and flexible curriculum that reflects the school's context and student aspirations. They use student voice and local demand to shape pathways that balance relevant applied and academic qualifications. The curriculum prepares students well for adult life, including managing finances and maintaining positive wellbeing. Students receive highly effective advice and support to make successful university, apprenticeship and employment applications. Many progress to ambitious destinations.

Students achieve well, particularly in applied subjects. Teaching is highly effective. Staff demonstrate secure subject expertise, explain content clearly and give very helpful guidance that students use to improve their work. Students who resit English or mathematics GCSE

benefit from targeted support that helps them to succeed. Disadvantaged students and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve in line with their peers because staff understand their needs and provide well-matched support.

Students develop positive learning behaviours through structured study sessions and leadership opportunities. They access a wide range of experiences, including sports academies, enrichment and work experience, which strengthens their confidence and readiness for the future. Students are positive role models across the school. Pastoral support is highly valued and helps students flourish as they prepare for adulthood.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Attendance is below the national average. This has improved steadily, and persistent absence has reduced, as a result of the school's dedicated and responsive work with pupils and their families. This is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged pupils. Pupils understand the importance of regular attendance and show responsibility for being punctual and ready to learn.

Many pupils speak proudly about the positive changes in the school. They find the rules and routines fair and consistently applied. Pupils generally respond promptly to staff instructions because they value the calm and order that helps them learn and feel safe. The school fosters a culture of mutual respect. Pupils and staff take genuine joy in each other's company.

Leaders create safe and purposeful classrooms. Disruption is rare because staff teach pupils how to pay attention and try their best. Pupils say that learning feels easier than before because giving their best effort has become the normality. Staff model high expectations, and pupils typically meet them. Pupils are polite and courteous, using respectful language to ensure that everyone feels included.

Bullying does not worry most pupils as they trust staff to deal with any issues effectively. Pupils who need help to manage their behaviour receive thoughtful support. They learn positive strategies to communicate their emotions. This has resulted in a large reduction in the school's use of suspension.

Curriculum and teaching

Expected standard 

Leaders hold a secure understanding of the quality of the curriculum and teaching across the school. They use accurate information to identify where improvements are needed and act decisively to refine practice. The curriculum is ambitious, broad and balanced. It helps pupils to develop a secure understanding of important knowledge and concepts. Learning follows a logical sequence so that pupils can build knowledge securely across subjects and phases.

Leaders ensure that teachers have the subject knowledge that they need to implement the curriculum. Clear expectations of an Abbey Lesson bring consistency and help pupils to understand what teachers expect of them. Teachers explain new content clearly and connect it to prior learning. They typically make appropriate adaptations to help disadvantaged pupils learn well. Teachers use a range of assessment approaches to identify gaps, including those caused by poor attendance. Generally, teachers use effective routines that help pupils to rehearse and secure learning. They address misconceptions quickly.

Leaders prioritise the learning of essential knowledge in reading, writing, speaking and mathematics. They check reading fluency regularly and provide targeted support that helps pupils to catch up quickly. Staff teach subject vocabulary explicitly so that pupils learn to speak and write with increasing accuracy and complexity across the curriculum.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

The school fosters an inclusive culture where pupils feel supported, valued and motivated to succeed. Leaders understand the barriers that pupils face and use innovative approaches, such as the Personalised Education Centre, to help pupils engage with learning.

Staff identify pupils' needs accurately so that they receive swift and effective help. They monitor progress carefully to ensure that support is timely and targeted. Leaders remove obstacles to learning and wellbeing effectively through reasonable adjustments, targeted interventions and inclusive classroom practices.

Support is reviewed regularly so that leaders can refine provision quickly. Staff benefit from ongoing training that strengthens their ability to adapt teaching. The specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) ensures pupils with SEND access the full curriculum through personalised support which is aligned with their education, health and care plans. Leaders collaborate with families, external professionals and agencies to shape provision and raise aspirations for pupils with SEND.

Pupil premium funding is used purposefully to reduce barriers for disadvantaged pupils and those known to social care. Leaders commission alternative provision carefully as a short-term measure to rebuild pupils' confidence and engagement with education. Leaders are in the process of developing staff expertise further to ensure that support continues to improve achievement and attendance for disadvantaged pupils with greater consistency and impact.

Leadership and governance

Expected standard 

Leadership at all levels shows a secure and well-established understanding of the school's context and community. The school has been through significant positive change. Some aspects of leaders' work are more impactful than others. Important improvements, such as ensuring pupils feel safe, have been made while further work is underway to improve academic achievement in key stages 3 and 4. Leaders demonstrate a deep commitment to their vision for further school improvement. They act with moral purpose and are excellent role models for staff. Strategic plans are coherent and rooted in a detailed evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development. These plans recognise and celebrate what the school does well, while also identifying with accuracy the aspects that require further

refinement. Robust processes give leaders the insight and confidence to act decisively, which helps to ensure that improvement work is impactful.

Trustees and governors provide appropriate challenge and support. They hold leaders to account effectively and work collaboratively with staff to ensure that decisions are taken in the best interests of all pupils. They fulfil their responsibilities with diligence, clarity and a clear sense of collective purpose.

Staff morale is high. A positive sense of teamwork is evident across the school. Staff speak with pride about contributing to the community. Leaders support staff through strategies that include well-considered professional learning which builds expertise at all career stages. Staff value opportunities to develop their teaching practice and describe feeling trusted and empowered. Leaders thoughtfully manage workload and promote staff wellbeing so that improvement expectations remain ambitious and sustainable.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Less effective teaching in the past than currently in school continues to affect published outcomes, which remain below national averages. Improvements are evident but not rapid. At the end of key stage 4, disadvantaged pupils attain below local and national averages, and published outcomes do not show significant or sustained improvement over time. This has potentially limited pupils' options when considering post-16 destinations and pathways. For some pupils, poor attendance and inconsistencies in teaching in a small number of subjects prevents them from learning what they should.

Pupils now learn more securely than previously because leaders have improved the quality of teaching and curriculum design. Pupils apply knowledge with increasing accuracy and fluency. Precise teaching closes gaps in pupils' prior learning. Pupils particularly achieve well in key stage 3, where high-quality teaching and curriculum have been their normality. Work in books shows improving quality, and in many subjects the differences between disadvantaged pupils and their peers are narrowing. As a result of the school's effectiveness, pupils are increasingly well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Across the school, pupils value the support they receive and the improvements that leaders have secured. Pupils feel part of a community that believes in them, challenges them and helps them to succeed.

Pupils experience a calm, inclusive and ambitious school where staff place pupils' needs at the heart of daily practice. They feel welcomed each morning because routines are clear and staff provide consistent guidance. Pupils describe respectful relationships with staff and

feel safe, listened to and supported when they face difficulties. They know that staff act quickly when concerns arise, and this helps pupils to trust the school systems in place.

Published outcomes at the end of key stage 4 indicate that pupils have not achieved highly over time. Improvements have been made to the curriculum and quality of teaching. The impact of these can be seen in current pupils' work. In lessons, pupils typically engage well. Pupils value the way teachers on the whole teach clearly and check that pupils understand new concepts. This structure enables pupils to attempt challenging tasks and correct misconceptions.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including pupils in the specially resourced provision for pupils with SEND, feel fully included in school life. They access trips, clubs and wider opportunities because staff adapt activities thoughtfully and promote independence.

Pupils enjoy a broad range of enrichment and speak proudly about developing new talents in sport, the arts and academic clubs. Leaders' efforts to remove barriers ensure that disadvantaged pupils can take part without worry. Pupils understand the importance of attendance and recognise the support they receive when they struggle to attend regularly. Many describe a growing sense of pride as their attendance improves.

Sixth-form students feel increasingly independent and well prepared for adult life. They value leadership roles, work experience and targeted lessons that help them make informed choices about their futures.

Next steps

- Leaders should continue their work to embed highly effective teaching across the curriculum to help pupils deepen their learning and knowledge consistently so that pupils' achievements improve, including those in published outcomes.
- Leaders should continue to refine and implement highly effective support to further reduce persistent absenteeism and improve the attendance of pupils.

About this inspection

This school is part of The Howard Academy Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Owen McColgan, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Dan McDonald.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders, trust officers, a trustee and the chair of the local governing body.

The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school includes provision for 50 pupils with autism in its specially resourced provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. It currently provides education for 53 pupils.

The school makes use of three registered alternative provisions.

Principal: Dr Rowland Speller

Lead inspector:

Michelle Payne, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Keith Pailthorpe, Ofsted Inspector

Mark Bagust, Ofsted Inspector

Sara Staggs, His Majesty's Inspector

Ben Greene, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

1,110

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,067

School capacity

1,226

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 1,153

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

38.80%

Above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 28.9%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

6.04%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.09%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

7.84%

Below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 13.4%

Location deprivation

Below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

Resourced provision and SEN unit

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

English and maths GCSE

Percentage of pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	32.5%	45.2%	Below
2023/24 (final)	26.7%	45.9%	Below
2022/23		45.3%	

A measure of pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	35.5	45.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	37.2	45.9	Below
2022/23		46.3	

Progress 8

How much progress pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-0.56	-0.03	Below
2022/23		-0.03	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils achieving grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	14.7%	25.6%	Below
2023/24 (final)	10.8%	25.8%	Below
2022/23		25.2%	

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (provisional)	25.5	34.9	Below
2023/24 (final)	29.9	34.6	Close to average
2022/23		35.0	

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (final)	-1.11	-0.57	Below
2022/23		-0.57	

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils' English and maths GCSE grade 5 or above

Percentage of disadvantaged pupils who achieved grade 5 or above in English and maths GCSE.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	14.7%	52.8%	-38.1 pp
2023/24 (final)	10.8%	53.1%	-42.4 pp
2022/23		52.4%	

Disadvantaged pupils' Attainment 8

A measure of disadvantaged pupils' point scores across 8 subjects including maths (double weighted), English (double weighted if both language and literature are taken), 3 EBacc measures and 3 GCSE or technical measures.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2024/25 (provisional)	25.5	50.3	-24.8
2023/24 (final)	29.9	50.0	-20.1
2022/23		50.3	

Disadvantaged pupils' Progress 8

How much progress disadvantaged pupils made between the end of primary school (key stage 2) and the end of secondary school (key stage 4), compared to pupils across England who got similar results at the end of key stage 2.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2023/24 (final)	-1.11	0.16	-1.27
2022/23		0.17	

16 to 18 performance

A-level average point score

The average points that students achieved per A-level entry.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	24.59	34.99	Below
2023/24 (final)	27.69	34.38	Below

A-level value added

A score showing students' progress between the end of key stage 4 and the end of their academic qualification studies.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (revised)	-0.4	0.0	Below
2023/24 (revised)	0.2	0.0	Above

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	12.7%	8.1%	Above
2023/24 (3 term)	13.0%	8.9%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	15.2%	9.0%	Above

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 term)	37.4%	21.9%	Above

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24 (3 term)	40.7%	25.6%	Above
2022/23 (3 term)	41.1%	26.5%	Above

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspects services providing education and skills for children and learners of all ages, and inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people.

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