

Mont à l'Abbé School

La Grande Route de St Jean, St Helier, JE2 3HA

Headteacher: Liz Searle

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Children, Young People, Education and Skills
Highlands Campus
PO Box 142
St Saviour
Jersey JE4 8QJ

Summary

- Mont à l'Abbé School provides an extremely caring and stimulating environment where pupils are keen to learn. Dynamic leadership has created a positive ethos where staff continually strive to improve pupils' learning. Consequently pupils make strong progress in their learning and in developing their independence and are well prepared for their future beyond school.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is excellent. Staff form caring relationships with pupils and have a close understanding of each pupil's particular needs. They manage any anxious behaviour with sensitivity and respect. Pupils' personal development is supported further by a wide range of therapies, which promotes self-confidence and social ease. As a result pupils feel happy and safe in school.
- Teachers and teaching assistants form a very strong team. They are well trained and have a very good knowledge of how to teach children with special educational needs. Starting in the early years provision, teachers and assistants use a wide range of strategies to help pupils communicate, including signing, symbols, pictures and information technology. A unified approach to teaching reading and writing is not yet in place across the school.
- Very strong arrangements are in place for maintaining pupils' welfare and safety. Safeguarding policies and risk assessments are thorough and specific for each pupil's needs. Parents are rightly pleased with the high standard of education and care provided by the school.
- Senior leaders have introduced several recent changes, which are improving pupils' learning. They visit classes regularly and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. Evidence gathered from these visits is not always recorded and used to inform closely the school's forward planning. Good arrangements for checking how well pupils are making progress have been introduced; although senior leaders do not yet have detailed information to compare the progress of different groups of pupils. Post-16 provision is of a high standard and the community is used very effectively to promote students' independence. However, current accommodation is temporary and does not provide access for pupils with physical disabilities.

Full report

Achievement

- Pupils participate well in lessons and enjoy their learning. Those with needs on the autistic spectrum develop a greater confidence in navigating their surroundings and learn to accept classroom routines. Pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties respond well to the sensory activities and make choices, for example through gesture, expression and the use of dual button technology. Photographic evidence is used effectively to record gains in learning and share the information with parents. Many pupils are at the early stages of reading and writing, while others can read and write sentences independently. Work in their books and folders is presented well and shows pupils are gradually improving their literacy skills.
- Children in the early years provision settle quickly on arrival at school. They make notable gains against their thoughtfully planned individual learning targets. Some can make choices while others require more structure and direction. Parents receive detailed daily information about their child's progress through the home-school book.
- Pupils make considerable gains in developing their independence and social skills. A colour coded system for helping pupils understand their own moods and behaviour is used very effectively. It enables pupils with more profound needs to express their feelings and to give feedback on activities. It is also adapted creatively for older pupils to identify ways in which they can manage their responses to different situations. As a result, pupils learn to take control of their own behaviour and avoid unnecessary confrontation with staff.
- Older pupils achieve well by completing a recognised programme, which includes developing independence and basic mathematics and English. Some gain the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and a small number study GCSE courses by attending part time at the co-located secondary school.
- Post-16 students are very well prepared for moving on from school. Their programme includes a strong focus on accessing the community and developing independence skills. This is demonstrated when students shop for ingredients and cook their own meals; develop greater independent travel skills; join the local library or take part in yoga and gym sessions in the community. Students also attend a local further education college, which helps to familiarise them with future pathways beyond school. All those who have left in the past two years have progressed to suitable destinations, which include attending the local college to complete a life skills course or to day services.
- The school has recently introduced new assessment arrangements, which are well suited to recording pupils' progress. Currently whole school data are not yet available to reliably compare the overall progress of pupils with different needs or characteristics. Available evidence suggests pupils who are entitled to the Jersey Premium make similar progress to that of their peers.

Behaviour, personal development and welfare

- The school provides a calm and purposeful learning environment where pupils thrive. Underpinning pupils' outstanding behaviour is the fostering of pupils' self-confidence and the development of the skills that enable them to manage their own behaviour.
- Some pupils who have communication difficulties can easily become stressed and confused, especially when confronted with a new situation. There are occasions when these pupils need physical guidance and reassurance from staff. Staff receive thorough training on appropriate strategies and any incidents of anxious behaviour are skilfully managed so as not to escalate.
- School data show that there is a declining trend in the number of behavioural incidents. This is due in large part to staff's ability to look for the causes and take remedial action. A recent example is the establishment of a separate base for some pupils with autistic needs who were struggling. The increased provision of sensory and calming activities has had a marked effect, both on the behaviour of those pupils, and on that of others in the school.
- Attendance is very high, despite some pupils having medical needs that require periods of absence. This is in part due to the close partnership staff have established with parents, but also because pupils enjoy their education.
- Pupils make very substantial gains in their personal development. Relationships between adults and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are excellent. Staff are patient and considerate, and possess a deep understanding of which strategies work successfully with individual pupils.
- From their various starting points, all pupils make considerable progress in developing their social skills. Staff place great emphasis on giving pupils opportunities to work in groups. Pupils develop an awareness of their feelings and of each other and learn to listen and take turns. Visual prompts and objects of reference are used skilfully to maintain pupils' attention in these sessions.
- Pupils develop an understanding of 'right' and 'wrong' and the consequences of their actions. Their self-esteem is enhanced when achievements are celebrated in circle time or in assemblies.
- Pupils' awareness of their own and other cultures is promoted very effectively. Pupils learn about Jersey's heritage through trips in the community and participation in events such as 'Jersey Sings' at the Royal Jersey Showground. Festivals of the main religions are celebrated in assemblies and in displays around the school.
- Pupils of all ages learn to take responsibility. For example, when primary age pupils go around the classes each morning and collect the numbers for dinners, or when secondary age pupils join the school council and are involved in raising funds for playground equipment.
- Ensuring a very high standard of pupil welfare is at the heart of the school's work. Pupils with profound and multiple needs are supported by appropriate procedures, which ensure their dignity when providing intimate care. Staff have a good understanding of their medical needs and work closely with health professionals. These pupils demonstrate their satisfaction through the use of assistive technology and by responding to the pictures and symbols that show different feelings.

- Information to help pupils understand how to keep safe is adapted well to their particular needs. Older pupils are taught ways of keeping safe in the community, supported by trips out and by the independent travel programme. For more literate pupils, there is an excellent document to help children keep safe, containing images and simple text.
- Pupils communicate that they feel safe and observations in lessons and around the school confirm this. The views of parents, as expressed in the recent questionnaires and in meetings during the review, are also extremely positive about the standard of care provided by the school.

Effectiveness of teaching

- Teachers and teaching assistants are ambitious for pupils to achieve their best. They form a strong team and have benefitted from a high level of training.
- Teachers work closely with therapists to set learning targets. Teachers and teaching assistants use pictures, switches, touch pads, symbols and signing effectively to help pupils communicate, including those pupils who speak English as an additional language.
- Teaching assistants offer an extremely high quality of support to pupils, promoting pupils' independence wherever possible and skilfully guiding pupils who become anxious into suitable choices. This nurtures pupils' resilience and raises their self-esteem.
- Teachers make sure pupils enjoy their learning by providing a broad and interesting range of activities, which is shaped to meet the needs of different age and ability groups. As well as academic learning, this includes music, trips out, and sensory and therapy sessions.
- Many pupils are at the early stages of reading and writing and suitable books are available which are well matched to their age. For example, in the secondary department texts with a teenage content but younger reading age, available in the school library. Some of these texts could be used to support learning more frequently in lessons.
- The school has a communication and a reading policy; however, there is a lack of detail on the agreed approaches to developing pupils' literacy skills. As a consequence, the best ways of developing pupils' reading and writing are not always understood and consistently followed by staff, which can occasionally slow the pace of learning. This area has been identified as a priority in the school's development plan and relevant staff training is being arranged.
- The school provides an attractive and spacious environment for learning. Classrooms are organised effectively to take account of pupils' special educational needs; for example, providing individual work stations for pupils with needs on the autistic spectrum, and using quiet areas to help some anxious pupils reflect and prepare themselves for learning.
- Class displays are generally used well to support learning, to remind pupils of their learning targets and to help them follow the daily routines. In a small number of rooms

there is a lack of pupils' work on display, which could mean an opportunity to celebrate pupils' achievement is lost.

- Staff are flexible in applying assessment linked to pupils' individual needs and pupils have a good mix of independence and academic targets. Work scrutiny confirms pupils are making good progress. However, it is more difficult to check progress over time given the recent changes in assessment. Teachers are currently collecting data to establish a reliable base line from which to measure future progress.

Effectiveness of leadership and management

- Outstanding leadership ensures Mont à l'Abbé School provides pupils and staff with a happy and purposeful learning environment. Leaders are keen to explore new ideas and to build on the school's achievements.
- At the heart of the school's success is an extremely positive team spirit. Staff 'help each other out' and display a 'can do' attitude to teaching pupils who have challenging needs. Staff report they feel very well supported by senior leaders who are highly visible around the school. As one commented about the accessibility of the headteacher, 'Her door is always open.'
- Leaders have introduced several positive changes in the past three years in response to the changing needs of pupils. These include a specialised base for pupils with needs on the autistic spectrum; a revised curriculum to better meet the needs of older pupils; a new approach to managing pupils' behaviour based upon cognitive behavioural therapy, and a more appropriate assessment system.
- The pace of change has been rapid and sustained. In part, success is due to the training and skill of staff, but also to the ability of staff to adapt new approaches to meet the different needs and ages of pupils. This is exemplified by the way in which the new approach to behaviour has been introduced so successfully.
- The curriculum is stimulating and varied and includes an extensive range of recognised therapies to support the emotional and physical development of pupils with complex and challenging learning difficulties. These include *Rebound*, *Sherborne*, hydrotherapy and *Touch Trust*. The use of sensory resources is underdeveloped in the outside play areas and the school has plans to rectify this.
- The Jersey Premium funding is used well, for example, to provide extra help with reading, to extend therapy across the school and to obtain bus cards and magazines for older pupils. A creative way of assessing the impact of funding has been developed which includes collecting information on how well pupils are settling in lessons following therapy sessions.
- Children and their families are made very welcome when they come into the early years provision. Staff make a home visit prior to admission and gather detailed information on the complex needs of each child, which helps them settle extremely well.
- Transition for older pupils is planned thoughtfully from age 14 years. Staff work closely with the Jersey careers service and provide increasing opportunities for pupils to experience life in the community.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff benefit from a comprehensive programme of training and policies and procedures are tailored to meet pupils' specific special educational

needs. The school's work is supported by a close working relationship with other agencies, such as medical professionals and social services.

- Staff benefit from an appropriate system of performance management, which involves an evaluation by their line manager linked to their professional development. Additionally, senior leaders visit classes regularly to check on pupils' learning and offer ongoing support to staff. Many of these visits are informal and although beneficial, are not sufficiently focused on pupils' learning or linked to current areas for improvement.
- Leaders know their school well and the school development plan contains suitable areas for improvement. Some initiatives in the plan lack measurable targets linked to expected gains in pupils' learning. Resources are well targeted and have resulted in clear improvements in pupils' learning and behaviour.
- Leaders have established strong links with the local community, always keen to draw on help and to learn from the experiences of other schools.
- Links with parents are very strong. Home-school books help parents know how well their child is progressing on a daily basis. Information about the school's provision is not currently set out in a brochure; however, this information is about to be included in a new website. Parents who speak little or no English are kept informed through the use of an online translation app and by access to the translation services when needed.
- In recent questionnaires, both staff and parents recognise the many strengths of the school and how it is striving to become even better.

Recommendations

The school should take the following actions.

1. Improve the teaching of reading and writing by:
 - Drawing up a policy which sets out how reading and writing are to be taught across the school
 - Including in the policy reference to approaches that might be used with the different ages, abilities and special educational needs of pupils
 - Providing training for staff on the teaching of reading
 - Checking resources are well matched to the age of pupils.
2. Improve teaching and learning by:
 - Gathering more detailed information about pupils' learning in classes
 - Measuring the impact on pupils' learning of initiatives in the school development plan.
3. Improve leadership and management by:
 - Using assessment information to analyse the performance of different groups of pupils.
4. Improve provision for post-16 students by:
 - Working with the Department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills to make long term plans for post-16 provision.

Information about the school

Mont à l'Abbé School provides education for pupils who have a wide range of special educational needs, including moderate, severe and profound learning difficulties, and those with needs on the autistic spectrum. It is the only special school for children with learning difficulties in Jersey and admits children to the nursery from the age of three and provides provision for pupils through to the age of 19 years. Over the past three years, the number of pupils on roll has increased from 87 to 104. Approximately two thirds of pupils are boys. All pupils have a record of need and just under half are entitled to support through the Jersey Premium. About a third speak English as an additional language, almost all of whom are of Portuguese heritage. Virtually all the remainder are of White Jersey heritage.

The school is located on two sites. The site for secondary pupils is co-located with a mainstream secondary school, approximately half a mile from the primary site. A small number of pupils attend part time at their local primary school, or at the co-located secondary school. The school has recently extended its provision by establishing two new classes, including one to meet the needs of pupils with complex needs on the autistic spectrum, and by setting up a base for post-16 students at a local youth centre.

Information about the review

- All of the fourteen classes and the post-16 provision were visited. The work of teachers, teaching assistants and therapists was observed.
- A large sample of pupils' work and teachers' records of pupils' progress were considered.
- Discussions were held with groups of pupils about their work and the way the school ensures their safety and wellbeing.
- Pupils were observed during break times and as they moved around the school.
- A tour was made of the school's sites to check their security and safety.
- Extended discussions were held with school leaders at various levels, teachers, teaching assistants and a group of parents.
- A wide range of documents was considered.
- The review considered the results of surveys of parents and staff issued as part of the review, and also results from questionnaires which had previously been organised by the school.

The review team

The review team consisted of five reviewers and was led by an experienced off-island consultant. The other reviewers included two other experienced off-island consultants, a senior adviser from the Department for Children, Young People, Education and Skills and a serving Jersey deputy headteacher.

Enquiries about this report should be addressed to Director of Standards and Achievement, Children, Young People, Education and Skills, Highlands Campus, PO Box 142, St Saviour, Jersey JE4 8QJ