

# Abbots Hall Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109308
<b>Local Authority</b>	Thurrock
<b>Inspection number</b>	356521
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25–26 November 2010
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Selwyn Ward

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	238
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rita Garner
<b>Headteacher</b>	Nicola Everett
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	8 July 2008
<b>School address</b>	Abbots Drive Stanford-le-Hope, Essex SS17 7BW
<b>Telephone number</b>	01375 673188
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<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@abbotshall.thurrock.sch.uk

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors, who visited 15 lessons taught by eight teachers. Inspectors spoke with staff, parents and carers, representatives of the governing body and groups of pupils. Inspectors looked at samples of pupils' work, the analysis of the tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' and local authority monitoring records, notes of governing body meetings, school development planning and risk assessments. They also analysed the questionnaires received from pupils, staff and from 61 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following.

- How well are boys and girls of different abilities catered for in lessons and through the wider curriculum?
- Are there inconsistencies that give rise to uneven rates of progress and how effective are leaders and the governing body in tackling them and in improving attainment in writing?
- Why have pupil numbers fallen and how have leaders and the governing body managed the changes necessitated by the school's tightening budget?

## Information about the school

This is an average size school. There are more boys than girls, and there are fewer pupils than at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils are White British, with small numbers coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. A very small number of pupils are learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. Of these, most have moderate learning difficulties; some have emotional and behavioural difficulties. An above average percentage of pupils join the school other than at the start of their primary education. The reduction in pupil numbers has given rise to a programme of redundancies since the last inspection, including a reduction in teaching posts. The headteacher was appointed in September 2008, having previously been acting headteacher and, before that, deputy headteacher. Abbots Hall has Healthy Schools status.

The school site is shared with a pre-school and a children's centre. These are both independently managed and are separately inspected.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

This is a good school. It has been through a difficult period since the last inspection. The positive views expressed by parents confirm that the fall in pupil numbers is due to the falling birth rate in the locality and not the result of parental dissatisfaction. On the contrary, many parents and carers wrote to praise this school and the education it provides for their children. They especially value the way in which the school looks after their children and the stimulating curriculum that motivates pupils to want to try hard, learn and do well. School self-evaluation is broadly accurate. It is to the credit of the headteacher and school leaders that Abbots Hall has been able to secure significant improvements in provision and in outcomes for pupils despite the severe challenge of having to manage reductions in staffing, including the loss of teaching posts. The difficulties have, nonetheless, taken a toll. Although most of the issues for development from the last inspection have been tackled successfully, some remain. Together with the continuing challenge of further planned staffing cuts, this limits as satisfactory the school's capacity for improvement.

Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage although, as at the time of the last inspection, they are overly directed in the mornings and have too few opportunities to learn through play. Progress is now satisfactory and accelerating in Key Stage 1. This is an improvement on previous years, when progress in Years 1 and 2 has been comparatively slow. Pupils' attainment in Year 6 is average but this represents good achievement in relation to the same pupils' Key Stage 1 test scores. The school has had greatest success in raising standards in mathematics and science, both of which were above average in assessments at the end of the 2010 academic year. It is English, and particularly writing, that still lags behind. Leaders have correctly identified that it is often boys who do less well in writing, so they have focused initiatives on providing more stimuli for boys through the opportunities to hone their writing skills on topics such as World War II. These are slowly narrowing the gender gap.

Because the curriculum gives them interesting and exciting things to do, boys and girls are increasingly eager learners. Behaviour is consistently good, even among those who have previously struggled to control their behaviour. This is reflected in the sharp drop in the number of exclusions. Significantly, it also shows in pupils' attentiveness in lessons and the way in which they listen carefully and appreciatively to the teachers and to each other. Teaching is satisfactory rather than better, however, because teachers do not capitalise enough on pupils' enthusiasm. Teachers' expectations are not high enough, especially in English, so lessons do not always move pupils' learning on at a fast enough pace. In some classes, an overreliance on worksheets limits opportunities for writing, especially when these are similar for pupils' often widely different capabilities. Even when teachers adapt activities to pupils' different abilities, pupils are still all given the same 'success criteria' for the lesson. For more able pupils, these lack challenge when they encompass work that

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these pupils show they have already mastered. Marking varies in quality. There is some high quality marking that sets out for pupils the next steps they need to take to move their learning on. This is especially the case in literacy and is helping to raise attainment in writing. However, opportunities are missed to build on this success by consistently reinforcing literacy skills through marking in other subjects. Too often, spelling and punctuation errors in subjects such as science go uncorrected. The school has plans to involve pupils more in checking and assessing their own and each other's work, but this remains at an early stage of development. Pupils have helpful targets in their books to show them what they need to do to improve, but they do not all refer to them when they are writing because this usually involves having to flick back through their books to find them.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the summer term 2011, raise the proportion of good teaching, especially in English, through:
  - ensuring that all teachers maintain high expectations of what the pupils can do and set work that stretches those of all abilities
  - setting 'success criteria' in lessons that are tailored to pupils' different capabilities and learning needs
  - reducing the reliance on worksheets so that pupils have more opportunities to record written work in their own way.
- By the end of the spring term 2011, ensure that pupils all have clear guidance on how to improve their work, and especially their writing, by:
  - routinely expecting pupils to check and correct their own and each other's work
  - being rigorous in correcting spelling and punctuation errors when marking work in all subjects
  - enabling pupils to readily refer to their individual targets while writing.
- By the end of the spring term 2011, provide more opportunities in the Early Years Foundation Stage for children to learn through play.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**2**

Pupils' positive attitudes to learning contribute strongly to the progress they make over their time at the school. The average attainment in both key stages is an improvement on the picture at the time of the last inspection, with incidence of underachievement now eliminated. Uneven progress in the past has meant that pupils in Key Stage 1 have not always built sufficiently on the start they get off to in the Reception Year. In both key stages, it is principally boys' attainment in writing that has failed to match the above average attainment in mathematics. Pupils' current work shows that this gender gap in writing is narrowing. Boys have taken an increased interest in writing as a result of successful initiatives in the curriculum to make writing relevant and fun. Year 5 pupils working on instructional texts, for example, were enthused by the prospect of these forming the basis of board games they were devising on the voyages of Sir Francis Drake as part of the topic on The Tudors. The school is careful to ensure that girls also continue

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to be interested and involved so that the narrowing of the gender gap is not at their expense. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and those learning English as an additional language, benefit from well tailored support that helps them to make progress that is at least as good as the others in their classes. For some of these pupils with additional learning needs, progress is exceptional. Those who join the school partway through Key Stage 2 are also helped to achieve as well as their peers.

Pupils get on well together. They treat each other with kindness and respect, and they grow in confidence and self-esteem, reflecting their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They enjoy accepting responsibilities within the school, including as trained peer mentors and school councillors, and they take a keen interest in the wider community, for example in choosing charities to support through fundraising. Because the arrangements for their welfare are thorough, pupils feel very safe at school. They also have a good understanding of the need for a healthy diet and regular exercise, reflected in Abbots Hall's award of Healthy Schools status. Many pupils keenly take part in extra-curricular sports activities in addition to the timetabled physical education lessons. Though still average, attendance is improving because pupils and their families respond positively to the initiatives taken by the school to discourage avoidable absence. Pupils' average attendance and their attainment in key literacy skills prepare them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	3
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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## How effective is the provision?

The imaginative links developed between different subjects has stimulated the interest of both boys and girls and contributes to their good progress. Pupils work with concentration and effort because activities, including writing, are made purposeful. Year 6 pupils presented with pride all the things they had learnt about World War II in their class assembly for the rest of the school and their parents and carers. Their research, including interviews with great grandparents and their thoughtful diary-style accounts of life as an evacuee, showed how the topic had fired their imagination. Their work incorporated various other subjects including design technology, information and communication technology and even dance, as illustrated by pupils' lively jitterbug.

Teachers manage their classes well so that pupils follow orderly routines, listen well and settle to work without fuss. The systems for keeping track of each pupil's progress are much improved since the last inspection. As a result, teachers know well how each pupil is doing. They do not always make enough use of this assessment information, however, to tailor work to each pupil's learning needs. This is particularly evident in lessons where worksheets are used. Whereas these often provide a helpful scaffold from which lower attaining pupils can build their written work, they sometimes constrain the writing of more able pupils. Leaders' own monitoring identifies that teachers do not always match work to pupils' different capabilities even when they plan with that intention. It also shows that more able pupils sometimes just get more work rather than increased challenge.

Among the major contributing factors to pupils' feeling of confidence and security, and to their good achievement, are the school's good welfare arrangements and the support for pupils who join the school partway through their primary education or who need extra help with their learning. Pupils are helped to settle in when they join the school, and there is sensitively targeted support for children who find themselves in vulnerable circumstances. The school's efforts to improve attendance have yielded positive results, with pupils all eager to win custody of the giant soft toy dogs that go each week to the classes with the best attendance. At least 30 children attend the breakfast club run by the school each day, which helps working families and has also boosted punctuality.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The difficulties posed by the necessity for staff reductions have added to the challenges faced by school leaders and the governing body. Despite their success in securing some key improvements, including an acceleration of pupils' progress, school leaders have

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themselves identified that the difficulties flowing from the fall in pupil numbers have been a brake on the school's capacity for further development. The headteacher and deputy headteacher carefully monitor provision, including through visiting lessons, and the feedback they have given staff has helped to raise the quality of teaching as well as other aspects of provision. Other leadership staff, however, have been less involved in monitoring. There are plans for more lesson observations to be undertaken by other members of the leadership team, but these have yet to be implemented.

The governing body is supportive. It ensures that safeguarding arrangements are thorough, so that, for example, the school's record of checks on the suitability of adults working with children goes beyond the basic statutory requirements. The governing body has not, however, met its duty to evaluate the school's contribution to community cohesion. Nevertheless, the school encourages pupils to take a growing interest in the wider world as well as their local community, which has a positive impact on their cultural development and contribution to the community. Equal opportunities are promoted well. This is evident in the harmonious relationships throughout the school, as well as in the way in which the boys are rapidly catching up with the girls.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

Children join the Reception Year with skills that are generally lower than those expected for their ages. The strong focus on developing children's social skills means that children settle quickly into well-established routines. They play co-operatively together and behave and listen well. Relationships with staff are friendly, and children show enjoyment and a pride in what they do. Staff plan topics to interest and engage the children but learning is overly regimented in the morning sessions, inhibiting opportunities for pupils to learn through play. Nevertheless, children achieve well over their time in the Early Years

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Foundation Stage to attain average standards by the end of the Reception Year. This is because the provision is well run, with detailed records kept of each child's progress. Resources, both inside and in the busy outside area, are stimulating for the children and contribute to their enjoyment of school, especially when they have the chance to choose activities for themselves. Staff are vigilant in looking out for pupils' welfare. Although children were allowed to go outside during a cold snap, staff were careful to ensure that all were warmly wrapped in their coats, even when that meant demanding jackets be worn on top of or in some cases beneath the fairy and dinosaur dressing-up outfits that the children had donned.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

## Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers voice favourable views about every aspect of the school. They are especially pleased at the care taken of their children and at how much their children enjoy school. They also express appreciation of the way that the curriculum is made 'interesting and stimulating using current and modern ideas and resources'. A small number ask for more information about upcoming topics so that they can better support their child's learning. Inspectors endorse the positive views expressed by parents and carers. Inspectors found that the school has developed a very constructive partnership with parents and carers, but agree that it would strengthen this still further if families all felt fully informed about the topics and themes due to be studied in the term ahead.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abbots Hall Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 61 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 238 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	37	61	24	39	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	40	66	20	33	1	2	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	37	61	24	39	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	29	48	31	51	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	38	62	23	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	29	48	31	51	1	2	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	54	28	46	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	27	44	33	54	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	30	49	30	49	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	41	33	54	2	3	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	25	41	32	52	2	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	29	48	31	51	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	56	27	44	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
Type of school	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li> <li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li> <li>■ The quality of teaching.</li> <li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li> <li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li> </ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



29 November 2010

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Abbots Hall Primary School, Stanford-le-Hope, SS17 7BW**

Thank you for being so helpful and friendly when we came to visit your school. Abbots Hall is a good school where you achieve well. The children in the Reception Year (Purple class) make good progress, but we have asked the school to give them more opportunities to learn through play. Throughout the school, you do better in mathematics than in English, but we could see that your writing is improving as a result of the interesting things you get to write about when you are learning new topics. I was impressed with the good job done by the school journalists who put together Abbots Express. I enjoyed reading my copy of the December issue, hot off the presses. I was able to solve the sudoku but the Christmas word search was quite a challenge.

You behave and get on well, and you do well because you work hard and listen carefully to your teachers and to each other. You feel happy and safe at school because staff take good care of you. Much has been improved at Abbots Hall, but there are some things that could be better. We have suggested some practical ways in which teachers could stretch you more in lessons. You can help by telling them whenever you find that the work you are given is too easy. We saw lots of examples of marking that gives you good guidance on how to improve your work, but we have asked teachers to be as vigilant in checking spellings and punctuation in other subjects as they are in literacy. We would also like to see all of you take time to check your own and each other's work to help improve the accuracy of your writing and to spot any careless errors. It was good to see that you all have targets to aim for, but you do not all refer to these enough when you are writing, so we have suggested that staff look out for other ways of making sure that you have these in front of you when you are working.

Thank you again for welcoming us to your school, and our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Selwyn Ward

Lead inspector

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