

Abington Vale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121923
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	359119
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2011
Reporting inspector	Lindsay Hall

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Adrian White
Headteacher	Mark Currell
Date of previous school inspection	18 March 2009
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 12 lessons taught by eight teachers. They held meetings with the headteacher, governors and staff, talked with pupils, parents and carers, and looked at the school's planning and assessment data. They observed the school's work and looked at the school's documentation, including minutes of meetings of the governing body, improvement planning documents and those relating to safeguarding and children's welfare. Inspectors scrutinised 68 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, and those returned by staff and pupils.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effective are the strategies used to raise attainment in mathematics in Years 3 and 4, especially for higher-attaining pupils, and in writing by Year 6?
- How effectively is pupils' progress monitored by leaders at all levels, and how well is the information used to set challenging targets for pupils of all abilities?
- How successfully does the school promote community cohesion through national and international links?
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, how effectively does the provision for outdoor learning meet children's learning needs?

Information about the school

The school is average in size for a primary school. The majority of pupils are of White British heritage but a growing number come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of these who speak English as an additional language is broadly average, as is the proportion of children identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. The school has experienced significant staff changes over the past year affecting half of the teaching staff. An increase in demand for school places in the area has meant an additional Reception class has been provided, and this provision will continue for the next year. The school has a number of awards, including the Activemark, and has achieved Enhanced Healthy Schools status.

Privately-run child care is provided on the same site in a breakfast club and after school club. These are inspected and reported on separately.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Pupils make excellent progress in both their academic and personal development in this outstanding school. The headteacher, two deputy head teachers and the governing body provide excellent leadership and management. They constantly communicate a strong vision for excellence and work effectively as a team driving the pace of improvement. The use of accurate self-evaluation, based on sharply focused monitoring, has led to rapid improvement since the school's previous inspection. All the previous issues, including developing pupils' cultural awareness globally, have been tackled with considerable success. The strength of leadership and governance, coupled with the determination of all staff to meet the needs of every pupil, ensures that the school has an excellent capacity to continue improving.

Children enter Reception classes with skills that are typical for their age and make good progress overall because of the consistently good quality of teaching and effective learning, both indoors and outside, in the much improved outdoor area. Their progress in literacy and numeracy is outstanding, because there is a strong emphasis on promoting literacy and numeracy skills. This emphasis continues throughout the school and, as a result, pupils make excellent progress in both English and mathematics. Their attainment is high in national tests at the end of Year 2 and Year 6. A scrutiny of pupils' work, school data and results of national tests in 2011 confirmed the high standards in Key Stages 1 and 2 in all subjects and the significant improvement this year in mathematics. Boys and girls achieve equally well and those from minority ethnic backgrounds make particularly fast progress. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is outstanding, although a very small number with significant learning difficulties in mathematics make only good progress. The effective curriculum has many strengths and ensures pupils enjoy school and make excellent progress. However, there are too few computers for pupils to use in the classrooms to support or enhance their studies in all subjects.

Teaching and learning are outstanding. Teachers make learning relevant and fun. Their lesson planning is a strength, ensuring that individual needs are effectively met. Teachers make excellent use of assessment to determine the next steps for learning and frequently discuss how pupils can make improvements. Marking is regular and supportive, but does not always provide written guidance to help pupils improve their work. The outstanding level of care, guidance and support in the school is reflected in pupils' positive relationships with one another and their good behaviour. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers say their children enjoy school and feel safe and inspectors share these views. One parent reflected the views of many when she said, 'The teaching staff are fantastic. It is a wonderful school.'

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The school is a cohesive community where everyone is valued and pupils are given every opportunity to discover and develop their talents. The school's outstanding partnership with parents and carers makes certain that they are kept well informed and fully involved in their children's learning. The school is highly regarded by parents and has a growing reputation in its local community. Other excellent partnerships with local schools and specialist agencies have a significant impact on pupils' education. These provide additional expertise to support pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable and a wide range of sporting activities for all to enjoy.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure marking always informs pupils how to improve their work.
- Improve resources for modern technology to enable pupils to use it in the classroom to support and enhance their learning across the curriculum.
- Increase the levels of challenge provided by independent activities in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Achievement is outstanding because in the vast majority of lessons, learning is carefully matched to the ability of pupils. They listen attentively and are keen to learn. They enjoy excellent relationships with the caring and supportive staff and this gives them the confidence to share ideas in lessons and to evaluate their own work. Pupils often work harmoniously in pairs or small groups. Observations and a scrutiny of pupils' work through the year show that pupils make good and often excellent progress. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported in their learning through timely interventions that effectively meet their learning needs. They make outstanding progress in English although, despite some creative input and external support, a very small number with individual education plans for mathematics make only good progress. All pupils come to school regularly and punctually and there are no incidents of persistent absence. Attendance is above average.

Attainment by the end of Year 6 is high and progress is excellent throughout Key Stages 1 and 2. The high level of attainment in English and mathematics is evident in the school's national test results and a scrutiny of pupils' completed work. These show that test results in English have been high for the last three years and mathematics for the last two years. Test results for mathematics in 2011 show a considerable improvement over the previous year with substantially more pupils attaining above-average standards. Senior managers have employed a range of effective strategies to raise attainment in mathematics, such as sharing teacher expertise within the school and calling upon local authority support to help develop mathematical problem-solving activities. Pupils are keen to access the school's secure 'virtual learning environment' at home, applying their knowledge and reinforcing their learning by competing in mathematical challenges.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and take full advantage of the many opportunities offered to them. Their contribution to school life is outstanding. A Year 5 and a Year 6 team won the Northampton town cricket competition during the inspection. Pupils have also composed an award-winning song. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously and its members are proud of the improvements they have made to the quality of

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playtimes with new equipment. Pupils are invariably helpful, polite and well mannered. They have made an effective contribution to the school's anti-bullying policy and to the school rules which encourage their good behaviour. Pupils are adamant that there is no bullying at their school. They have an excellent understanding of how to live healthy lives by eating well and being active. Older pupils help to run the busy healthy tuck shop which provides a range of high quality healthy snacks such as fresh fruit kebabs. Spiritual, moral and social development is a particular strength. Pupils have a secure knowledge of their own culture and are provided with very good opportunities to gain first-hand experience of the wide mix of cultures in modern Britain and abroad through links with other schools, including one in Ghana. As a result of their high attainment and excellent personal development, pupils are prepared extremely well for the next stages of their education and future life.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

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

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

How effective is the provision?

Excellent teaching and learning is at the heart of the improved achievement since the last inspection. Teachers manage classes well and have positive relationships with pupils. At the start of lessons teachers set out their expectations through clear success criteria and pupils routinely assess their own work. In lessons where teaching and learning were most effective, pupils were highly motivated following a brisk, purposeful introduction and clear instructions on how to tackle interesting work which was tailored to their needs. Pupils

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understand their targets well and work on these diligently in most lessons. Effective use is made of interactive whiteboards to engage pupils and accelerate learning. Learning support assistants support pupils' learning well, particularly those pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Very occasionally, some teachers do not challenge higher-attaining pupils sufficiently and their concentration lapses.

The curriculum is good. Staff successfully plan a creative skills-based curriculum, routinely adding the five areas of sport, drama, art, music and creativity to ensure it is stimulating and enjoyable. Effective links are made between the different subjects and topics are regularly reviewed. The curriculum is enhanced by the many extra-curricular clubs run before and after school, where pupils of different ages enjoy playing and working together in an interesting variety of activities such as Rock School, Street Dancing and creating music using computers. Music is a particular strength. The school choir, led by a music specialist performs to a high standard and has shared their music with elderly members of the community in a local residential home as well as singing in the O2 Arena in London.

The pastoral care of pupils is outstanding and underpins their learning as well as their happiness in school. Good systems are in place to identify any pupils who have problems and the school has built excellent relationships with a broad range of outside agencies to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Advice and support from specialists ensure these pupils have the help and support they need to do well. There are excellent transition arrangements, enabling pupils to move both into and from the school with confidence. Absence is monitored well and ensures attendance is successfully maintained at above average for a primary school.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school has improved significantly since the previous inspection. This stems from the combined high level of skills of the headteacher and deputy headteachers, and the full involvement of the governing body. Their collective expertise has ensured improvement has continued during a period of significant staff change. Along with staff, governors have the best interests of every pupil at heart and are constantly challenging staff about ways to improve provision and outcomes. The team approach to developing a good curriculum, for example, has ensured pupils' performance in mathematics is as high as it is in English.

The governing body brings a high degree of professional expertise and governors very effectively challenge and hold the school to account. All aspects of the school's performance are regularly reported to the governing body. As a result, governors are very well informed and have a clear view of the school's strengths and where improvements

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can be made. The school has good arrangements for making sure that the pupils are as safe as possible. Teachers develop and enhance the pupils' knowledge of staying safe, for example, by using the specialist knowledge of visitors such as the Solve-It team and staff from the county Life-Education Bus.

The school promotes community cohesion effectively within the school and its outreach into the community includes environmental projects such as 'school in bloom' and support for charities both in the UK and overseas. Leaders make good use of assemblies, visits and visitors to give children first-hand experience of a range of cultures. Close links have recently been established with a school in Ghana and pupils have raised funds for them.

This is a school where everyone has equally excellent opportunities to succeed and take part in a wide variety of enrichment programmes. The school tackles discrimination very effectively, with no reported incidents in the past three years. Three residential visits each year for pupils in Years 2, 4 and 6 reflect staff commitment to provide every pupil with happy memories of their time in Abington Vale primary school. The excellent partnership with parents and carers is reflected in the parental involvement in supporting pupils' learning. Parents often help in the classrooms and are fully supportive of homework. Their close partnership is instrumental in ensuring pupils make excellent progress. Those who responded to the questionnaires were extremely positively about their children's experiences at this school.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	1
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good induction procedures ensure that children settle quickly and that parents and carers are fully involved in their children's learning. Children enter the Reception class with skills and knowledge expected for their age. Teaching and learning proceed at a good pace so that children develop well personally and academically. They enjoy learning in the secure

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and welcoming environment and, by the end of the Reception year, children's skills are at least average in all areas of learning, with the majority of children attaining above average standards.

Staff place considerable importance on the development of literacy, and children's reading and writing skills develop well. They learn in daily sessions to identify letters and sounds and can form letters correctly, make words and form simple sentences. Independent activities, such as making airline tickets, also help to develop their writing skills. The classrooms are bright and stimulating and the outside area has been much improved since the previous inspection. There is a good free flow between the inside and outside areas. Children play and work well together and choose confidently from the wide range of activities provided. In one effective example of role play in a mechanics workshop, children were industriously "mending" bikes with spanners and screwdrivers, whilst developing language and communication skills. Teachers' expectations for some independent activities are not specific or challenging enough and, although children enjoy what they are doing, there are missed opportunities to develop children's learning further.

The staff make regular effective assessments of children's work and compile detailed learning records. Good leadership and management ensure children's welfare during their time in the Reception year, and good emphasis is placed on their safety. Parents and carers have many opportunities to learn about and help with their children's learning, and communication with them is very good. Despite staffing changes during the current school year, hard work by all the adults has maintained good provision and outcomes, and the setting continues to be well managed.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

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

Views of parents and carers

Parents and carers responded extremely positively to almost all of the questions in the questionnaire. They are particularly appreciative of the way all staff know and care for their children. A typical comment was, 'This school goes above and beyond the call of duty.' Inspectors endorse parents' and carers' positive views. A very small minority had concerns about how well behaviour is managed and how much the school takes account of their suggestions and concerns. Inspectors judged behaviour to be managed well in lessons and around school. The partnership with parents and carers is outstanding because their involvement is having a significant impact on pupils' learning and the school regularly seeks and takes account of their views.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abington Vale 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 68 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 235 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	52	76	15	22	1	1	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	48	71	19	28	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	33	49	34	50	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	34	50	33	49	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	40	59	27	40	1	1	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	39	57	28	41	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	42	62	26	38	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)	32	47	26	38	3	4	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	40	59	27	40	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	36	53	27	40	4	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	30	44	32	47	5	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	45	66	21	31	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	45	66	23	34	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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



27 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abington Vale Primary School, Northampton NN3 3NQ

My colleagues and I really enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you very much for the warm welcome you gave us. We could see from the start of the inspection how much you enjoy school and how proud of it you are. Your pride is fully justified. We judged your school as an outstanding one because of your hard work and the excellent progress you make from where you started. We were delighted to see that your attainment is now as high in mathematics as it is in English. In the Reception classes, despite some new teachers starting recently, you all try your best and make a good start in school.

Your headteacher and other staff work extremely hard to make sure teaching and the care and support you receive each day is second to none. Seeing you at work in lessons and observing you at lunchtime and playtimes showed us how safe you feel and how much you enjoy school. Your good behaviour and attendance contribute to the excellent progress you are making. You have an excellent understanding of why it is important to eat healthily and take regular exercise. You clearly do well in your music and sporting activities, judging from your recent success in cricket and the lovely singing we heard in school. It is good to see your parents are just as appreciative of all the school is doing for you. Supporting you at home as well as they do is helping to push up standards, especially in mathematics.

There are some ways that your school could be even better and we have asked your governors, headteacher and the other staff to:

- make sure that when teachers mark your work, they tell you how to improve it
- provide more computers for you to use when you are working in lessons
- give children more challenging independent activities in Reception classes.

You can continue to play your part in improving your school even more by keeping up your good attendance, continuing to work hard and to be as friendly to one another as you are at present.

Yours sincerely

Lindsay Hall

Lead inspector

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