

Abacus Primary School

Tresco Way, The Wick, Wickford, SS12 9GJ

Inspection dates

27–28 June 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children make good progress as they move through the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Skills in linking letters and sounds have improved significantly.
- Attainment and the rate at which pupils learn are improving in English and mathematics in all key stages.
- Teachers reinforce reading, writing and mathematical skills in other subjects.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs are supported well and make good progress because their needs are accurately identified.
- Teaching is consistently good and a small amount is outstanding.
- Pupils are well-behaved at all times and feel safe in school. Parents and carers agree.
- Attendance is above average. Pupils are punctual. There have been no exclusions.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school.
- Older pupils are expected to help younger pupils. Arrangements for transfer into and out of the school are very effective.
- The headteacher is working effectively to improve the school and especially teaching and attainment. She is well supported by her leadership team, subject leaders, staff and governors.
- Governors visit the school regularly to assess its needs. They are supportive but also offer a good level of challenge.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet consistently outstanding.
- Opportunities for teachers and support staff to share their strongest classroom skills are still developing.
- In a very few lessons, pupils have less time to work by themselves and are not always asked to explain their thinking and conclusions to the class.
- Marking is regular and careful. However, reference to pupils' subject targets or what they need to do to improve their work is inconsistent and pupils are not always expected to respond to the written feedback teachers give them.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 20 lessons taught by 10 teachers. The team also observed a range of small group work to support pupils who need extra help with their learning. They carried out five joint observations with the headteacher.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, governors, staff, a representative of the local authority and two groups of pupils. Inspectors spoke to parents and carers in the playground and at the school's sports day.
- Inspectors took account of the 64 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and the 14 staff questionnaire responses in planning and carrying out the inspection.
- The inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at the school's improvement plan, information on pupils' attainment and progress, the school's view of its own performance and procedures for monitoring attainment, progress and the quality of teaching as well as a range of school policies and arrangements to ensure the safeguarding of pupils.
- Pupils' books were examined in lessons and in a separate work sample conducted jointly with senior staff.
- Inspectors listened to pupils read.

Inspection team

Michael Sutherland-Harper, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Lynne Thorogood	Additional Inspector
Philip Scull	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is slightly larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The very large majority of the pupils are White British.
- The proportion of pupils supported through school action is below the national average. The proportions of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs are below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium is below the national average. This is additional government funding for children known to be eligible for free school meals, children looked after by the local authority and children with a parent in the armed forces.
- No children are currently receiving alternative educational provision elsewhere.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the quality of teaching to outstanding by:
 - ensuring that all marking consistently refers to pupils' learning targets and what they need to do next to improve and that all pupils know and understand their targets
 - making sure that all pupils read and respond to the feedback provided by teachers on how well they are doing
 - increasing opportunities for teachers and support staff to improve their skills by observing and sharing best practice
 - increasing the emphasis on pupils working by themselves and providing more opportunities for them to explain their thinking and conclusions.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with skills and knowledge below those typically expected for their age. Children's ability in mathematics is slightly better than in English and their speech and language skills are the weakest. Extra help to improve these skills has resulted in increased participation rates for children in classes. The school also works closely with families to ensure children are well supported from the time they arrive at the school.
- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Careful planning, consistent teaching approaches, reading workshops and opportunities for families to observe learning mean that all adults have an increasingly consistent approach to improving the children's attainment. Good use is made of both the indoor and outdoor areas with a careful balance of activities led by adults and those chosen by the children themselves.
- Pupils' understanding of the sounds that letters make (phonics) has improved with the introduction of smaller groups from the Foundation Stage onwards so that the success rate in the Year 1 screening check has more than doubled since last year. The school re-tests pupils who have not succeeded at the first attempt and sets challenging targets for pupils in the run-up to the national check.
- Pupils make good progress as they advance through Key Stages 1 and 2. Standards in English have risen significantly this year because of a whole school focus on improving writing skills. In Key Stage 1, for example, pupils are set for phonics to help with speaking, reading and writing. Pupils have been successfully encouraged to write at length by teachers using an increased range of resources and themes and this work is also continued at Key Stage 2. Opportunities for pupils to express opinions in writing and speaking are growing.
- Pupils achieved results above national averages last year at the end of Key Stage 2. Setting for mathematics has increased rates of progress in that subject so that they are now above those expected nationally at the end of both Key Stage 1 and 2. Effective support is offered in all subjects and adjusted whenever necessary.
- The current Year 6 pupils are expected to improve on their predicted targets in mathematics and to make better than expected progress in English, although a weaker cohort than the previous year. Current school information shows an upward trend in standards and progress at Key Stage 2. Opportunities are provided to enable pupils to enter successfully for the highest levels in national tests.
- Reading writing and mathematics are promoted well in all subjects. For example, work in a history lesson on the Tudors allowed pupils to develop their ideas about another period while giving them the opportunity to write at length. A science lesson on sound waves involved pupils in mathematical calculations.
- Pupils improve their mathematical skills through the use of support programmes involving electronic technologies and are at ease with laptops.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar, and sometimes better, progress than their peers because of well-targeted support and early identification of needs in classes based on detailed notes on each pupil. Learning support assistants are sensitive to individual needs. Good links with outside agencies reinforce this support.

- Pupil premium funding is carefully allocated to ensure that eligible pupils make good progress, for example, through the increased use of learning support assistants and reinforcement of basic English and mathematical skills in smaller groups for pupils who may be struggling. There is no gap between the performance of this group and other pupils in English and mathematics. Their attainment is sometimes better because individual education plans are carefully drawn up and experienced staff deliver good support in the smaller groups which the funding allows.
- Pupils acquire good reading skills as they progress through the school. They make regular use of the library, correct themselves well when reading and show good skills in matching sounds and letters. Home-school reading records ensure that parents are fully involved with helping their children improve their reading.
- Pupils say that they enjoy school and parents and carers agree.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching in all lessons observed was at least good. In a small number it is outstanding. The strongest teaching is characterised by excellent subject knowledge, careful assessment and analysis of pupils' needs and meticulous planning. In these lessons, pupils progress rapidly in their acquisition of knowledge, understanding and a range of skills.
- The teaching of English and mathematics is good, with good provision, both in class and in smaller group activities, for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. A strong focus on writing, through teachers demonstrating skills, encouraging practice and emphasising correct posture, has resulted in high quality work over recent months and rapid improvement. The organisation of ability sets for mathematics, reading and writing has improved provision for these basic skills.
- In a Year 3 and 4 mathematics lesson, the combination of engaging resources, well-defined tasks and prompt support meant that pupils made rapid progress with understanding new concepts.
- The teaching of reading is systematic, well-structured and effective in improving pupils' skills. The links between sounds and letters are well taught throughout the school and so are writing, mathematics and communication skills.
- Teachers have high expectations and set tasks which make sure that pupils are suitably stretched in most classes. In lessons which are less strong, the lesson structure does not always allow sufficient time for all pupils to work by themselves on tasks in order to consolidate their learning or challenge them to present and explain their findings.
- Questioning techniques and feedback during lessons ensure good progress because they enable adults to adapt their teaching accordingly. Opportunities for teachers and support staff to observe their colleagues' strongest classroom skills are growing but are at present inconsistently developed.
- Work is regularly marked and assessed, although not all pupils are aware of their targets for improvement. Where marking is most effective, it provides pupils with clear guidance on what to

do next to improve and they are expected to respond to the feedback. This good practice is not yet fully consistent across all classes. Presentation is generally very neat and homework relevant to, and supportive of, class work is regularly set.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils listen well in lessons, participate in pair and group discussions and respond willingly. They settle to tasks quickly and usually take pride in their work.
- In discussions, pupils say there is little poor behaviour and, where this occurs, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. They understand that a few pupils have difficulty with behaviour and sometimes need help to work with others. The very large majority of the parents and carers who responded to the online survey say that behaviour is good.
- Behaviour around the school, in lessons and outside, is good and was demonstrated in assemblies and on the sports day, held during the inspection. Pupils recruited as play leaders help to ensure that break times are happy and enjoyable events for all. An unexpected fire drill demonstrated how sensible and orderly pupils were in a potential emergency and was positively commented on by the many parents and carers present.
- Pupils understand the nature of bullying, including racist, gender based and cyber-bullying and say it does not happen. They have had lessons on 'being different' and consequently show respect for those with disabilities and individual needs.
- The clear behaviour management policy is understood by everyone. The rewards and sanctions system across the school ensures equal opportunities for all and no discrimination. Behaviour is well managed by all adults. Pupils say they can always turn to an adult in school if worried or upset.
- Pupils feel safe in school. They have had lessons in keeping themselves safe on the roads and on e-safety and understand 'stranger danger'. The school has good arrangements in place to help pupils when they join the school and also when they move to their secondary schools.
- Attendance is above average. No notable difference is evident in the attendance of groups. Pupils are punctual in the mornings and for lessons. There have been no exclusions recently because good support at an early stage avoids this process.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has been highly visible around the school and accessible to parents in her determination to improve attainment and teaching. She has successfully concentrated on developing staff skills and sharing responsibilities among her recently established senior leadership team.
- Senior leaders meet regularly to discuss the quality of teaching and learning based on frequent monitoring against national criteria. Their reviews of assessment procedures and progress rates are now more regular than previously.

- The roles of subject leaders in checking pupils' progress and the quality of teaching have increased. They have a greater and more effective role in assessing what is happening in their subject areas and in following up on any results which may be less than were expected. Checking of subjects is increasingly rigorous. Subject leaders have regular allocated times to discuss and share ideas with each other to ensure a consistency of approach.
 - The school offers a broad, balanced range of subjects which are delivered via topics and influenced by pupils' own choices. For example, pupils' interest in nature and eco-systems is reflected in the work on offer in science. A good range of clubs and activities, including sport, art and music, provide regular opportunities for personal development.
 - Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong. Pupils have a strong sense of justice and get on well with each other and adults. Philosophy for children sessions encourages discussion of moral issues in lessons. Connections with other countries are good. Pupils have regular opportunities to visit artistic events like the ballet. Every pupil learns to play a musical instrument. There are termly visits from local church groups. Arrangements when pupils move into or leave the school are thorough and help with the development of social skills.
 - Safeguarding meets all statutory requirements. Child protection procedures are meticulous.
 - The local authority has light touch links with the school. An advisor is in regular contact and members of the local authority have helped to ensure the current rate of school improvement.
 - Procedures for the management of staff performance have been refined with targets based around school priorities, whilst also ensuring individual staff development. Promotion is carefully reviewed and progression up the pay scales is linked to pupils' attainment and progress. All staff reviews follow on from that of the headteacher who has hers first to set an example.
 - Links with parents and carers are regular and constantly reviewed. Many parents and carers help out at the school, which has a growing range of opportunities for parents to develop their existing skills, for example in cooking and reading, and learn new ones.
 - **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. Governors are clear that they want the governing body to contain a variety of complementary skills, including financial awareness. Governors have been trained to understand what the information about test results shows about the performance of their school relative to others. The chair of governors is in regular contact with the headteacher. He and other governors visit the school frequently to support its work but are also prepared to challenge, as they have done over Key Stage 1 progress and results, which have now improved significantly. Visits to the school allow governors to assess the quality of teaching and ensure that it continues to improve and remove any possible underachievement. Arrangements for ensuring high quality management of teachers' work are well organised and effective. Governors understand and review how the pupil premium funding is spent.
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What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	133312
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	406510

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	284
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stewart Cassidy
Headteacher	Heidi Danniells
Date of previous school inspection	23 June 2011
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