

Abbots Langley School

Parsonage Close, Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire, WD5 0BQ

Inspection dates 8–9 May 2014

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|-------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness | Previous inspection: | Good | 2 |
| | 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.

- Given their starting points when they join the school, in either the Nursery or Reception classes, most pupils make good progress. By the end of Year 6, their attainment is typically above that expected for their age.
- Support for pupils who qualify for additional government funding is enabling them to make increasingly good progress.
- Pupils achieve well because teaching is good.
- The school enables pupils to develop good attitudes to life, school and learning.
- A consistent approach to pupils' personal, as well as their academic, development results in their good behaviour and understanding of how to be and stay safe.
- Good leadership from the headteacher, other leaders and the governing body results from a clear focus on improving even further pupils' progress and the quality of teaching.
- Staff see the pupils' potential to achieve well.
- An atmosphere of mutual respect exists across the school, and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural is promoted well.
- Discussions with parents and those who responded to the *Parent View* survey show that almost all appreciate that their children are happy and safe in school.
- The school is regarded highly by its families who see it as an important part of the local community.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Some teachers are not consistent in the ways they offer pupils guidance through marking.
- Some teaching does not always set consistently high challenge for the more-able pupils in order to help them accelerate fully their progress.
- A few subject leaders do not yet have the full range of skills needed to help senior leaders to improve teaching and pupils' achievement.
- A few teachers are not yet using progress data effectively enough to help plan work in lessons for pupils of different abilities.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed 28 lessons; in total, 18 teachers and their teaching assistants were seen. Five lessons were seen jointly with members of the senior leadership team.
- Daily registration time was observed and inspectors attended assemblies.
- Inspectors looked at examples of pupils' work, and heard a sample of pupils reading from both Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Meetings were held with groups of pupils selected at random by the lead inspector. In addition, many informal opportunities were taken to talk with pupils.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of school documents, including development plans, policies and reports on the school's strengths and aspects for development, monitoring records and reports, safeguarding and curriculum materials, information provided for families, and governing body documents. The school's data, including records tracking pupils' progress, were reviewed.
- Discussions and conversations were held with the headteacher and deputy headteacher, the assistant headteachers, the special educational needs coordinator, Early Years Foundation Stage staff, subject leaders, class teachers, teaching assistants, administrative staff, members of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- The 120 responses to the online questionnaire, *Parent View*, were taken into consideration. The 51 responses to the questionnaire for school staff were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Michael Miller, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Caroline Dawes

Additional Inspector

Lynda Townsend

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This school is much larger than the average-sized primary school.
- The headteacher took up his post in September 2012, five terms ago.
- Most of the pupils come from White British backgrounds; almost all speak English as their first language. The very few children for whom English is an additional language are currently in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- A few pupils come from other heritage backgrounds, mainly from Asian or Asian British heritage, and a very few from Mixed, or Black and Black British backgrounds.
- Up to half of those children using the school's Nursery may transfer to other schools for their Reception Year; an equal number then join the Reception class from other early years providers.
- Most of the children starting the Reception year then continue their education at the school until they leave at the end of Year 6.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives the pupil premium (additional government funding for particular groups, including, in this school, those known to be eligible for free school meals) is below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs supported at school action is well below average. The proportion supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also well below average.
- The school offers childcare provision for its pupils through the privately run 'The Abbots Langley After School Club' (EY472334). This is inspected separately by Ofsted. The governing body runs a Breakfast Club each day during term time for its own pupils.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils by the end of Year 6.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching from good to outstanding, and enhance pupils' progress further, by:
 - ensuring teachers take a more consistent approach to their regular marking of pupils' work, including written feedback to pupils, not only to challenge them to improve their progress but also to help pupils understand and remember better what to improve
 - providing additional challenge for the school's most-able pupils through the ways they are set increasingly testing tasks and activities in lessons to accelerate their progress.
- Build on the school's work to close further any gaps between different groups of learners by:
 - ensuring all teachers use the helpful information now being made available about pupils' attainment and progress
 - setting work that is matched even more closely to pupils' different abilities and stages of development.
- Enhance the checking of teaching and pupils' progress, by helping the school's less experienced subject leaders to develop fully the skills they need to support senior leaders in checking the school's work and raising pupils' achievement further.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Most children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage, in either the Nursery or Reception years, with levels of skills, knowledge and understanding which are broadly as expected for their age. Good teaching and provision in the Nursery and Reception classes enable children to make secure progress, including the very few who join the school with English as an additional language. Consequently, by the time children leave the Reception classes, the large majority reach a good level of development and are ready for the challenges of Key Stage 1.
- During Key Stages 1 and 2, pupils progress well. By the time they leave, at the end of Year 6, standards are typically above average. In the Year 2 national tests and assessments, pupils' performance has been significantly better than average overall for the past five years, with pupils typically around a term ahead of their peers nationally.
- In the Year 1 phonics screening check in 2013, the proportion of pupils gaining the expected standard was average; this was twice that achieved in 2012. During the current academic year the proportion on-track to succeed in reaching and exceeding the expected mark in the check has increased further. This results from the increasingly successful teaching of letters and sounds throughout the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. Pupils develop as confident readers.
- In the Year 6 national tests and assessments, pupils performed well up to 2012, with levels of attainment which were just under two terms ahead of other Year 6 pupils nationally. However, in summer 2013 this fell to the national average. This was mainly due to pupils' weaker performance in writing, and particularly for boys.
- Improving pupils' writing skills remains an ongoing focus for the school. This is not only enhancing well pupils' achievement but also reflects the school's strong commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for all pupils. In one lesson, there was a distinct cry of 'Yes!' when the teacher announced that they were to do some writing work. Displays of work testify to the pride and enthusiasm pupils take in their writing. They are writing both passionately and creatively.
- Most pupils across the school are making at least expected, and often better, progress in reading, writing and mathematics. For example, the proportion making better than expected progress by Year 6 is above average. The latest assessments for Year 6 show that pupils have already made around a year's better progress than expected since Year 2.
- Ensuring disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs made improved progress was an area for improvement at the last inspection. The school has worked hard since then to improve its provision; this has made a difference. Good use is being made of a wide range of additional support which is supporting well the various groups of pupils across the school. Current Year 6 pupils, with difficulties or disabilities, have made just under two terms' better progress than expected nationally; their progress compares well with that of their classmates.
- Those pupils eligible for additional government funding are making increasingly good progress; this has accelerated well this academic year. School data show that such pupils in the current Year 6 have made around a term's better progress than their classmates. The gap in performance between pupils receiving the pupil premium, which improved to around a term overall in 2013, has closed further so far this year. However, there is still work to do to ensure any gaps between different groups of learners are closed securely in the longer term, particularly as the gap in 2013 was a couple of terms in reading, and a term behind in English grammar, punctuation and spelling. However, the gap was less than half a term in mathematics, and there

was no gap in attainment in writing

- Pupils enjoy the fact that work in almost all lessons now has specific 'challenges' to which they are expected to rise. However, ensuring additional challenge for the school's most-able pupils is not yet always a consistent enough process. This is an area for further development, particularly as the proportion of the school's most-able pupils making better than expected progress was only average in the 2013 tests and assessments.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding; this helps lay the foundations for lifelong learning right from the Early Years Foundation Stage. Teachers are clear about what they want pupils to learn. Teachers and their assistants alike develop very positive working relationships with the pupils. This underpins effectively the pupils' good attitudes to learning.
- Teachers and their teaching assistants work well together. Most are good at asking questions, both to check pupils' understanding and introduce an element of challenge in a lesson. Most pupils show that they are very keen to rise to such challenges. Teachers plan and teach lessons which are interesting and almost always gain the pupils' attention. When listening to a story, pupils want to know what happens next and often make important contributions to that story themselves.
- Teachers provide pupils with good oral feedback on their work. However, while nearly all marking is regular and encouraging, not all written feedback is specific enough as to how the pupils may improve. There are inconsistencies in the ways marking challenges pupils to accelerate their progress or help them to understand and remember better what to improve.
- The headteacher has done much to help teachers appreciate the importance of using the helpful information now being made available to them about pupils' attainment and progress. This is aiding teachers well in setting work that is matched even more closely to pupils' different abilities and stages of development. However, a few teachers are still developing the skills necessary to make full use of the data provided to help them plan lessons to ensure that extra element of challenge which will enable pupils' progress to accelerate from good to outstanding.
- In an outstanding Year 5 lesson, the teacher showed how well the teaching often links so effectively various subjects and pupils' experiences. Building on a recent visit to the British Museum, pupils debated whether it was morally and spiritually right to excavate a pharaoh, or leave the mummy in peace in its afterlife. This linked very effectively aspects of history and archaeology with religious education and philosophy, with some drama. The quality of class and group discussion, and the reflective consideration of the issues, showed high standards.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The foundations for pupils' good attitudes to learning are laid securely from the Early Years Foundation Stage. All staff play their part in helping to create a very positive atmosphere for learning. The ways pupils interact with each other and adults, is good; pupils cooperate well, both at work and at play. They are polite and considerate, and develop well as responsible young citizens who reflect thoughtfully on what they do.
- A strong, underlying emphasis on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development results in their good behaviour and understanding of how to be and stay safe. The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Discussions with pupils show they understand well their

roles and responsibilities within the school to ensure it is a lively and thriving community.

- Pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development both encourages and enables them to reflect on their learning and each other's achievements. The ways pupils celebrate readily their classmates' successes, also reflect their understanding of the school community and the character of their social development.
- Pupils know about the implications of bullying. The school has prepared them well to recognise and deal with different types of bullying and any threats they might meet in the wider world. They say that bullying is rare and show confidence that their teachers would act quickly to put things right. School records support this.
- Pupils appreciate that there are a few who may be 'naughty' at times, or find it more difficult than most to stick to the rules consistently well. However, because behaviour is managed well across the school, pupils are helped to control themselves and not disrupt learning.
- The school continues to work hard to ensure above-average attendance rates are maintained. However, pupils want to come to school regularly because they know there will always be something of interest to do and learn. Pupils also take on responsibility readily.

The leadership and management are good

- Leadership and management are good because leaders, at all levels, do make important differences to pupils' lives and achievement. The school has gained a justifiably good reputation not only because of the ways it promotes pupils' personal and academic achievement, but also because of the quality of teaching.
- Almost all parents responding to the on-line questionnaire, *Parent View*, would recommend the school. All those who wrote to inspectors, or spoke with them personally, praised the work of the headteacher, and the impact he has had on the school. The school's constant drive for improvement is supported well through effective staff teamwork.
- Subject leaders work effectively together and with senior leaders and governors. However, some are still developing the skills necessary to support the headteacher in the monitoring of teaching and the analysis and evaluation of performance data so they can contribute more fully to the management of the school and have an increasing impact on raising achievement.
- A robust system for tracking pupils' progress has been established by the headteacher. This is contributing to the accelerating progress pupils are now making. Teachers understand the relationship between pupils' progress and the ways senior leaders use this measure to check on their effectiveness. Staff are accountable for the success of the pupils in their classes.
- Joint lesson observations with the inspectors show that the senior leadership team has an accurate view of the quality of teaching and learning. The ways in which they analyse learning are effective; discussions with teachers about their lessons are supportive and professional.
- The school has well-established links with its local authority, which have benefited the school very well. This was seen at first hand during the inspection through the ways the school's improvement advisor was on hand to work alongside senior leaders, and the inspectors. Local authority reports on the school have proved accurate with helpful pointers for development.
- Parents praise the 'community spirit' created by the school's leaders, and how this influences

positively their children's love of school and learning. As one parent wrote, 'I just felt compelled to write in saying what an overwhelming feeling of contentment greets me every day as I walk my child into the school.'

- All staff who returned questionnaires agreed that they are proud of the school. They expressed confidence in the head teacher, the changes which are being made, and the successes being won. Discussions with staff show they have a good understanding of what is necessary to move the school from good to being outstanding, and show the commitment to achieve this. As one teacher wrote, 'This is a great school with motivated and happy children.'
- Good use of the new primary school sports funding is enhancing well the various opportunities for pupils to participate and do well in sports and physical education generally across the school. The school has achieved a good balance both in increasing general participation in sport, while nurturing talent and enabling pupils to enjoy competitive sport.
- Inspectors agree with the Chair of the Governing Body when he said, 'The school is not yet at the top of the hill, but it is moving steadily upwards.' The school has good capacity for improvement because it is focused so well on improving pupils' progress and the quality of teaching.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Over the past two years, all members of the governing body have undertaken wide ranging training to help them become increasingly effective in their work, and to give them the skills necessary to both support and challenge the headteacher and other school leaders. Because of this, governors ask probing and appropriate questions of the school. The governing body has a good grasp of data and a good understanding as to how the school is performing in relation to others nationally.
 - Governors are working actively with senior leaders to ensure that the pupil premium funding has an increasing impact on the achievement of eligible pupils, both through additional staff support and various enrichment activities. There is a similar approach to ensuring that any pupils who may be disabled, or have special education needs, also receive a fair deal.
 - The governing body ensures that legal requirements are met, including those for safeguarding. Governors work effectively in partnership with the headteacher to ensure clear guidelines for staff as to how salaries are linked to pupils' progress, teaching quality and national *Teachers' Standards*.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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

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| Unique reference number | 117083 |
| Local authority | Hertfordshire |
| Inspection number | 444172 |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 3–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 503 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | John Messenger |
| Headteacher | Roger Billing |
| Date of previous school inspection | 8 March 2010 |
| Telephone number | 01923 263174 |
| Fax number | 01923 261713 |
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