

Inspection of a good school: Abbey Junior School

Abbey Road, Darlington, County Durham DL3 8NN

Inspection dates:

20 and 21 June 2023

Outcome

Abbey Junior School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Abbey Junior School are happy and polite. They care for one another. There is a strong sense of community among pupils and staff. Pupils enthusiastically take-up a wide range of leadership roles. For example, the 'eco warriors' have worked with staff to improve the school environment. They have led projects to improve air quality and raised awareness of food waste in packed lunches. Pupils value the opportunity to develop their teamwork and organisational skills. Pupil leaders play an active part in shaping school life and carry out their roles with diligence and pride.

Pupils behave well during lessons. They know that leaders have high expectations of their behaviour and understand the consequence system for any poor behaviour. Classrooms are calm and purposeful. Pupils feel safe at school. Bullying rarely happens. Pupils trust staff to help with any worries or concerns that they have.

Leaders are ambitious for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils enjoy learning a broad range of subjects. Staff enrich pupils' learning with visits to museums and historical sites and by listening to talks by visitors. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have developed an ambitious and broad curriculum. In most areas, they have organised the knowledge and skills that pupils learn in a logical manner. For example, in mathematics, teachers support pupils to become confident in mathematical calculations, before applying their learning to problem-solving activities. Teachers model the correct use of subject-specific terminology and support pupils in doing the same. Pupils complete 'sticky knowledge' quizzes to help them to recall and reinforce their learning. Teachers use these quizzes to check pupils' understanding and address any misconceptions.

However, in some areas of the curriculum, leaders have not fully identified the knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. Where this is the case, teachers are not clear on the knowledge they should prioritise in their teaching and assessment of pupils' learning. This slight variation in teaching and assessment is also reflected in leaders' oversight of the curriculum. Where it is strong, leaders use their checks on pupils' learning to adjust the curriculum to close any gaps in learning. However, in some subjects, leaders do not thoroughly check how well pupils learn the curriculum.

Leaders have high aspirations for all pupils. Teachers are provided with clear, useful information about the individual needs of pupils with SEND. They use this information to provide extra support for pupils. For example, leaders guide teachers to allow pupils extra practice or to break activities down into smaller chunks.

Leaders have successfully developed pupils' love of reading. Pupils enjoy exploring how the plot and characters in books develop. As one pupil commented, reading lets you 'paint your own picture'. Numerous visits to the local library provide pupils with a solid foundation for lifelong reading habits. Pupils who find reading challenging are supported to learn to read using a phonics programme. Staff teach phonics consistently well. They check carefully whether pupils' phonics sounds are secure before moving them on. Pupils read books which match the sounds they are learning. This helps them to become fluent readers.

Staff and pupils have respectful relationships. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, and they follow routines and expectations. Pupils speak with passion about the importance of equality. Staff teach them about the protected characteristics and help pupils to build an inclusive environment. For example, pupils volunteer as playground buddies to make sure that everyone is included at playtimes.

Leaders take care to consider pupils' wider development. They ensure that pupils have the skills and attributes to lead a healthy and productive life. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum teaches pupils about physical and emotional well-being, healthy relationships and citizenship. Pupils put this learning into action by fundraising for charities, running the school council and by involvement in the Rota Kids club.

Staff are proud to work at Abbey Junior School. They are well supported by leaders and feel that their work is valued. Governors know the school well and are able to hold leaders to account.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have made sure that keeping pupils safe is the responsibility of everyone. Staff receive regular training, so they know the signs that a pupil may be at risk. Staff understand how to report any concerns over pupils' welfare. When necessary, leaders work with external agencies to provide pupils with the appropriate support. Leaders carry out checks to make sure that adults are suitable to work with children.

The curriculum helps pupils learn about how to keep themselves safe. For example, they learn about how to be safe online and how to seek help if something worries them.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some areas of the curriculum, leaders have not identified the most important knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. Teachers lack clarity on which knowledge should be prioritised. Where this is the case, leaders should ensure that they clearly identify essential content and develop strategies to check that this has been learned.
- In some areas of the curriculum, leaders do not have a clear picture of how well pupils are learning the planned curriculum. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge go unnoticed. Leaders should work with subject leaders to develop a better picture of how well the intended curriculum is learned.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in December 2012.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	136989
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10255852
Type of school	Junior
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	352
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Emma de la Motte
Headteacher	Jonathan Briggs
Website	www.abbeyfed.darlington.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Federation of Abbey Schools.
- The school uses one unregistered provider.
- The school runs a breakfast and after-school club for pupils.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and history. To do this, they met with subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read, and met with teachers and pupils.
- The inspector also scrutinised curriculum planning in geography and physical education.

- The inspector met with the headteacher, subject leaders and the special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- The inspector also met with trustees.
- To inspect safeguarding, the inspector scrutinised safeguarding records, including the single central record of recruitment checks.
- The inspector spoke to groups of pupils about their learning and experiences in school. They also considered pupils' behaviour in lessons, around the school site and at lunchtime.
- The inspector took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, the pupil survey and the staff survey, along with written comments from parents. The inspector spoke informally to parents outside the school.

Inspection team

Kate Morris, lead inspector

Seconded Inspector

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