

# Inspection of a good school: Aboyne Lodge Junior Mixed and Infant School

Etna Road, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5NL

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Inspection dates:

10 and 11 October 2023

## Outcome

Aboyne Lodge Junior Mixed and Infant School continues to be a good school.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attend a school where leaders, staff and peers are warm and welcoming. It makes pupils feel safe, encouraging them to attend regularly and to heed the school's high expectations. Owing to the curriculum and the wider experiences available, pupils quickly become confident, cheerful and charming individuals. Pupils perfectly portray the school's values: creative, curious and caring.

Pupils get many opportunities to be creative through the curriculum. Additionally, pupils take on various roles. These include roles on the school council or the eco-committee, and as well-being ambassadors. These roles allow pupils to problem solve. They produce fundraising ideas or suggest changes to make the school even better.

Pupils are curious beings. They show a polite interest in new people, places and points of view. They keenly discuss and demonstrate what they know. Older pupils can reel off all they have learned about rivers in the United Kingdom. Younger pupils relish reading aloud the books they receive.

Treating others with care comes naturally to pupils. The buddy system promotes kindness, letting older pupils mentor younger ones. Through characters such as 'Buddy Bee' and 'Tough Tortoise', pupils develop important character traits, such as perseverance and teamwork.

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

The school works collaboratively with subject hubs to strengthen the curriculum, including in early years. The school warmly welcomes experts into school, allowing them to audit the curriculum and teaching accurately. The feedback that the school receives provides helpful assurance about what is working well and what to improve next. Because the school is open to advice, as well as discerning about the advice given, the curriculum continues to improve. This shows in pupils' ongoing and improving achievements.

Teachers usually explain ideas clearly and give pupils timely opportunities to 'have a go' themselves. This allows teachers to check pupils' understanding. However, there are instances where this could be done better. Leaders have plans in place to share good practice, but these are yet to take effect.

The school worked at pace to put in place a rigorous phonics programme. There is bespoke training for staff. This focuses on the elements that pupils need in order to progress to the next stage of the programme. If they do fall behind, pupils receive timely and effective help. Pupils regularly revise the sounds they need to learn. This systematic approach helps them to become confident and fluent readers.

The school, along with pupils and parents and carers, acts as the advocate for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). This includes positive engagement with external agencies. Doing so ensures that staff receive guidance about how best to support pupils with SEND, for example by using extra resources to help pupils understand sequencing or scripting language to help pupils regulate their emotions.

Instilling respectful behaviour begins in early years. Thorough transition, clear routines and explicit behaviour instructions show in children's chirpy manner. It sets the scene well for how pupils behave across the school. Incidents of low-level disruption are extremely rare.

There is an impressive offer to cater for pupils' wider development. This includes extensive extra-curricular clubs, such as those for cross-country, fencing and street dance. Pupils compete successfully in various inter-school sporting events. The school sources visitors, such as authors, engineers and religious leaders. These individuals complement pupils' learning as well as broadening pupils' career aspirations. Pupils' social skills are particularly well developed. This is due to opportunities such as performing in plays, giving presentations and completing projects in mixed-age groups.

Governance is a specific strength. This is due to the careful recruitment of governors with complementary skills. There is a shared understanding of how best to check, challenge and celebrate the work of the school. The governing body works collaboratively with school leaders to identify and iron out any issues promptly.

In recent years, the school has experienced financial difficulties. School leaders are sensibly steering the school onto a path of financial stability. However, a lack of funding is hindering a pivotal part of school development: the early years outdoor environment. Staff are trying to be creative, for example by introducing a digging area for children to strengthen their control and coordination. However, there are not enough engaging experiences on offer to build children's language, skills and understanding. Leaders have the expertise, but not the resources, to effect the change they wish to see.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Sometimes, teaching instruction is not as clear as it should be. This affects how well pupils absorb new information and the time set aside for them to complete work and bed in new knowledge and skills. The school should provide the training and support some staff need in order to present information clearly and efficiently.
- Despite the school's best efforts to work within the resources it has, the early years outdoor environment is underdeveloped and uninspiring. Consequently, children have fewer opportunities to refine and extend their gross motor skills and develop their language and understanding through engaging activities. The school should work with the local authority and external partners to regenerate the early years outdoor environment to realise the aims of its clear curriculum.

## 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 2014.

## 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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium](#)

**funding** (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117141
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10294962
<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	187
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of the governing body</b>	Adam Brown and Alex Farley (Co-Chairs)
<b>Headteacher</b>	Keith Smithard
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.aboyne.herts.sch.uk">www.aboyne.herts.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- At the previous inspection, the school offered Nursery provision for children aged three to four years. Because of financial constraints, the school closed its Nursery provision in 2022.
- There is before- and after-school childcare for pupils who attend the school. It is run by school staff and managed by school leaders.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector held meetings with leaders, including six governors, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator.

- The inspector carried out deep dives in early reading, mathematics and geography. For each deep dive, the inspector discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also listened to a sample of pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; examined safeguarding records; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector reviewed a range of documentation, including school policies, the school development plan, the school's self-evaluation, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and reports from reviews of the school carried out by the local authority.
- The inspector gathered pupils' views by holding discussions with some of them, as well as talking to pupils during lessons and at lunchtime. The inspector also observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and at social times.
- The inspector gathered parents' views by reviewing the 105 responses, including 71 free-text comments, submitted to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.
- The inspector gathered the views of staff by speaking to several of them and reviewing the 19 responses to Ofsted's staff survey.

### **Inspection team**

Daniel Short, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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