

The Abbey Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121916
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	292261
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Rajinder Harrison

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 on roll	
School	270
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Karen Popely
Headteacher	Renuka Popat
Date of previous school inspection	3 December 2001
School address	Winchester Road Northampton NN4 8AZ
Telephone number	01604 660100
Fax number	01604 660106

Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Following the reorganisation of schools within the local authority, this new average-sized primary school was created from a lower school three years ago. About four fifths of the pupils are of White British origin and others come from a wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds, but very few are at the early stages of learning English. A below average proportion of pupils are entitled to free school meals. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2006. Extensive building works that began two years ago are still in progress. In addition, the school has had significant staffing disruptions over the past three years.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement because it is performing significantly less well than in all the circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to raising achievement and standards, improving the quality of teaching and learning in Years 3 to 6 and improving aspects of leadership and management.

The school has many positive features but it is ineffective because too many pupils underachieve in Years 3 to 6. This is largely due to a legacy of inadequate teaching and ineffective checks on pupils' progress. Consequently, pupils are not always given the work they need to achieve successfully and overall teaching and learning are inadequate. While care, guidance and support are satisfactory overall, the academic guidance pupils receive is unsatisfactory. By the end of Year 6, pupils are not sufficiently well prepared academically for the next stage of their education.

Most children have started at the school with knowledge and skills that are generally typical for their age, although assessments of recent intakes reflect that their literacy and numeracy skills are not as secure as they used to be. Provision is good in the Foundation Stage so children enjoy learning and achieve well. At the end of the Reception Year, they all reach the expected levels in all but their writing skills. Recent improvements in teaching in Years 1 and 2 ensure these broadly average standards are maintained and pupils achieve satisfactorily. In Years 3 to 6, current data reflect well below average standards in English, mathematics and science. The school is still coming to terms with the challenges of an all-through primary, but inadequate teaching and hence gaps in pupils' learning have led to many underachieving. Through good individual support, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and those new to learning English achieve satisfactorily. The curriculum is now satisfactory and a good range of clubs, visits and visitors enrich learning well.

Pupils' personal development is good and their regular attendance shows they enjoy being at school. Parents are very positive about the school and recent improvements, which include better communication with parents. Pupils understand why learning is important and are keen to work hard. The calm, orderly atmosphere helps pupils feel safe and secure in school. Their behaviour is excellent. Pupils show respect for others and are quick to befriend and look after each other. They understand well the importance of taking care of themselves by staying safe, fit and healthy.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have improved considerably under the headteacher's very good guidance. Governors are very supportive but neither they nor the managers checked the school's performance, particularly pupils' progress and achievement, rigorously enough to arrest the underachievement in Years 3 to 6. However, the school now knows its weaknesses and appropriate action is being taken to address the issues regarding teaching and assessment. This, along with the good climate for learning that the school promotes, indicates the school has the capacity to make further improvements.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by improving teaching in Years 3 to 6.

- Ensure assessment data is accurate and is used effectively to make sure work matches pupils' needs and challenges them appropriately.
- Ensure that all managers and governors check the school's performance rigorously to improve achievement in all subjects and all classes.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' overall achievement is inadequate. From a broadly average starting point in the Foundation Stage, pupils reach standards that are well below average by the time that they leave the school.

Pupils make inconsistent progress through the school. Good teaching, interesting activities and careful assessments help children to achieve well in the Foundation Stage. They leave the Reception Year having reached the levels expected for five-year-olds in all but writing. Broadly average standards are maintained in Years 1 and 2 and pupils achieve satisfactorily.

In Years 3 to 6, pupils make patchy progress and standards are currently well below average in Year 6. Pupils have not moved on fast enough because gaps in previous learning continue to hamper their progress. There are signs that achievement is now at least satisfactory in Years 3 and 5 where teaching is stronger.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Children develop confidence, independence and initiative in the Foundation Stage and these skills form the basis of pupils' good personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the rest of the school. Pupils enjoy school. They say that there is no bullying and that if any issues arise staff will deal with them immediately. Assemblies and a good programme for personal and social education help pupils understand their role in society. They organise fund raising events, for example, 'Pump aid for Africa'. Through various social activities and community events, pupils learn to work successfully with others. They celebrate the different cultures within the school and events such as 'India day' support pupils' good understanding of the diversity of multicultural Britain. Many attend the numerous school clubs, particularly for sports and music. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles by choosing healthy lunches and know about looking after the planet. School council members are involved in decision making, for example, helping to determine the school rules and sanctions. Pupils take on roles as 'play leaders' to check everyone plays safely. They understand well the dangers of drugs and who to go to should they feel threatened.

Although pupils' basic skills are low, their good personal attributes stand them in good stead in preparing them satisfactorily for the next stage of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teachers' very good relationships with pupils encourage them to enjoy learning and work hard, which they do even when work is not very demanding. Pupils behave very well even when lessons are uninspiring. The strongest teaching is in the Foundation Stage where activities are challenging and imaginative and capture their interest. Here, and in Years 1 and 2, teachers

have a secure knowledge and understanding of what pupils need to do to achieve well, and work is well matched to pupils' needs. Pupils are particularly responsive when using computers or doing practical activities. Throughout the school, effective use is made of teaching assistants, and this helps all pupils take a more active part in lessons.

In Years 3 to 6, the picture is less positive. Here, lessons lack pace and challenge and fail to build accurately on what pupils can already do because teachers do not use assessment information to guide their planning. There is also a tendency for staff to tell pupils what they should know rather than encouraging them to think and take greater responsibility for their learning. Teaching is improving, particularly in Years 3 and 5, but not fast or consistently enough to raise standards. As a result, the quality of teaching and learning overall is inadequate.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Since becoming an all-through primary, the school has worked hard to develop an interesting curriculum. There are some clear strengths in the work planned. In the Foundation Stage, for example, children have challenging activities which help them to develop their initiative and independence, and suitable programmes are in place to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or those new to learning English. Pupils identified as being gifted or talented have satisfactory opportunities to extend their learning. Provision for music is good and is enhanced by specialist teaching. Pupils also benefit from a wide range of interesting visits and visitors that help them experience the wider world, and many take part in after school clubs to develop their interests further. In Years 3 to 6, while the subject content is covered satisfactorily, the level of challenge in individual lessons is inadequate to secure acceptable standards. The school has still to check that pupils of all abilities are sufficiently challenged through more demanding tasks and more opportunities to work independently.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care arrangements are very good, and procedures for child protection, health and safety, reporting of racial incidents and safeguarding pupils are all secure and satisfactory overall. Despite the continued upheaval of the building works, parents know their children are safe and well looked after. Pupils trust all the adults that work with them and know help is available if problems arise. New arrivals are welcomed warmly and the school is a happy place to be. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are particularly vulnerable are supported sensitively. External agencies are contacted where necessary to seek specialist advice.

Procedures to check academic progress have been inadequate in Years 3 to 6 but improvements are being made rapidly and support has improved. Not only has the information been inaccurate, it has not been analysed carefully enough to check that pupils are on track to achieve all that they should. The practice of setting pupils' targets is inconsistent and insecure, as is the guidance they receive on how to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher now knows the school better and is in a good position to effect rapid changes, particularly in improving teaching. She is determined to raise standards and has established a

supportive leadership team to help her. Most senior managers are relatively new to their roles and have had insufficient time to check that teaching and achievement are adequate in all classes. Recent checks on teaching and pupils' progress have helped to improve achievement in Key Stage 2 although there is still a significant amount of underachievement.

Procedures to check the school's performance have not been rigorous enough in the past, particularly regarding analysing pupils' progress and setting targets that ensure all pupils achieve well. The school is now aware of these weaknesses, and rigorous assessment systems, that identify early when pupils are not achieving as well as they should, are now in place.

Governance is satisfactory. Governors are very supportive and have managed the building works satisfactorily so that all classes can now be housed in one building and teachers have the facilities they need to support better teaching and learning. However, their involvement in checking the school's performance is less effective.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

16 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of: The Abbey Primary School, Northampton, NN4 8AZ.

I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school when we visited recently to look at your work and talk to you and your teachers. It was lovely meeting such friendly and polite young people – you made us feel very welcome. Please thank your parents for completing the questionnaires about their opinions of the school. It was brilliant to see so many of you being praised in assembly and your singing and music were absolutely magical to listen to!

- While many things in your school are good, we think the school is not good enough in helping you do as well as you should.
- You try your best, and those of you in Reception and Years 1 and 2 get the results we expect. However, those of you in Years 3 to 6 do not reach the standards you ought to achieve.
- Although you often do interesting work, attend the many clubs and work with many visitors, some of you could do harder work.
- Your teachers take good care of you and help you if you have problems, but you do not get enough advice as to how you could improve your work.
- Your behaviour is excellent; you help each other and are a credit to the school.
- Your headteacher knows what the school needs to help you succeed and the staff and governors are helping her make the necessary improvements to improve teaching and check your progress regularly.
- These are the three important things we have asked your teachers and governors to do to improve your school:
 - Improve teaching in Years 3 to 6 to help you to get better results.
 - Make better use of the information the school has on the progress you are making, for example by telling you in more detail how you could improve your work.
 - Check everything that the school does to make sure the improvements are made to make your school good.

There are things you could do to help, for example, you could make sure you tell teachers if the work you are doing is too easy or too hard for you. We are pleased that you are happy at school and have good friends. We hope that you continue to enjoy school and make progress.

Yours sincerely

Rajinder Harrison Lead inspector