

Abbey CofE Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125654
Local Authority	Warwickshire
Inspection number	299986
Inspection dates	21–22 March 2007
Reporting inspector	David Collard

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	174
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Allred
Headteacher	Margot Brown
Date of previous school inspection	18 November 2005
School address	Aston Road Nuneaton CV11 5EL
Telephone number	024 76386101
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Abbey is an average sized urban infant school. The school was judged to require special measures at its previous inspection because the quality of education was inadequate. Prior to this inspection, there have been three monitoring visits. An acting headteacher was in place for one year but a new substantive headteacher took up her post in September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Abbey Infants has greatly improved in the last fifteen months and is now providing a satisfactory quality of education. There is a new found confidence amongst staff, pupils and parents. This is because the good leadership and management, with very good support from the local authority, has worked on the right priorities to move the school forward. The new headteacher provides a strong lead to all the school's work and has been able to unite the staff with a common purpose aimed at giving pupils the best possible chances to succeed. The school has swiftly and realistically addressed the many weaknesses.

Pupils are now making sound progress, with increasing numbers making good progress. Pupils' standards by the end of Year 2 are broadly average, although still below in reading and writing. Achievement is improving but is still no better than satisfactory due to the remaining weaknesses in literacy. Teaching is satisfactory overall but there are individual examples of both good and outstanding teaching which are helping to raise the expectations of all staff. As importantly, there are now few differences in the quality of teaching in each class.

Personal development and well-being were good at the last inspection and have continued to be so. The systems and procedures for the care and support of pupils are stringent, both for their pastoral needs as well as for academic guidance. Pupils want to be at school and much enjoy learning. They say they feel challenged by the work they are given, particularly when their lessons relate to their own experiences. Not surprisingly, this has had a good effect on attendance, which has now risen to slightly above the national average.

Children enter the Nursery with poor communication and social skills and a weak understanding of the world around them. They make a good start in the Foundation Stage where teachers' planning primarily centres around developing literacy, numeracy and personal education. This good quality provision means that pupils start Year 1 having improved their understanding of letter sounds and basic counting. Nevertheless standards, whilst close to those expected for their age, are still below, particularly in writing. Teachers in Years 1 and 2 work hard to ensure that pupils have a balance between the more formal work of the National Curriculum and play opportunities to continue to develop social and learning skills. This is preparing them satisfactorily for their later education. Despite results in the 2006 national tests being exceptionally low, the pupils are on course to meet the new and realistic targets set for this year. The school's data indicate that standards are likely to be broadly average and in mathematics nearly all pupils should reach the standards expected for their age.

The school has rightly focused heavily on improving the basic skills of reading, writing, numeracy and technology and this meant that, until recently, the curriculum although satisfactory and meeting all statutory requirements, has not been as vibrant and exciting as it could have been. The school is now focusing the work of the new middle management team on making improvements so that the teaching will provide better challenge across a range of subjects and will make pupils think more for themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards, particularly in reading and writing, by ensuring that all teaching is raised to the quality of the best.

- Develop the role of the middle managers to ensure that they can lead the drive to make the curriculum more relevant to the needs and experiences of the pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The achievement of all pupils is satisfactory although standards, whilst broadly average, could be improved. Pupils have standards on entry to the Nursery that are significantly lower than expected in communication, language and literacy, in social development, and in knowledge and understanding of the world. For instance, one child looked amazed when he saw an egg being broken because he had never made a connection between an unopened egg and his fried egg at breakfast.

By the start of Year 1 pupils are working at levels generally expected for their age, although they are significantly lower in early writing, letter sounds, calculating and general knowledge. Through Years 1 and 2 suitable progress is made and in some individual lessons this is good or outstanding. Overall, standards are improving and the school's internal assessments show that pupils are on course to reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 2. Pupils in Year 1 are showing the most improvement because they have been subjected to more of the better teaching for longer. Pupils with learning difficulties now make satisfactory progress across the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are good. Relationships and behaviour are good with only the occasional lapse of interest and attention when lessons are not always so well matched to needs. Pupils are polite and considerate and settle well when working independently. Regular events, such as Chinese New Year, make a positive contribution to their cultural development, although more could be done so that pupils appreciate the diversity of the school community. Pupils know well the importance of healthy lifestyles with many joining in physical activities offered after school. Through the school's programme for personal and social education, pupils learn well about keeping safe. They take on responsibilities enthusiastically, for example as team captains and school council members. 'We all have a chance to decide how to make things better here', said one councillor. Pupils contribute satisfactorily to the local community, for example through links with the church and local residential homes.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The satisfactory teaching is ensuring that pupils' progress is now more continuous and progressive through each year. The extensive monitoring and support of all staff have resulted in significantly raising the expectations about what the pupils are capable of achieving. Both internal and external monitoring has shown that some lessons seen have been outstanding and work completed by the pupils supports this view.

Work in both the Nursery and Reception classes focuses on providing first hand experiences that will increase children's development in both their basic skills of reading, writing and

numeracy along with being able to mix with each other and experience the wonders of the world around them. Planning is at its best in the Nursery, where it relates very well to extending what has gone before. In Years 1 and 2 the teaching is much more confident than it was some months ago. Through the high levels of outside specialists who have been providing support, the teachers have become aware of what methods work well and how to organise their classes to get the most from pupils' learning. Nevertheless, the school rightly acknowledges that all this new confidence needs to be embedded and improvement plans are aimed at ensuring this happens. A good example of its early success is the very focused phonics teaching for all pupils that is improving the below average standards in spelling and reading.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The satisfactory curriculum is balanced and relevant but, as the school knows, needs to be broader and more stimulating. Necessarily, there has had to be a concerted effort to raise the very low standards that were previously evident in reading, writing and mathematics. This is now happening and so future improvement plans are set to make the overall curriculum vibrant, exciting and challenging. Some early successes have been achieved through the use of visits and visitors and by adapting plans, when the situation arises, to what is relevant and interesting to the pupils, such as when it snowed recently. As teachers have become more confident and expert at planning challenging activities so they have broadened their use of different resources such as the interactive whiteboards. There is still some way to go but there is now an undoubted enthusiasm amongst all staff to stimulate and excite pupils' interest in a methodical way.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of all pupils are good and pupils feel safe and well looked after. Parents and pupils confirm that this is a very caring school which underpins pupils' personal development successfully. Procedures to deal with child protection, and health and safety, are all good. The school has actively and successfully taken the necessary steps to improve attendance by targeting families who have problems getting their children to school. Guidance from external agencies is sought where necessary and parents are kept fully informed. Provision for the slightly increasing numbers of pupils learning English as a new language is satisfactory and all of them quickly start to engage with new friends.

The monitoring of pupils' academic progress is good, a great improvement from the last inspection when it was inadequate. Detailed and realistic evidence is being gathered to check how well pupils are progressing and this information is starting to be used effectively to set pupils' individual targets. Teachers are still having to gain the confidence to adapt their planning in light of the information assessments provides. There are effective partnerships between home and school which are helping pupils to make better progress. Teachers are being held to account for the performance of their class and can see the relevance of the assessments they are undertaking. They then use this information in their planning to readjust their lessons and the group work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good, a fact acknowledged both in the school's effective self-evaluation and by the local authority. The very strong direction provided by the headteacher, well supported by the senior management team and outside agencies, has set a clear agenda for improvement, highlighting the need for pupils to achieve as well as they can. This is the key reason why the school has moved forward as well as it has and demonstrates the good capacity for it to continue to do so.

Effective and extremely rigorous monitoring has resulted in improving the quality of teaching. For instance, a review of pupils' attainment and skills in mathematics led to the effective implementation of strategies that have improved standards in Years 1 and 2. The school recognises that teaching needs to improve further to ensure pupils in the mixed age classes, particularly boys, are always well challenged. Evaluation procedures are rigorous and improving as staff become more skilled, but the role of subject leaders, many of whom are new in post, is still underdeveloped. As yet, this makes it difficult for all those involved to check that the improvements in curricular provision are having as much impact as possible.

Governance is good. Governors are actively involved in the life of the school through regular monitoring visits, discussions with staff, and review of pupils' performance. They are realistic about what still needs to be done and are under no illusion that close scrutiny is still needed. Money is spent wisely to provide valuable resources, including good levels of additional staff to support teaching and learning. Parents are highly supportive. Their views are often sought and acted upon, for example in improving curriculum information through letters and workshops.

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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?	3
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
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	2
The attendance of learners	2
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?	3
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?	2

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?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	2
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	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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?	No

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit. We very much enjoyed being with you and seeing what you have been doing. As you may know lots of visitors have been around the school over the past year because it was felt that your school needed some help to improve. I think that this has been very successful and I have told your teachers that your school will no longer need to be visited so often. I have included the main points of my report below.

- You told us that you much enjoy school and we can see why. It has improved a great deal since it was last inspected in November 2005. In fact we have said that it is no longer in special measures and that your school is now satisfactory.
- At the moment you make satisfactory progress from when you start in the Nursery class to when you leave in Year 2, but we think this is rapidly getting better. Those of you in Year 2 should do much better in your SATs tests this year.
- Your teachers have worked hard to improve things. Generally all the teaching is satisfactory and there are also some really good and outstanding lessons as well. This is all helping you to make better progress.
- You told us you think you are looked after well and we agree. It was interesting talking to some of you about your targets and it was great to see that you knew what to do to improve your work.
- As your teachers have had to work hard to improve your reading, writing and mathematics some things in other subjects have not been as exciting as they could have been. This is all set to change. We saw that the staff are planning some exciting activities for the months ahead. We have also asked that all the staff get more involved in checking their subjects to make sure all the right changes are made. This should particularly help you improve your reading and writing.

Under the good leadership of your headteacher and with the support of everyone, I am sure that your school will go from strength to strength. You now need to make sure that you continue to work really hard. I will miss my visits each term but would like to wish you all the very best for the future.