

Abbey Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114165
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	301954
Inspection dates	3–4 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Maddison HMI

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	360
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael King
Headteacher	Mr George Ford
Date of previous school inspection	1 September 2003
School address	Abbey Road Darlington County Durham DL3 8NN
Telephone number	01325 380748
Fax number	01325 363082

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average junior school and is situated in a residential area in Darlington. Pupils come from a range of social backgrounds, with the balance towards the more advantaged. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average, as is the proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Most pupils are White British with a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are no looked after children.

Most pupils transfer from Abbey Infant School and the junior and infant schools are in the process of creating a federation. The junior school is part of the High Force School Centred Initial Teaching Training Programme. The school has achieved Investor in People status and received several awards, notably Basic Skills, Artsmark Gold, Activemark Gold, Eco School, Leading Aspect and Inclusive School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school. The personal development and pastoral care of the pupils are strengths and the school effectively promotes high standards. Pupils relate well to each other and they work hard; they have good attitudes to learning and they make good progress. Pupils are, in the words of the school motto, 'Learning and Growing in Friendship'.

Achievement is good and standards are high. Pupils enter the school with above average attainment. They make good progress throughout their time in the school, especially in Year 3 and Year 6 where teaching is particularly effective. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 are well above the national average. Pupils do well in English, mathematics and science, but test results indicate that writing needs to be improved. Pupils do well overall because they are well motivated and because they receive good teaching. Lessons are well planned and pupils respond positively to the range of teaching strategies employed by teachers. Pupils concentrate well and take a pride in their work. Those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are well supported and make good progress. However, feedback to pupils by teachers about how to improve their work and on how they can make greater progress, especially in relation to writing, is variable.

The personal development of the pupils is good as are the care, guidance and support they receive. This reflects the school's positive ethos of which the headteacher and his staff are rightly proud. Relationships between all members of the school community are good. Pupils know the importance of keeping safe and their understanding of what is required to live a healthy life is well developed. They have a clear sense of right and wrong. They show their enjoyment of school through their high attendance and their attention in lessons. They are confident and are developing into mature, well balanced and responsible individuals. They are keen to be involved in the life of the school. Their support for environmental projects, especially 'The Garden Army', their involvement as buddies in the 'Friends for You' scheme, and their participation in class councils and the school council, provide ample evidence of this commitment. In these ways the pupils come to appreciate their growing responsibilities as young citizens. The curriculum is good and learning outside the classroom is blended effectively with learning inside the classroom. The additional activities in which the pupils are engaged enrich their learning considerably and contribute to their good personal development and good achievement. However, the provision for higher attaining pupils in the foundation subjects is not fully in place; as a result, some pupils are not making as much progress as they could.

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is well supported by an enthusiastic leadership team, an active governing body and a dedicated staff. Together they have successfully created a positive climate for learning. There is a commitment to the professional development of all staff. This has had a beneficial impact on teaching and learning throughout the school, as have the trainee teachers who are an effective part of the school's workforce. Plans to form a close federation with the neighbouring infant school are well advanced and senior leaders are clear as to the advantages such a federation will bring. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and appreciate the commitment of staff and the good care and welfare provided for their children. However, they would like to be more involved in the life of the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide more precise feedback to pupils on their work so that they know how to improve and make greater progress, particularly in relation to writing.

- Make appropriate provision for higher attaining pupils in the foundation subjects to enable them to fulfil their potential in all aspects of the curriculum.
- Involve parents and carers more directly in the life of the school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The achievement of children is good and it is improving. However, there is scope for even higher achievement and for more pupils to make greater progress especially in writing. Pupils' attainment on entry in Year 3 is generally above average. Progress builds well throughout the school, but it is slower in some year groups because higher attaining pupils are not always challenged sufficiently. Teaching is particularly strong in Year 3 and Year 6 and pupils make good progress overall. As a result, by the time they leave school they meet challenging targets and attain standards which are well above average. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2006 showed that more than half of the pupils attained the higher level in English and mathematics and more than two thirds in science. Provisional, but yet unvalidated test results for 2007 indicate that further improvements have been made in mathematics and science. However, results in English indicate that more work is needed to improve standards in writing. Overall the good results attained by pupils in this school are because they are well taught and because the vast majority have positive attitudes to their studies, are encouraged to work hard, and strive to do well. Due to well matched support from teachers and teaching assistants, pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good and these are strengths of the school. Pupils are polite, well mannered and courteous and the school consistently promotes this. There is a calm and orderly atmosphere and there are very good relationships between all members of the school community. Pupils enjoy school, work hard and are keen to learn. This is seen in their good behaviour in lessons and around the school, and in their attendance which is well above the national average. Pupils feel safe and they also understand the importance of keeping safe. They know who to turn to if they need help and are pleased that problems are quickly resolved. This helps to reinforce their positive attitudes. In their enjoyment of physical activity, their involvement in the fruit tuck shop and their choices of healthy food, they put their learning about healthy living into practice. Pupils make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They develop a very clear sense of care, support and respect for each other. Cultural development is particularly good because of the school's emphasis upon teaching issues with a global significance. Pupils' future economic well-being is well promoted and Year 6 pupils, for example, strengthen their understanding of enterprise by taking responsibility for the stalls at the school's annual garden party. Pupils enjoy all these opportunities which develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good and this enables pupils to achieve well. Lessons are well planned and, by making the learning objectives clear to pupils, a sense of purpose is established in class.

Teachers have high expectations regarding the quality of work they expect and pupils respond well to this. Opportunities are taken to extend speaking and listening skills and the whole school focus on developing writing is helping pupils improve the quality of their written work. Teachers have good subject knowledge and their questioning techniques encourage pupils' thinking and contribute towards a positive learning environment. Information and communication technology is being developed effectively across the curriculum to support teaching and learning. Teaching assistants are well trained and deployed well. Pupils understand routines in lessons and quickly settle to work. They are attentive and focussed and take a pride in their work. In the very best lessons observed, teachers were willing to take risks with pupils responding enthusiastically to the challenges offered. Work is generally well matched to ability, though there could be more challenge in some classes for the higher attaining pupils. Work is marked regularly and good work is praised and rewarded. Comments generally provide information which will help pupils to understand how to improve. However, this practice is not as effective as it needs to be to help pupils improve their writing at the higher levels.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good and it is considerably enriched by learning outside the classroom which involves visits to places of interest in this country and abroad. Pupils enjoy these opportunities and especially the Year 6 residential trip to Weardale. Curriculum innovation is strong. Focus week workshop sessions covering global education and science and design technology, for example, enrich pupils' experiences and contribute significantly to, amongst other things, their social and cultural education. There are good links with other local primary schools in a learning network to develop mathematics, science and modern foreign languages by using the outside environments of each school. This outdoor education utilises the various school sites well and has effectively strengthened the curriculum. However, provision for the higher attaining pupils in the foundation subjects is not fully in place; as a result, some pupils are not achieving their full potential.

Recent developments in the provision for modern foreign languages have provided a breadth of opportunities but the impact of these initiatives for all pupils has yet to be evaluated. Pupils have opportunities, throughout the school to work in teams and make presentations. These activities develop their confidence and self-esteem, as well as giving them important skills for the future. There are a number of extra-curricular activities provided. However, the range is small and is focussed upon music and sport.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support the pupils receive are good. Pastoral support is well developed and the school rightly prides itself on the level of care and welfare it provides. The needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are particularly well met by teachers and teaching assistants through classroom support and small group provision. Arrangements for safeguarding, including those for child protection, are firmly in place. There is good attention paid to health and safety which results in pupils' care and welfare being paramount. Links with the adjacent infant school are particularly strong and this helps to smooth the process of transition into Year 3. The school also successfully prepares the pupils for their transfer at age 11 to secondary school. Generally, pupils are aware of their targets and most can articulate how well they are doing. They are encouraged to reflect upon their own work and this helps

them to make good progress in their lessons. Pupils' progress is checked and the school knows what has to be done to improve it. Parents are informed of their child's progress, but there is concern from some who would like more regular updates. Overall, parents are pleased with the level of care for their children and are supportive of the school. However, they would like to be more involved in the life of the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher is well supported by an enthusiastic senior leadership team and dedicated staff. Together they have been successful in creating a positive learning environment in which pupils' enjoyment of school is carefully nurtured. They work hard to ensure all pupils are effectively included and pastoral care and support is strong. Relationships with other schools are good and the headteacher does much to create links with external partners and to strengthen opportunities for the pupils. He is also committed to developing effective opportunities for the professional development of his staff. Governors are dedicated to the work of the school. They meet regularly and are committed to developing the school within the local community. However, they could do more to challenge the school on educational issues. Financial control is generally secure; the school's finances are managed carefully and efficiently, resulting in good value for money. Adequate arrangements are in place to check the work of teachers to help bring about improvements in classroom practice. Knowledge gained from this work is shared honestly with teachers and improvements are achieved.

School self-evaluation is generally accurate and well focussed. The headteacher and senior leaders have developed a school improvement plan which identifies key areas for development and appropriate strategies for delivery. As a result, the capacity to improve is good.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

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	1
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
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	2
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

5 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbey Junior School, County Durham, DL3 8NN

Thank you for welcoming me and my colleagues to Abbey Junior School. We were very impressed by how thoughtful and polite you were and how clearly you could tell us about your school.

You told us that you think Abbey Junior is a good school and we agree. We thought that there were some particularly good things about it. For instance, your teachers and the teaching assistants teach you well. This is because they have high expectations, they explain things clearly and they plan your work carefully. You are making good progress and standards are high, but we think some of you could do even better.

You told us that you enjoy your lessons and we think your behaviour is good both in classrooms and around the school. We particularly liked 'The Garden Army' and 'Friends for You' because by taking part you help each other as well as making school a better place. We think that all the adults at Abbey care for you well and you told us that you feel safe in school. As a result, we think that your school motto is a really good one; you are 'Learning and Growing in Friendship'.

Your headteacher, the staff and the governors are keen to make the school even better. We agree that Abbey Junior School can be better and we have asked Mr Ford and your teachers to provide more precise feedback to you on your work so that you know how to improve in all your subjects and especially in relation to writing. We have also asked the school to concentrate on providing opportunities in all subjects you study, as well as English, mathematics and science, so that all of you, and especially the high attaining pupils, make as much progress as possible. Your parents and carers are pleased with the way in which the school looks after you but they would like to be more involved in what goes on, so we have also asked the headteacher and the governors to look at ways of making this happen. Please thank your parents for sending in so many questionnaires and for taking the time to write comments as well.

We very much enjoyed our time in your school and were glad that it did not rain during the school's 50th Garden Party.

Thank you for being so helpful.

Best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Maddison

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools