

Abbey Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103929
Local Authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	308459
Inspection date	21 February 2008
Reporting inspector	Joan Greenfield

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	7-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	358
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Roger Prior
Headteacher	Pauline Smart
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	Barclay Road Smethwick B67 5LT
Telephone number	01214 292700
Fax number	01214 344643

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the impact of the school's provision in improving standards and achievement further, especially in mathematics; the effectiveness of systems to track and assess pupils' progress, their relationship with setting challenging targets and their impact on planning and consistency across the school; and how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The inspector gathered evidence from: discussions with staff, pupils and a governor; the scrutiny of pupils' work and other documentation provided by the school; observations of lessons, an assembly and pupils at break and lunch times; and the analysis of parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

Abbey Junior is a larger-than-average junior school. Most pupils are White British backgrounds but there are a number of pupils from a range of other backgrounds, mainly Indian, Caribbean and Eastern European. A higher proportion than average has a home language other than English. The number of pupils who join the school other than at the normal times is increasing, and many of these pupils have little knowledge of English. More pupils than usual have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The school has been successful in gaining a number of awards, including the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Artsmark, ICT Mark and Healthy School, and has Investor in People status.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Abbey Junior is a good school that is improving rapidly. Several aspects of its work are outstanding and as some relatively new initiatives become more established, the school is on course to become even better than it is currently. The drive for improvement and the school's inclusive ethos stem from the excellent leadership of the headteacher and her concern to do the very best for the pupils through creating an environment in which they can flourish, both academically and personally. Her approach of devolving whole-school responsibilities to a very strong team of senior staff and encouraging all staff to contribute to the school's development is working extremely well and accelerating the school's progress.

Parents rightly comment that the school is 'welcoming and friendly' and has 'an excellent community atmosphere'. Such an atmosphere enables pupils to grow and develop into articulate and confident young people, who are developing a good range of skills that prepare them well for their future lives. Their personal development and well-being, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness, are outstanding. Pupils are extremely polite and very well behaved, and treat adults with considerable respect. This is helped by the excellent relationships that exist between all members of the school community. Pupils feel very strongly that their voice is listened to and their concerns addressed. 'It's really, really fun,' said one pupil, reflecting the views of many others. Pupils are proud of their school, enjoy learning very much and are keen to do their best. They take on a wide range of responsibilities, undertaking tasks such as school and class councillors, librarians, monitors and health and safety representatives, and also run lunchtime clubs. Together with fundraising for charity, these opportunities allow them to make an excellent contribution to their school and wider community, as well as developing their self-esteem and sense of responsibility.

Within this supportive environment, pupils make good progress from their broadly average starting points in Year 3 and achieve well. This applies to all groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the increasing number who are in the early stages of learning English as an additional language. These pupils benefit from the good support provided by their teachers and teaching assistants, which means that their specific needs are met effectively, whether in the classroom or through withdrawal for more specific support.

Standards are well above average overall, reflected in the school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 6. Pupils make particularly good progress in English, where the results have been well above average in four out of the past five years. The evidence from their current work, and the careful tracking of their progress, shows that pupils are on course to do as well, if not better, this year. Standards in science have improved in the past two years and are also well above average. The school's results in mathematics are not quite as strong as those in English and science, although they were above average in 2007. The school is working hard and successfully to raise standards in mathematics through making the tasks and activities more relevant and meaningful to pupils. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were asked to identify the best long jumpers in the class so they could represent the school in a local competition. This required them to measure several jumps of a group of pupils, work out the mean, median and mode of their measurements and then represent their data in a variety of different ways, such as a bar chart, line graph, pictogram or a radar graph. This work led to some enthusiastic discussions as they worked cooperatively in small groups. Pupils' weaker numeracy skills sometimes slow their work rate when undertaking problem-solving activities. Teaching is good and often outstanding. Pupils are actively involved and challenged in lessons,

with good opportunities provided for them to talk about what they are doing, share their ideas and discuss problems with a partner or in small groups. They also assess their own work and that of others well. This is particularly effective in English, where the tasks pupils undertake have clear objectives and specific criteria against which they can check their own work. Detailed marking of their English work supports this structured approach, with teachers giving clear guidance to pupils on how to improve it. This is one reason why pupils do so well in English. Although it is one of the school's priorities, this excellent practice has not yet been extended sufficiently to other subjects.

Staff have a real regard for the welfare of their pupils and the quality of care, guidance and support pupils receive is first rate. Pupils comment that they feel safe, as there is very little bullying in the school. They are confident that staff will listen to them if they have any concerns. The school meets all safeguarding and child protection requirements, and health and safety is given high priority. Pupils who join the school at different times receive good support to enable them to settle in quickly. There are excellent links with other schools and staff work hard to involve parents and ensure that their children attend regularly. Surveys on matters such as homework and anti-bullying and their general views about the school give parents an opportunity to contribute to the school's development. In addition, the parents' handbook gives them helpful information about the school's procedures and routines.

The curriculum provides pupils with a good range of activities to maintain their interest and give them a love of learning. It is being revised to make stronger links between subjects and to make it more relevant to pupils' needs. Although the school makes some provision for its most able pupils, this is not part of a structured and planned programme. Curricular innovations, such as the introduction of Philosophy for Children, a programme to develop the pupils' social and emotional aspects of their learning', and a 'creativity afternoon', are adding a further dimension to pupils' personal and academic development. These and other opportunities, such as a good range of visits, including residential visits, and visitors, enrich and extend pupils' experiences well. Pupils maintain an active and healthy lifestyle, have ready access to water during the day and participate regularly in the wide range of extra-curricular activities organised by the school.

The leadership team has a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further development. This is because the systems for checking the school's performance and pupils' progress are robust. Occasionally, the school's judgements are a little too generous, but its priorities are the right ones and give staff a clear sense of direction and focus. The school's targets are demanding but achievable as they take account of a wide range of evidence. Governors undertake their responsibilities effectively and support the school well. The school's progress over the last two years and the drive and enthusiasm of the staff for doing even better show that it has excellent capacity to improve still further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement in mathematics to the level of that in English.
- Extend the use of the excellent marking and assessment practice in English to other subjects.

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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
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

22 February 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbey Junior School, Smethwick B67 5LT

Thank you for making me feel so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to those of you I met in the playground and with members of the school council. This letter is to tell you what I found out about your school.

You go to a good school that is getting better and better. You told me you liked school and that it was fun. I agree with you. Because the teaching is good, you make good progress so that standards are well above average by the time you leave in Year 6. You do very well in English and in science but not quite as well in mathematics. The school is doing a lot to help you do better in mathematics but you also need to work hard at improving your numeracy skills.

You get on very well with one another and nearly all of you behave very well. Adults in the school really care for you and want you to do well. When you need special help, it is generally there for you. You enjoy school very much and you have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. The school gives you lots of opportunities to take responsibility and I saw some of this in action during the lunchtime art club which some of you had organised. I was very impressed with the way you did this.

The curriculum gives you a wide range of interesting activities to do and you told me that you particularly like the 'creativity afternoon'. I am sorry that I was not able to see the activities you do in these sessions but I did see the displays of some of your work on the walls. The school gives you many opportunities to go on trips and visits and many of you enjoy taking part in clubs and after-school activities.

Your headteacher and other senior staff run the school well and are very keen for you to do as well as you can. They have a good understanding of what the school needs to do next. Although your school is good, I think it could become even better. I have asked the headteacher and staff to do two things to help it do this.

- Help you to do as well in mathematics as you do in English.
- Assess and mark your work in other subjects as well as they do in English.

I hope you will all continue to attend regularly, work hard and do your very best.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Joan Greenfield Lead inspector

Annex B



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Lead inspector