

Abbey Infants' School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114181
Local Authority	Darlington
Inspection number	311509
Inspection date	9 June 2008
Reporting inspector	Graeme Clarke

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	4-7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	271
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Michael King
Headteacher	Mrs Elaine McCue
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2004
School address	Cleveland Terrace Darlington County Durham DL3 8JA
Telephone number	01325 380803
Fax number	01325 355851

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues:

- the quality of provision in the Foundation Stage
- the progress pupils currently make, particularly in mathematics
- the use of marking and assessment to support pupils' learning, especially those identified as gifted or talented.

The inspector gathered evidence from lesson observations, looking at pupils' work, assessment information, documents, interviews and discussions with the headteacher, staff, pupils and a governor. 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

This larger than average size infant school serves a locality where the socio-economic characteristics are well above average. A low proportion of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is very low, although the number with a statement of special educational need is broadly average. Almost all pupils have a White British heritage and none requires support for English as an additional language. The school works closely in federation with the neighbouring junior school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Abbey Infants is an outstanding school. Pupils' academic achievement and their personal development are excellent. Exceptional leadership by the senior team, under the very capable direction of the headteacher, together with the exemplary contribution of the governing body, ensure that pupils benefit from a rich range of experiences. Teaching and support are of the highest quality. In this very inclusive school, deservedly recognised by a local authority award, all staff very successfully promote the philosophy that every child does matter. A very large proportion of parents have total confidence in the school. One parent's comments sum up the views of the majority. 'Abbey Infants is a lovely school - my child has blossomed under their guidance. The support that she received from all the staff is excellent. All the staff make the effort to get to know the individual children and their families. ...My child loves going to school and learning.'

Pupils make excellent progress in the Reception year and begin Year 1 with well above average abilities. They continue to achieve outstandingly well by sustaining very high standards as they move through the school. Year-on-year, pupils have reached very high standards in reading and writing in the statutory Year 2 assessments. Last year, mathematics standards were not quite as high but, even so, they were significantly above the national average. Boys and girls attained equally highly. The school rightly identified two key areas for improvement - standards in mathematics and the achievement of gifted and talented pupils. Provisional results this year show pupils have again reached very high standards, particularly in reading and mathematics. Analysis shows gifted and talented pupils have all reached standards at the highest Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics. Last year, the very small number of pupils with learning difficulties attained as well as their counterparts nationally. Currently, those pupils with learning difficulties are making good progress, especially so in their reading development.

An exceptionally rich range of activities in lessons, assemblies and visits leads to pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils feel very safe in school because of sound safety procedures; for example, for keeping the site secure and supervising Internet access. They know the importance of sensible conduct and behave impeccably in lessons and in the communal areas both inside and outdoors. The Healthy School award reflects pupils' healthy choices at lunchtimes and their knowledge of good health and fitness. Many now come to school on foot, bicycle or scooter. The school's 'walking train' award initiative is well regarded by pupils and parents. Pupils take part in physical education with obvious enthusiasm. Their cheery outlook, respect for each other, confidence, and politeness towards adults all reflect how well the school helps to promote their social and emotional development. Pupils clearly enjoy school very much: they like many aspects of school-life and say they want to keep the school just the way it is. Attendance is well above average. Pupils' keen involvement in assemblies, participation in the school council and the Green Beans Eco-club, and support for charitable activities, show they contribute really well to many facets of school life and help enhance the lives of others. Year 2 pupils are prepared very well for their future because their basic and social skills are so well developed.

Pupils' high standards and achievement result from a most effective combination of excellent teaching and a rich curriculum. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely in partnership to plan and share the purpose of lessons with their pupils. Teachers make excellent use of their knowledge of pupils' different abilities to provide activities that suit and challenge them well. In turn, pupils are interested and attentive. They are keen to contribute to lessons: they read

confidently and fluently, and clearly answer questions or explain their grasp of a problem to the class. They tackle individual tasks enthusiastically and industriously. The teamwork between teachers and teaching assistants ensures gifted and talented pupils take a full part in lessons and learn outstandingly well. Productive links with parents support learning. For example, the school has recently developed a highly regarded computer-based 'learning platform', which pupils and parents can access through the Internet from home.

The school places a very high premium on valuing each child as an individual. It very successfully safeguards the welfare of pupils. It enhances their learning through excellent partnerships with others, for example, the local authority and teacher training institutions. Procedures for child protection and safeguarding meet statutory requirements and are up-to-date. Careful assessments of pupils' work at suitably frequent intervals during the year build into an effectively used track record of their progress. Coupled with teachers' personal knowledge of their pupils, the information informs staff about those pupils who are at risk of falling behind or who need greater challenge. Marking celebrates pupils' accomplishments and usually gives them pointers to improve but this is not yet a consistent practice.

The school is outstandingly well led and managed. The headteacher, senior staff and governors rigorously monitor and review the work of the school. In turn, they began the year with a very clear action plan to raise standards further, especially in mathematics, and to improve the achievement of gifted and talented pupils. They have a very clear perspective on all aspects of its work but are somewhat modest in judging some of their accomplishments. Of particular note is the way the governors of the partner infant and junior school in the Abbey Federation manage their responsibilities with expertise and verve. They get the best of value from their resources to ensure pupils' outstanding academic achievements and personal development. The school has successfully addressed all the issues from the last inspection. Given its sustained record of high standards and achievement, and the senior leaders and governors' determination to raise achievement even higher, the school's capacity for further improvement is outstanding.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Children join the Reception class with a range of skills, which for many, are above those typical for their age. Outstanding management and excellent provision helps children thrive. Parents are delighted that their children thoroughly enjoy school and make exceptionally good progress. Staff carefully maintain records of children's participation and work with photographic evidence of their practical involvement to assess their progress and help plan activities. A well-balanced combination of supported activities with independent work and play exploits indoor and outdoor facilities to the full. Children make outstanding progress in language and literacy development. The progress is helped by the way they learn 'joined-up' handwriting from the outset and are taught phonics to encourage reading and spelling. They begin Year 1 with very high standards in all areas of learning. Almost all far exceed the levels expected for their age, which gives them an excellent start when they begin Year 1.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the consistency of marking to let all pupils know how well they are doing and how to improve.

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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?	1
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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

10 June 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbey Infants' School, Darlington, DL3 8JA

I really enjoyed my visit when I came to inspect your school this week. Thank you for helping me when I came to see you at work. You were exceptionally polite and really helpful. I did enjoy talking with those of you whom I met. I was pleased to see how confident you are when you are reading aloud or speaking to others in your class or assembly. I enjoyed hearing how much you enjoy coming to school, and how much you contribute to school life. I was very pleased to find that so many of you like the school just the way it is. I know the headteacher and all the staff are rightly very proud of you.

Yours is an outstanding school. It is very warm and welcoming and really well organised. I know that you feel safe and happy because all the adults in the school look after you exceptionally well. Your lessons are excellent. I was impressed with the way you work very hard and like to take part. Last year those of you in the Reception class did exceptionally well. Those of you in Year 2 are also doing exceptionally well this year, especially with reading and mathematics. I like the way your teachers set you targets for your work in English and mathematics. Whenever they mark your work, I have asked them to help you know how well you are doing to meet your targets and how to do even better.

You have very many opportunities at Abbey Infants' School to learn about life and these should stand you in good stead for the future. Many of you will soon be moving on to the junior school. I hope that you all do really well.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Clarke

Lead inspector