

Acomb Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121271
Local Authority	York
Inspection number	313929
Inspection dates	7–8 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Lesley Clark

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	238
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Judith Pinder
Headteacher	Mr S McMullan
Date of previous school inspection	15 September 2003
School address	West Bank Acomb York North Yorkshire YO24 4ES
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Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This average sized school serves a mixed residential area with pockets of social and economic disadvantage to the west of York city centre. Almost all pupils are of White British heritage with a very small number from European and Asian heritages. Two are at the early stages of learning English. There are two-thirds boys to girls in every class. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average as is the number with statements of special educational need. An above average proportion of pupils is vulnerable or has complex needs. The school is an Investor in People and holds the Artsmark Gold and Basic Skills awards.

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. An outstanding child-centred curriculum promotes high levels of enjoyment in learning, resulting in enthusiastic, highly motivated pupils and outstanding attendance. Pupils say that lessons 'help us to think about things'. They particularly like special days devoted to subjects such as art and science with, in their words, 'whiz bang experiments and lots of things to do and make'. Parents warmly support all the school does, appreciating the 'drop in' days when they join in lessons with their children as well as the cheerful welcome they receive when they pop into school with any concerns.

The school has made rapid strides in the last three years in raising pupils' achievement. Using assessment and the curriculum as the main tools to bring about long-term changes, the headteacher and deputy headteacher have radically changed the way the school operates. As a result, the school offers a rich and vibrant curriculum, firmly focused on pupils learning through doing. Assessment is used outstandingly well in most classes to determine what pupils should be taught next based on what they have learnt so far. Because of this, the proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in national tests is increasing steadily. Outstanding systems to monitor pupils' progress ensure that any underachievement is quickly spotted and pupils get the help they need. Subject leaders take full responsibility for ensuring good quality provision in their subjects. However, the role of the special needs leader is less well developed and so opportunities are missed to involve pupils in their individual education plans.

Achievement is good because pupils are well taught. From a below average starting point, pupils reach nationally expected standards in mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 and above average standards in English. Achievement has improved steadily over the past three years, especially in English. This is because writing is promoted extensively in all other subjects. This is now happening with mathematics, too, as part of the school's long-term plan to raise achievement. At the same time, the school is promoting learning through pupils asking questions and finding out for themselves, ensuring that boys especially learn actively. This works most successfully in Years 1 to 3 where pupils have followed this way of working right from the start. As a result, standards pushed above average at the end of Year 2 in reading, writing and mathematics in 2007. This practical approach which favours the large proportion of boys is less well established in Key Stage 2 where teaching quality is more variable. Progress slows in Year 4 as a result. Opportunities for pupils to learn through enquiry, investigation and discovery are used more fully in some classes than in others, thus restricting older pupils' capacity to direct their own learning as extensively as the younger ones do. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who are new to learning English make good progress because teachers cater very carefully for their needs in class.

Pupils' personal development is good. Good pastoral care, support and guidance help them to feel happy and safe at school. Pupils feel valued by their teachers. This develops their self-esteem and confidence, turning them into assured young people. Weekly personal, social, health and citizenship (PSHCE) lessons give them a chance to talk about important matters such as friendship. Pupils are very keen on these saying, 'you get to hear what other people think'. Consequently, they learn to be sensitive to the needs of others and to respect their views. Pupils have a good sense of community and are directly involved in fund-raising activities to help those who are less fortunate. Vulnerable pupils are given outstanding support to boost their self-esteem and help them to learn successfully. Recently, a group of vulnerable pupils, for example, was involved in baking biscuits and selling them in the local theatre, as part of

their development of life skills. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives for they have good basic skills and they learn to think for themselves and to work collaboratively.

The school is well led and managed. The headteacher sets the pace of change and staff follow his clear lead with enthusiasm. This makes the school a very happy place because teachers now use pupils' needs and interests as their starting point. The school has made outstanding progress since the last inspection and now has areas of outstanding practice. The school has identified all areas of weakness and set about improvements systematically and effectively. Governance is good. Governors ask the right questions to ensure continued progress. Parents' views of the care and support given to their children by the school are overwhelmingly positive. The school gives good value for money and demonstrates outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision enables children to get off to a good start when they first come to school. They quickly learn to be independent, responding to adults' high expectations, learning to share with others and to communicate through language. Good teaching and good support enable them to make good progress in all areas of learning. From a below average starting point, most are close to the levels expected by the end of the Reception year, though very few exceed them. Children have a lot of fun because staff devise interesting activities which capture their imaginations such as the role play involving fire engines. Links between the indoor and outdoor curriculum are at an early stage of development. The systems to assess children's progress are outstanding for they are simple to manage and effective. A notable strength is the outstanding curricular links between the Foundation Stage and Year 1. Children's welfare is promoted well. Good links with parents means they are fully involved in their children's learning. The provision is well led and managed.

What the school should do to improve further

- Develop the role of the special needs leader.
- Provide consistent opportunities in Key Stage 2 for pupils to direct their own learning and so learn through enquiry, investigation and discovery.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From a below average starting point pupils achieve well, reaching close to average standards in mathematics and science and above average standards in English by the end of Year 6. Over the past three years there has been a steady increase in the proportion of pupils exceeding expected levels at the end of Years 2 and 6. This is because teachers use assessment extremely well to challenge more able pupils. Standards at the end of Year 2 in 2007 were above average for the first time in four years, a reflection of the outstanding curriculum which ensures that pupils have plenty of opportunities to learn through finding out for themselves. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress, benefiting from good additional help in class to help them learn new skills. The school is on course to meet its challenging targets in both mathematics and English.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. They thoroughly enjoy school and get on extremely well with each other and their teachers. This is reflected in their attendance which is exceptionally high. Pupils behave well and they work sensibly and constructively together. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are especially interested in the multicultural aspects of their work. For example, younger pupils were engrossed in their work on Divali as part of a physical education lesson and older pupils pointed out with pride the glazed Islamic tiles they designed. Pupils know how to stay safe and who to turn to if they need help. They know it is important to eat sensibly and to take regular exercise but their packed lunches do not always reflect their understanding of a healthy diet. While younger pupils show high levels of independence and enquiring minds, older pupils are more passive in lessons. They do, however, take on responsibilities within the school, acting as reading mentors, for example. The school council actively represents pupils' views as well as organising the sale of stationery and fruit at break times.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching quality is good or better in most classes with most teachers making full allowance for pupils' different learning styles. Teachers are skilled at making connections between subjects so as to make learning relevant. A notable strength is the way teachers use daily assessments of what pupils have learnt to help them decide what to teach next. This means that in almost all classes, work is very carefully matched to pupils' different needs and so they learn well. Teaching assistants give good support to those with learning difficulties, helping them to understand new work. In outstanding lessons, pupils have extensive opportunities to learn independently and as a result, they make rapid gains in understanding. The school has rightly identified weaknesses in teaching and learning in Year 4. Learning slows in this year because not enough is expected of more able pupils and pupils have too few opportunities to practise new skills. In all classes, teachers encourage pupils to discuss ideas with a partner and use up-to-date technology to make teaching points clear.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum links subjects imaginatively and creatively together so as to make learning exciting, relevant and enjoyable. The decision to put writing at the centre of curricular planning has resulted in above average standards in English. Currently, mathematical skills are being extensively promoted in other subjects with a corresponding rise in standards as a result. Regular special weeks devoted to other subjects promote both excellence and enjoyment as pupils benefit from in-depth studies with a practical bias. Specialist teaching in French, music and PSHCE ensures that pupils receive an exceptionally broad education. Both younger and older pupils benefit from extensive extra-curricular activities. These are complemented by a range of interesting and relevant educational visits and visitors to school. The links between the Foundation Stage curriculum and that in Years 1 to 3 are outstanding, ensuring that younger pupils learn through enquiry and discovery.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Child protection procedures are robust and meet current government requirements. All staff have had training in child protection and in dealing with the complex physical and emotional needs of some pupils. The systems to support children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are satisfactory. While the school copes successfully with a wide range of needs and abilities, including provision for those new to learning English, the role of the special needs leader is underdeveloped. Consequently, pupils are not as involved as they should be in agreeing targets in their individual education plans and the leader does not oversee their progress. The systems to support vulnerable pupils, however, are outstanding and the learning mentor strongly influences inclusion throughout the school. Equally, the systems to support academic progress are outstanding and give an excellent overview of progress, enabling underachievement to be identified and remedied very quickly. Good links with other schools give pupils confidence, preparing them well for the next stage of their education.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The long-term rather than a 'quick fix' approach established by the headteacher is proving to be very effective. Staff, governors, parents and pupils express their satisfaction at the way the school has changed. The result is a happy school with rising standards and many improvements since the last inspection. An understanding of how pupils, especially boys, learn underpins the school's approach to raising achievement. The school has an accurate picture of its strengths and areas for development. However, because it sets its sights high, it judged achievement and standards to be satisfactory rather than good as it has not yet reached its goal which is 'excellence for all'. Subject leaders share fully in the process of monitoring the work of the school and taking responsibility for raising standards. This has enabled strong, long lasting improvements to be made in English, with improvements in mathematics and science following on in sequence as planned. The role of the special needs leader is less clearly defined. Governors take an active role in meeting their responsibilities. They provide an appropriate level of challenge and fully support the work of the school. Parents place a high value on the school and all it does for their children, welcoming the extent to which they are included in their children's education.

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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?	2
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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 extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	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?	1
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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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

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

Thank you for talking to Mr Wilson and me so readily and for showing us your work and telling us all about your school. We very much enjoyed our two days with you and agree with you that it is a very happy place to be. We could well see why you rarely miss a day of school. This is why your attendance is outstanding.

You go to a good school and it has some outstanding features. The best things about your school are the curriculum and the way teachers assess what you have learnt before deciding what to teach you next. These two things make your learning extremely enjoyable and help you to achieve well. Younger pupils have a really lively, active curriculum with lots of opportunities to learn through asking questions and finding out for themselves. Some of you in Key Stage 2 also do this but we should like everyone in all classes to have the same chance to learn actively and to direct their own learning.

You are well taught and we were impressed by your behaviour both in class and around school. Older pupils take their responsibilities seriously and we think your PSHCE lessons really help you in your dealings with others. Your school is well led and managed by your headteacher and deputy headteacher who really work as a team with your teachers. You are also part of that team, which is why you are involved in setting targets and checking your progress towards them. Those of you who have individual education plans, however, need to have more of a say as to what goes in them so this aspects needs to be organised better.

This is what we have asked your school to do next so as to make your school an even better place for learners.

- Develop the role of the special needs leader.
- Provide consistent opportunities in Key Stage 2 for pupils to direct their own learning and so learn through enquiry, investigation and discovery.