

Abbot's Hall Community Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124631
Local Authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	328182
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
Reporting inspector	John Messer

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	199
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Andrew Holding
Headteacher	Mrs Debbie Knight
Date of previous school inspection	21 September 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Danescourt Avenue Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 1QF

Age group	4–9
Inspection dates	10–11 December 2008
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This first school is smaller than most primary schools. The school roll has been declining recently, mainly because a new primary school opened nearby. Two Reception classes cater for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Attainment on entry is below the nationally expected levels. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds and a small proportion are from minority ethnic families. In recent years a significant number of pupils have arrived from Eastern Europe and on entry these are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average. The school has the Basic Skills Quality Mark and the Activemark awards. There is a privately run breakfast club and an after school club on site.

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 where pupils make good progress and achieve well. Standards have been rising steadily in recent years. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 make good progress in literacy and numeracy. The results of national assessments for pupils in Year 2 in 2008 showed that standards were broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. This was particularly encouraging as that year group had a higher than usual proportion of pupils who find learning difficult, as well as a number of pupils who joined the school speaking little English. Progress in Years 3 and 4 is good in reading and writing, so that by Year 4, standards are above average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in mathematics and attain average standards by Year 4. They make good progress in science and attain standards that are above average. Leaders have been highly successful in raising standards in literacy but there has not been the same emphasis on raising the profile of numeracy. Also staffing difficulties in the recent past, including some long-term staff absence, interrupted pupils' learning in some classes. This caused gaps in pupils' understanding of mathematics in particular. In response to pupils' widely varying stages of development in mathematics, leaders have organised four ability sets across the three mixed age Year 3 and Year 4 classes. This is having a positive impact but there is still an exceptionally wide spread of ability in each set.

Pupils who speak languages other than English at home make good progress. They quickly develop the language skills that they need to access the curriculum and make good progress in literacy and numeracy. Pupils who find learning difficult are supported well and make good progress.

Teaching and learning are good and literacy is taught particularly well across the school. Teaching of mathematics is good in Years 1 and 2 and satisfactory in Years 3 and 4. In numeracy lessons for the older pupils, tasks are not always matched sufficiently closely to pupils' abilities. Consequently they do not move rapidly enough to the next stages in their learning. Science is taught well with good opportunities for investigations. The curriculum is being developed effectively. Links are made between subjects to stimulate interest. However, the thematic approach is not as well developed in Years 3 and 4 as it is in the lower part of the school and activities are not as consistently stimulating. Therefore learning is not always as effective as it could be.

Pupils' good personal development makes a strong contribution to their learning. Pupils enjoy school and are eager to learn. From their very earliest days in school they are supported well and encouraged to be confident learners. They develop into responsible young people who make a good contribution to the school and the wider community. They are encouraged to think about what they need to learn and reflect on how effective their learning has been. This promotion of thoughtful reflection is the prime element that defines the school's ethos and underpins much of the learning. The wide range of skills that pupils learn, coupled with the positive work ethic they develop, prepares them well for the next phase of their education and their future lives.

Good care, guidance and support help pupils to learn well. Teachers mark pupils' work so that it not only gives praise but also gives clear guidance about how to improve. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Pupils have a good understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lifestyles.

The headteacher's good leadership has steered the school through a particularly difficult period. The school's falling roll has been managed well. Year groups and classes have been reorganised and there is now the prospect of greater stability in staffing. Leadership roles have been distributed more widely and subject leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. There is a shared determination to improve provision and raise standards further and the school has good capacity to improve. The governing body monitors the work of the school closely and governors are keen to support the school in finding ways to develop provision. The school's self evaluation is accurate and highlights the most important areas for improvement. Standards are higher than they were at the time of the last inspection and there have been advances on many fronts. Parents are pleased with the education provided for their children although a significant number regret that staff changes have interrupted pupils' learning. Parents particularly appreciate the open channels of communication. One commented, 'We have always found all staff very supportive, open and approachable.'

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good teaching, detailed planning and clear expectations support learning well and promote good progress. There is a good balance between activities directed by adults and activities chosen by the children. There is an appropriately strong emphasis on teaching children the relationship between letters and the sounds they make. This helps them to get off to a flying start in reading and writing. Staff have high expectations of children's ability to work independently and children rise to the challenge of using film cameras, for example, to make their own version of 'Goldilocks'. Staff use good questioning strategies to encourage children to think hard about their learning. Children speak confidently and are developing a wide vocabulary. The outdoor area provides many exciting activities that support learning effectively. Children enjoyed squirting water onto the tarmac to make letter shapes, for example. Staff record children's progress carefully and use assessments well to plan the next steps in learning. Children's welfare is a top priority and staff respond sensitively to the needs of each individual. Personal development is good. Children happily share equipment, are confident in the way they approach adults. However, resources for creative development are not of the highest quality and equipment is not always stored, labelled and displayed in an attractive and accessible way.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make sure that tasks in mathematics are matched more closely to pupils' varying stages of development in Years 3 and 4 so that progress accelerates.
- Extend the links made between subjects in Years 3 and 4 so that pupils have more opportunities to apply and extend their skills in stimulating ways.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well because teaching is good, relationships are excellent and they enjoy learning. Standards are rising because leaders monitor the school's performance thoroughly and are always looking for ways to improve further. Children in the EYFS develop a good range of basic skills that prepare them well for tackling the National Curriculum from Year 1 onwards. By Year 2, standards match national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. By the end Year 4, standards are above average in reading and writing and average in mathematics. Pupils learn

a good range of computer skills and attain standards in ICT that are above average. They are good at making multi-media presentations as well as using the internet for research.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils respond well to the caring staff who work hard as a team to provide a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and pupils have no hesitation in sharing their thoughts and ideas with adults. Pupils are keen environmentalists and have a good understanding of the need to recycle materials and save energy. Behaviour is good and pupils work and play happily together. They like school and attendance is above average. Pupils make a strong contribution to the school community through the school council. They understand their responsibilities to those less fortunate than themselves and support charitable fund-raising events wholeheartedly. They have chosen to sponsor a child in India and they chose to use some of their budget to buy the children's newspapers enjoyed by pupils in Years 3 and 4. There is a strong emphasis on pupils understanding their preferred style of learning and they are encouraged to think carefully about their feelings and the feelings of others. There is scope for pupils, especially those in Years 3 and 4, to use their well developed research skills more widely and become fully independent learners.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The excellent relationships between teachers and pupils help to create a productive climate for learning. Lessons are planned particularly carefully in literacy and all groups of pupils make good progress across the school. In numeracy lessons for pupils in Years 3 and 4, work is not always modified sufficiently to match the pupils' widely varying stages of development in each teaching group. Consequently pupils' progress is not as rapid as it could be. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to the quality of pupils' learning and are particularly skilled at helping those who find learning difficult. Teachers use technology, such as interactive white boards, video cameras and computers, well to support learning. Pupils are well motivated and thoroughly enjoy finding out more about their world.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is taught most effectively where clear links have been made between subjects. This is more fully developed in Years 1 and 2 than in Years 3 and 4. The school works closely with the local Sports Partnership, which introduces pupils to a wide range of different sporting activities. Pupils attend a good variety of after school activities which include craft, environmental studies, mathematics, computer skills and many sporting activities such as tag rugby, hockey and cross country running. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of visits to places of interest and by visitors to the school. Pupils in Year 4 enjoy a residential visit to an outdoor activity centre and the youngest children benefit from their regular use of the 'Forest School', an exciting outdoor learning experience.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Care, safety and pupils' well-being are top priorities. Child protection procedures are robust and staff receive regular training. Health and safety matters are addressed efficiently. The school ensures that all pupils are included and can play their full part in school life. Pupils are supported well in developing social skills and self-confidence, for example in the delightful Christmas performance by the younger children. There are strong links with support agencies, such as specialist speech and language advisers, that contribute to effective care. Each pupil's progress is measured systematically and this helps to identify any who may be underachieving and be in need of extra learning support. The school has recognised the need to improve target setting so that pupils have a clearer understanding of how to reach the next stages in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher leads the school well. Her calm, reflective approach helps to give clear direction. The school is emerging from a difficult time and is now entering a more settled period. Staff share a commitment to improving provision and to raising standards further. Governors are closely associated with the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and the key areas for development. Community cohesion is promoted well. 'Welcome Wednesdays', when parents are invited to join pupils in their learning for part of the day, help to cement links with the local community. Parents from minority ethnic families visit the school to share their customs and this gives pupils a good understanding of the ethnic diversity of our society.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

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/or disabilities make progress	2

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
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 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

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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**

12 December 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Abbot's Hall Primary School, Stowmarket, IP14 1QF

What a good school. We thoroughly enjoyed the short time we spent with you. Thank you for being so friendly and helpful.

One of the main strengths of the school is how keen you are to learn. You work hard and make good progress. You get on well with each other and with all the staff. You are sensible, polite and sensitive to the needs of others. We particularly like the way that you support the orphanage in India. The school council really do get things done. It was a good idea to have a clock outside in the playground so that you could work out when it was time to join lunch time clubs. Because teachers make lessons interesting, you make good progress. You are good at reading and writing and most of you enjoy mathematics and science. You are developing a good range of computer skills. Those of you who find it rather difficult to learn new things get lots of help and often do really well. You understand the need for a healthy diet and how important it is to keep yourselves fit by having plenty of exercise. You know how to stay safe and look after yourselves and others. You go on visits to places of interest and the residential visit to the Frontier Centre is particularly popular. You develop a good understanding of people's different customs and beliefs.

We think that there are two main things that would help to improve your school. In order to raise achievement in numeracy in Years 3 and 4, we think that you should have work that is not too hard or too easy but is pitched at just the right level to help you to make faster progress. We also think that lessons in Years 3 and 4 could be even more exciting, if subjects were linked together more. We know that you want to do your best and we are sure that if you continue to work hard the school will go from strength to strength.

We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

John Messer

Lead inspector