

Abington Vale Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	121923
Local Authority	Northamptonshire
Inspection number	332309
Inspection dates	18–19 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Peter Callow

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005; it was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	221
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	Jackie Frampton
Headteacher	John Searl
Date of previous school inspection	16 October 2007
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Ashford Close Abington Vale Northampton NN3 3NQ
Telephone number	01604 635071
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school has nearly completed the transition from a two form entry first school to a one form entry primary school. There is one class in each year group except for Year 6, where there are two. The vast majority of pupils come from the immediate area surrounding the school and a quarter are from minority ethnic groups, which is close to the national average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also average. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Reception class. Breakfast and after school clubs operate in a separate building on the site, but are not managed by the governing body. The school holds the award of Healthy Schools.

When the school was last inspected it was judged to require special measures in order to provide a satisfactory standard of education. Since then, monitoring visits have been made each term to assess the progress the school has been making.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. Having improved rapidly, Abington Vale is now a good school. Under the outstanding leadership of the Interim Headteacher and with the good support of the local authority, staff and governors have been totally committed to remedying the weaknesses identified at the last inspection. By putting in place effective systems for evaluating the school's performance and empowering leaders at all levels to undertake their roles and responsibilities much more successfully, he has ensured that the school's capacity to improve further is good.

All teaching is now good or better which means that pupils of all abilities are making greater progress than formerly. Expectations are much higher and, as a result, the vast majority are achieving well and reaching the standards of which they are capable. Standards therefore are rising, particularly in Years 3 to 6, and those in the current Year 6, as in most year groups are above average. This represents a marked improvement since the last inspection. Writing has been correctly identified as an area for development, but already there is evidence across the school that strategies put in place to raise standards have been successful. The sharing of good practice, particularly by teachers visiting each other's classrooms, has been a key element but leaders are aware that not enough opportunities like this exist yet for all teachers and in all subjects.

A consistent approach to the setting of targets and much improved marking provide pupils with a clear understanding of their next steps in learning and how they can reach them. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are excellent. Developments to ensure greater links between subjects and to provide more opportunities for independent learning are making the curriculum more engaging for pupils and helping to provide greater challenge for the more able. Pupils enjoy coming to school, where they say they are happy and safe, including from bullying. Mutual respect between adults and pupils is a strong feature of the school, captured by one pupil who said, 'Teachers have faith in us'. The care pupils receive contributes significantly to their good personal development and well-being. In the Reception class it is outstanding, enabling children to become independent, confident learners who make good progress from their starting points on entry.

Pupils have a good understanding of leading a healthy lifestyle, with many participating in extra curricular activities involving physical exercise, like the early morning dance club. They make a positive contribution to school life through their good behaviour and to the wider community through their charitable giving. Pupils' ability to cooperate well with others is very evident in both work and play and, together with their good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), ensure that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The school recognises, however, that pupils' understanding of the United Kingdom (UK) and global communities is not sufficiently well developed for them to appreciate the diversity of people's backgrounds that they are likely to encounter in their future lives.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children join the Reception class with a range of skills, but overall they are normally at a level expected for their age. Due to the strong leadership, good and increasingly outstanding teaching, as well as a curriculum that meets the needs of young learners, they achieve well and enter Year 1 with standards that are above average for their age. Children are making outstanding progress in their writing, benefiting from a good balance of adult led activities and those they choose for themselves. The excellent care children receive makes a great impact on their personal development and well-being, which is outstanding. Their enjoyment for learning is very evident, when for example they were making beautiful patterns with chalk on the playground, related to a story they had heard. Although the outdoor provision has greatly improved since the last inspection, leaders are aware that apparatus and equipment to promote children's physical development are limited.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards by providing more opportunities for all teachers to share good practice across the curriculum.
- Promote community cohesion through increasing pupils' understanding and appreciation of UK and global communities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Whilst children generally enter the school with the levels expected of four year-olds there is some variation between year groups. The achievement of groups of pupils of different abilities and backgrounds in all year groups, relative to their starting points on entry has improved and is now good across the school. This is the result of a strong focus on providing a consistency of good quality teaching and learning. The standards of pupils in Year 2 have been above average in recent years, but currently they are average because, despite making good progress, these children came into the Reception class with levels of skill that were below those normally expected. Standards in Year 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science, returning to the level they were four years ago. This demonstrates the impact of strategies to increase the rates of progress of pupils in Years 3 to 6. Pupils with learning difficulties and those who are more able achieve well because all work is closely matched to pupils' differing needs. Standards in writing are improving, particularly because of the sharing of good practice. However, this strategy is not yet consistent for all teachers and in all subjects.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good and their cultural development is satisfactory. The school recognises the need to promote this area more strongly and initiatives that encourage inclusion and consider other cultures have been introduced and are beginning to have some impact. Many pupils spoken to said they liked school a lot because they have lots of friends, they feel secure and if they have any problems then they are sorted out quickly. Their attendance is around the national average and punctuality is good. Behaviour is consistently good in class and around the school. Pupils' extremely positive attitudes to their learning make an important contribution to the good progress they make in their work. Pupils'

views about school life are sought and acted upon, especially through the school council, and most recently about the organisation of Red Nose Day.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

A dedicated team of enthusiastic teachers have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection so that it is now consistently good throughout the school. An increasing amount is outstanding. Lessons are well planned and ensure appropriate challenge for pupils of all abilities because activities build well on accurate assessments of pupils' prior learning. The majority of lessons move at a good pace but sometimes the momentum is lost, especially through the overuse or length of time given to working with talk partners. Teachers make the focus and expected outcomes of each lesson clear so that pupils are very engaged in their own learning. Older pupils, in particular, understand the level at which they are working and what is needed to improve their work to attain at the next level. Pupils' learning is well supported by good quality resources, the use of interactive whiteboards and by able teaching assistants.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The better match of work to pupils' differing needs and abilities in English and mathematics has helped to improve the quality of the curriculum and pupils to achieve well. Whilst there is challenge for more able pupils through extension activities and independent work, there are not enough opportunities to broaden the curriculum for gifted and talented pupils. Increasing connections are made between subjects to make learning meaningful and provide more ways for pupils to practise their basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. For example, pupils in Year 5 were seen planning a television advertisement for a food product that they were going to film. A good range of extra-curricular clubs, trips and visitors all stimulate pupils' interest in learning and help them to enjoy school life. The curriculum makes a very positive contribution to pupils' good personal development and well-being, especially through the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

As one parent said, 'The school has a good feel – it is a caring school'. Pupils respond well to this ethos, not only feeling safe and secure, but also being helped to develop good attitudes to each other and to their learning. They know, for example, that it doesn't matter if you make mistakes. Pupils in need of additional support are identified quickly and effective plans put in place to give them access to specialised help when it is needed. The academic guidance given to pupils has improved considerably since the last inspection so that effective target setting and marking are underpinning the increased rates of progress in English and mathematics. The school has rightly identified the need to now consider how these strategies can be developed in other subjects.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The Interim Headteacher has provided an extremely clear sense of direction for the school, based on an accurate assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. In all his successful work focused on raising achievement and standards he has systematically developed the skills and experience of senior and core subject leaders, as well as governors, through well-considered professional development opportunities. They too are now setting a strong direction for the school's improvement. By this, and the introduction of effective systems and structures, such as those for tracking pupils' progress rigorously and identifying those at risk of underachievement, he has built good capacity for further improvement even after he leaves. The very committed governing body has worked closely with all leaders, including the incoming headteacher, and other staff to also ensure that the momentum of improvement continues. Discussion with parents revealed that much has been done to restore the confidence of parents in the school and build an effective partnership. The school's own thorough evaluation of its contribution to community cohesion judges it to be satisfactory. It identifies strong local links but a need to increase pupils' understanding of UK and global communities.

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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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
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	3
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	1
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?	3
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**

20 March 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Abington Vale Primary School, Northampton, NN3 3NQ

This was the fourth visit I have made to your school and on each one I have come with other inspectors to check on how well your school is doing. We have always been impressed by the good relationships you have with adults, as well as one another, and the excellent attitudes that you have to your work.

On this occasion we found the school much improved and no longer requiring special measures to help it get better. It is now a good school. These are some of the best things that are happening.

- The leaders of your school, including the governors, are very clear about how to ensure that the school continues to improve.
- All of the teaching is good so that you are all making more progress than you used to and are therefore reaching higher standards in your work.
- The targets that you are given in English and mathematics help you to know what you need to do to get better and teachers' marking helps you know how to reach these targets.
- You are well cared for, and you say you feel safe and happy to come to school.

There are two things that we have asked the adults to do to help the school to continue to improve.

- Share the good ideas that your teachers all have about what helps you to make good progress in different subjects.
- Give you a greater understanding and appreciation of the different people living in our country and across the world.

I am sure that you will miss your headteacher when he leaves at Easter, because he has worked very hard to make sure that your school has improved very rapidly. However, you have got the arrival of your new headteacher, who you helped to choose through the school council, to look forward to. You can help him to make the school even better by continuing to try your best and behave well.

With best wishes Yours faithfully

Peter Callow Lead Inspector