

The Federation of Abbey Schools (Academy Trust)

Abbey Road, Darlington, County Durham, DL3 8NN

Inspection dates 18–19 December 2012

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Many pupils who join the school in Year 3 have a high attainment in English and mathematics. When they leave at the end of Year 6 standards for the majority are well above those expected nationally. This represents good progress and achievement overall.
- Teaching is good in the majority of lessons. This is because teachers know their pupils well and monitor their progress closely. They also expect the very best from pupils in all subjects.
- Pupils behave well both inside and outside lessons. Most show polite and courteous attitudes towards adults and each other. They feel safe and secure in school and are clear about what to do if they have a concern. Attendance is high because pupils enjoy coming to school.
- The academy leadership team of two headteachers and three deputy headteachers in partnership with the governing body have worked hard to improve the quality of teaching. Their continuous commitment to this is moving the academy forward and improving pupils' achievement, particularly in English.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Lower-attaining pupils do not always make enough progress. This is because staff do not always assess their needs sufficiently accurately and set appropriate work.
- When teachers mark pupils' books they do not always give sufficient guidance on how to improve.
- Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to develop their abilities to think independently and to solve problems, particularly in mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons and parts of lessons taught by 12 teachers and teaching assistants. Joint lesson observations were undertaken with the two headteachers and one of the deputy headteachers. The inspection team also listened to six pupils from Years 3 and 6 read and examined the quality of work in the books of pupils across the school.
- The inspection team held meetings and had discussions with 15 pupils, senior leaders, members of the school staff and four members of the academy’s governing body.
- The inspection team had informal discussions with a number of parents and took into account the views of 59 parents made known to the inspection team through the on-line questionnaire (Parent View).
- The inspection team studied health and safety documentation, and also looked at teachers’ curriculum planning, documents relating to the performance management of staff and the school’s system for checking pupils’ progress.

Inspection team

Marian Thomas, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Julie McGrane

Additional Inspector

Peter William Harrison

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school formed an academy with its federated infant school partner in August 2011; they share a leadership team and governing body.
- The vast majority of pupils are of White British origin with a small number from other ethnic backgrounds.
- A much lower than average number of pupils is known to be eligible for the pupil premium (which provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority and the children of service families).
- The proportion of pupils identified with special educational needs through school action is lower than the average for similar schools.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is approximately half the national average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by:
 - improving the quality of written feedback in pupils' books to ensure pupils are clear about what is needed to improve their work
 - ensuring pupils are given more opportunities to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills particularly in mathematics.
- Improve the achievement of lower-attaining pupils to match the achievement of other groups by:
 - ensuring that assessments to establish these pupils' level of need are accurate and rigorous
 - making sure that work set in lessons matches their needs more closely so they make as much progress as possible.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils arrive in Year 3 with skills and knowledge above those expected for their age. Staff build well on this very good start and many leave with levels of attainment in mathematics and English well above those expected nationally. This represents good progress and achievement for the majority of pupils.
- However, achievement for a number of the lower-attaining pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, is not always good enough. This is because the assessments carried out by staff in order to establish the levels of need of these pupils are not always as rigorous as they should be. As a result, work set in the classroom does not always match their needs. This slows the progress of these pupils.
- Overall progress between Years 3 and 6 is good. Pupils' attainment in English is high. This is because the academy has a very strong focus on developing pupils' reading and writing skills. Pupils are encouraged to read for pleasure at every opportunity. An example of the importance the academy places on this could be seen in a recent 'creative week' dedicated to celebrating the joy of reading. Year 6 pupils presented a reading evening in which pupils read from a variety of books and presented short dramatic interpretations. This was described by one pupil as, 'Very hard to do, but enjoyable and has made me want to read even more.'
- Although pupils' attainment in mathematics is high, it is not quite as strong as in English. This is because insufficient time is spent in lessons on developing pupils' skills in using and applying their knowledge to solve mathematical problems. As a result, pupils are slower to develop the thinking skills required to achieve higher levels of mathematical attainment.
- Attainment for pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is higher than that of similar groups nationally. Over the last year, there has been a rise in the achievement of this group, which demonstrates that the gap is closing between the attainment of this group and others in the school.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teachers have good levels of subject knowledge and are effective at using a range of different approaches to teaching their pupils. Teaching observed during the inspection was good or better with few instances of teaching requiring improvement.
- In the very best lessons, pupils are inquisitive and use their imagination to good effect. This could clearly be seen in a Year 6 English lesson in which pupils were constructing metaphors to describe the sun and moon. Pupils with a range of abilities produced some highly descriptive metaphors including, 'The moon is an Olympic silver medal.' and 'The sun is a luminous piece of sweet corn in a sea of dark gravy.'
- Teachers are good at using information about how well pupils are doing to plan future lessons. They regularly mark pupils' books but do not always provide sufficiently good guidance on how to improve. As a result, pupils are not always clear about the next steps needed to improve their work.
- Support staff work closely with teachers in the classroom and the majority are effective at supporting the needs of the lower-attaining pupils. However, occasionally, when the needs of a pupil have not been sufficiently well assessed, they are not given sufficient direction and pupils make less progress because support for their learning is not as good.
- Teachers' skilful use of information and communication technology contributes well to the lively and interesting curriculum, which offers pupils many opportunities to use and improve literacy and numeracy skills.
- The vast majority of parents feel the quality of teaching at the academy is good. A comment made by one summed up the feelings of many: 'I feel the teachers at the academy do a good

job. They are friendly and accessible and I feel my child has made excellent progress and is happy at school because his teacher knows him well.'

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The vast majority of pupils behave well both in the classroom and around school. They show polite attitudes towards each other, staff and visitors. Scrutiny of behaviour records shows that behaviour is usually good and that the academy has not permanently excluded any child since its formation.
- Pupils are proud to be members of the school community. Those spoken to during the inspection said they enjoyed school and felt their opinions were listened to and acted upon by school leaders.
- Through carrying out tasks such as collecting paper for recycling and ensuring the bicycle shed is locked, older pupils learn to take responsibility for their own and others' safety and well-being.
- The majority of parents feel behaviour is good and that school leaders are effective at dealing with any minor incidents that arise. Pupils are clear about the different forms of bullying which might occur. They expressed the view that incidents of bullying are rare and are dealt with well by staff. Through the effective application of the academy's safety policy pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep safe on the internet.
- Attendance is higher than that of similar schools nationally. However, academy leaders feel it could be higher still and are working hard to reduce the numbers of pupils whose families take holidays in term time.
- Pupils say they feel safe in school and are clear about who to turn to if they have a problem.

The leadership and management are good

- The senior leadership team and the governing body are aware of the strengths and areas in need of improvement within the academy. Their precise and well organised improvement plan demonstrates clearly how they intend to move the academy forward.
- Since becoming an academy, the two schools have developed even closer links and now share a leadership team as well as a governing body. This closer working partnership has contributed directly to an increase in pupils' levels of achievement over the past 17 months.
- This success, coupled with improvements in the quality of teaching over this period, demonstrates clearly the academy leaders' and governors' ability to bring about further improvement.
- Senior leaders have taken a rigorous approach to the regular monitoring of the quality of teaching. Recently introduced lesson observations undertaken by all teachers with their peers have contributed well to improvements in standards in all subjects. The majority of parents feel that the academy offers good levels of support and care to their children that enable them to make good progress both academically and socially.
- The support for pupils' needs and varying abilities ensures that most pupils make good progress. This demonstrates the academy's commitment to equality of opportunity for all pupils.
- Targets set for staff through management of their performance link directly to pupils' achievement and the academy's improvement plan. Checks on the performance of staff are rigorous and both headteachers use this information to make decisions on teachers' pay.
- The academy works with an external school improvement consultant, particularly with regard to supporting performance-management processes. This is helping to set even higher expectations and to improve the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.
- The curriculum offers pupils of all abilities a wide range of experiences. Trips to a variety of destinations enhance learning and enable pupils to develop a better understanding of different

cultures. For example, when explaining about a recent trip to France, a Year 5 pupil described a trip to a French market as, 'Awe-inspiring. People spoke so quickly and the sights and sounds were very different to England.' Experiences such as these increase pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governors come from a wide range of backgrounds. This ensures they have a good range of skills and experience with which to support and challenge the decisions made by school leaders. The recent development of their own governors' handbook has helped them to understand all aspects of governance, including the role of data in monitoring pupils' performance. They have developed, in partnership with senior leaders, an effective system of performance management for staff which links to pupils' achievement. Careful use of pupil-premium payments has enabled governors to give support to pupils whose circumstances may put them at risk and has increased the levels of attainment and progress of this group. The health and safety committee ensures safeguarding procedures meet current requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136989
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	406654

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	359
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	M King
Headteacher	G Ford / E McCue
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01325 380748
Fax number	-
Email address	admin@abbeyfed.darlington.sch.uk

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