

Abbey Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104168
Local Authority	Walsall
Inspection number	286869
Inspection date	14 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Cole

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	186
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ken Worley
Headteacher	Gillian Morley
Date of previous school inspection	27 January 2003
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

This primary school serves an area with a high level of social deprivation. Almost all pupils are White British. Pupils start at the school with attainment that is well below average, and especially low in language and mathematical skills. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is broadly average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. This view contrasts with the school's more cautious assessment of itself as 'good'. This caution reflects a desire to be 'even better'. The headteacher's constant search for ways to improve the school is the mainspring of the school's success. This, and a total commitment to meeting the pupils' needs, ensures that outstanding teaching leads to outstanding achievement by pupils.

A very good, well planned curriculum for Foundation Stage children helps them to get off to a very good start and to achieve very well. There is further excellent progress as pupils move through Years 1 to 6. The progress made by Year 6 pupils leaving the school last year put the school in the top 8% of schools nationally. Progress in mathematics and science was really exceptional. The standards achieved by the oldest pupils are in line with or a little above the national standard. This represents excellent progress from the much lower level of pupils' attainment when they started at the school.

This commendable progress is the result of well organised teaching that caters thoroughly for all pupils' needs. Very thorough checks on pupils' progress are well used to see they get all the help they require. Teachers challenge pupils of all abilities to give of their best and, with the help of the many support staff, provide a great deal of help and very clear guidance. The good curriculum provided for pupils includes a very effective systematic approach to teaching basic skills of literacy and numeracy. A very good range of visits, visitors, special events and after-school clubs extends pupils' opportunities to learn, to take exercise and to enjoy themselves. Pupils have some sound opportunities to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their learning across a range of subjects but these could usefully be extended.

A further reason for the pupils' commendable achievement is the school's success in promoting good personal development and well-being. Pupils have very positive attitudes to school. They enjoy learning, try hard and take pride in their achievement. Good care, support and guidance help pupils to feel safe and happy at school. They are very well behaved in lessons. However, when not closely supervised by adults, some show a lack of self-discipline, for example, in their behaviour in the playground at lunchtime.

The outstanding leadership and management of the school are energetic and enterprising. The school's very thorough checks on its own performance help it to see clearly where it can be still better. It then plans and implements well designed changes with urgency and determination. This has resulted in very good improvement over the last five years. There has been a steady and significant improvement in standards. The capacity for further improvement is extremely good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Help pupils to develop greater self-discipline.
- Increase opportunities for pupils to develop independence in their learning, for example, through their use of ICT.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils of all abilities, needs and backgrounds achieve extremely well. Pupils make very good progress during the Foundation Stage. This is particularly true for personal, social, language

and mathematical skills which are very low for many children when they start out. Children end the Reception Year with overall standards that are below average but this represents very good progress from their low starting point. With further excellent progress in Years 1 to 6, pupils leave the school with standards that are comfortably in line with or a little above national standards. Year 6 pupils taking the 2006 national tests had made outstanding overall progress since taking Years 2 tests four years earlier. The progress was exceptionally good in mathematics and science. English progress was not as good mainly because pupils' results in writing were a little disappointing. The school responded immediately to this with a very thorough set of strategies to improve pupils' writing and the work of present Year 6 pupils points to a significant rise in writing standards. Pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities make excellent progress toward the challenging individual targets set for them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils get off to a very good start in the Nursery and Reception unit in developing good attitudes and behaviour. Throughout the school, good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is helping pupils acquire a firm sense of right and wrong and to understand others' points of view. Pupils make very co-operative relationships with adults in school. Their compliance with the school's expectations makes for calm and orderly lessons. In the playground, some pupils' lack of self-discipline shows in the way they sometimes resort to aggressive means of settling disputes, despite the wealth of guidance the school gives about better ways. However, growing confidence, a sensible attitude to learning, and excellent progress in basic skills are generally preparing pupils well for future adult and working life. The school is succeeding in teaching pupils that, in their words, it is 'cool to be keen'. 'Mini-enterprise' projects are guiding pupils to a simple understanding of the world of business. Pupils respond well to good opportunities to contribute constructively to the school and wider community. They take on a wide range of jobs for helping around the school, participate keenly in school council activities and make charitable collections. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. Many take advantage of the very good after-school opportunities for exercise.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The teaching is very challenging but also very supportive. Pupils are firmly expected to do their best and also given plenty of very effective help and encouragement. Pupils speak highly of the help they receive, especially when they find difficulty in learning. They respond to encouragement and rewards by trying hard, concentrating on their work and taking pride in their achievement. Lessons are carefully planned to see that the work maximises progress by building on pupils' previous attainment and meeting all pupils' needs. This is achieved through good use of very thorough, regular assessments of pupils' progress. Assessments are used well to identify pupils who are having difficulties and to see that extra help is provided. Teachers involve pupils in assessing themselves so that they develop a sense of responsibility for their own learning. They also mark pupils work very helpfully, indicating where pupils have succeeded or misunderstood, praising success and showing pupils exactly how they can do still better. The deployment of both teachers and the many effective classroom assistants is very successfully organised. It particularly allows younger pupils learning basic literacy skills to benefit from much intensive small group teaching.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The very effective Foundation Stage curriculum employs careful observations of the children's progress and individual needs. Thorough, systematic provisions for literacy and numeracy throughout the school result in pupils' good progress. There are well planned programmes of work and extra support for pupils in need of extra help. Carefully targeted individual or small group support helps pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities to make extremely good progress. Planning misses some opportunities to enable pupils to show independence and find enjoyment in learning through using ICT. Limited classroom equipment imposes some limitations here. There is a very thorough, well planned programme of personal, social and health education. The curriculum is enhanced through an excellent range of educational trips and visitors, including authors, poets and sports coaches. Residential visits to an outdoor pursuits centre develop pupils' personal confidence, skills and relationships as well as encouraging healthy exercise. Optional activities outside lessons are commendably varied. They include many sporting opportunities and, for example, clubs for computers, crafts, 'young engineers', library and homework.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Very good relationships between staff and pupils combine with rigorous formal procedures to ensure that pupils' safety and welfare are generally well promoted. However, the supervision of the playground leaves some pupils feeling unhappy about others' behaviour there. Strong links with outside agencies help staff to provide very good support for vulnerable pupils. Very good personal and academic guidance result in most pupils reaching the standards expected for their age despite many beginning school at an educational disadvantage. Pupils understand exactly how well they are doing, remember and understand the individual targets they are given and know clearly what they have to do to reach them. Guidance on healthy lifestyles is well backed up by checks on pupils' dietary choices and related rewards which, very appropriately, offer a free swimming or gymnasium session at a local leisure centre.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher is passionate about ensuring the pupils overcome the disadvantages many start with, and have as good opportunities as pupils anywhere. She receives much encouragement from governors in this endeavour and the full support of a committed and hard-working team of staff. The result of this shared determination is the often outstanding quality of the work of the school. Governors and senior staff set very high expectations for the school and keep a very close watch that targets are met. They are constantly looking for ways to further improve pupils' personal development and achievement. Many well planned and effective innovations are introduced. The school is enterprising in making many productive links with other schools and organisations as sources of guidance and support for its drive to improve. All of this has led to very good improvement in the school. The school received government recognition for being among the top 100 most improved schools over the period 2002-2005. It has continued to improve since.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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	1

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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?	1
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

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

I would like to thank all of you for your friendly welcome when I visited your school recently. I really enjoyed meeting and talking to you.

It was good to see that you enjoy school and that you get on well with each other and with the adults. You have a sensible attitude to school and to your work. I was very impressed at how well you know your targets. You also understand exactly how you can improve. This is helping you make extremely good progress. I think your behaviour is good on the whole, especially in lessons. However, a few of you do not behave well when away from the adults, such as in the playground.

Some of you told me how much help the teachers and the others adults give you. I saw this for myself. All the adults give you lots of help and encouragement. The teachers give you excellent lessons and provide good work that helps you learn. They also organise plenty of interesting visits and events and put on many after-school activities which you enjoy.

I have said that yours is an outstanding school and that the adults in charge of it are doing an extremely good job and taking good care of you. However, I have suggested two ways that the school could give you still more help:

- By helping you all to be able to control your own behaviour, so that you do not need adults to tell you what to do all the time.
- By giving you more opportunities to show how well you can work by yourselves, for example, when using computers.

I wish you all the best for the future,