

Aboyne Lodge Junior Mixed and Infant School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117141
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326535
Inspection date	28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Sue Hall

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	283
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	Ms Jenny Duxbury
Headteacher	Mrs Linda Crawley
Date of previous school inspection	27 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Etna Road St. Albans Hertfordshire AL3 5NL
Telephone number	01727 766117

Age group	3–11
Inspection date	28 April 2009
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Fax number

01727 766118

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: whether different groups of pupils achieve equally well, particularly in Key Stage 1; whether assessment is accurate, especially in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1; and whether the monitoring of the work of the school is rigorous enough to identify areas for further improvement. Evidence was gathered from observations of parts of lessons and discussions with the headteacher, staff, governors and pupils. Inspectors also scrutinised the inspection questionnaire for parents, school documentation and a sample of the pupils' work. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a slightly larger than average size school in St Albans. There are few children entitled to free school meals. The number from minority ethnic groups and the proportion speaking English as an additional language is slightly above the national average, although many have dual language skills. The number of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average although there are slightly more with a statement of special educational needs than often seen. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is in the Nursery and Reception classes. The school holds the Investors in People award and the Activemark for sports.

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 a school that provides an outstanding quality of education. This is because the excellent quality of teaching and learning, the curriculum and leadership all enable the pupils to make excellent progress and attain very high standards by the time they leave the school. These aspects, coupled with excellent pastoral care, also ensure that the personal development of the pupils is outstanding. A very large proportion of the responses from the inspection questionnaire speak with great warmth of the care and education provided for children, epitomised by one parent noting 'the support of the school has been exemplary' and another that this is 'a star of a school'.

Children enter the Nursery and Reception classes with a range of skills and experiences which overall are broadly in line with the expectations for their age. They make excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and enter Year 1 having met and often exceeded the targets for their age. In Key Stage 1 pupils make good and sometimes excellent progress, and at the age of seven standards are above average. The school has worked conscientiously to ensure that the assessment of what the pupils know, understand and can do both on entry and throughout their time in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 is thorough and carefully considered. However, a scrutiny of school records and observation of lessons confirms that such assessments are often modest and under-rate the pupils' skills and the progress they make.

In Key Stage 2 the rate of progress gathers pace and by Year 6 standards are well above average and progress is excellent. By the age of eleven pupils are doing very well with a large majority working at high levels. National test data shows that over recent years standards have been outstanding in all key areas with improvements in mathematics since the last inspection. Overall, the achievement of all groups of pupils is excellent. Pupils with learning difficulties do particularly well because of very high quality support which enables them to grow in confidence and blossom as learners, as do those learning English as an additional language.

The personal development and well being of the pupils is outstanding and many speak with great joy and pride about how much they like their school. A key factor is the 'great nurturing ethos' noted by one parent but typical of many similar comments. Parents also note how inclusive the school is and that 'every single child matters both to each other and to the staff'. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent with particular strengths in moral and social development, where children clearly recognise right from wrong and their own role in society. Behaviour is exemplary; many pupils have good manners and are warmly welcoming to visitors and families new to the school.

Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle and approve of the stance taken by the school council to promote healthy lunchboxes. They enjoy playtimes in the excellent outdoor areas which are stimulating and encourage activity and imagination. Pupils have an excellent range of opportunities to make a positive contribution to the school, local and wider community. Pupils and parents speak with pleasure about how effective the 'buddy' system is, where Year 6 pupils are paired with the youngest children and meet weekly to share stories and activities. This gives the younger ones a 'big friend' to look after them when they start and in the first few months and enables many of the older ones to develop their own confidence and a sense of responsibility to the community. With the development of high-level

skills in a wide range of areas, this equips pupils very well for their future. Attendance is above average and well monitored by the school.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding. In the brief observations and in the sample of work seen there is much evidence of exemplary teaching, with staff having very high expectations of behaviour and achievement. The planning of lessons is carefully considered and generally provides a level of challenge that matches the range of abilities very well. Staff explain things clearly so that pupils know what to do. The curriculum is outstanding, with very strong links between subjects. This was shown in a Year 6 mathematics lesson where pupils considered the strategies used by the Ancient Egyptians alongside what they might do to solve complex multiplication and division problems. The curriculum for the younger pupils is imaginative and often includes role-play activities that motivate them to try hard. This was seen in a Year 1 lesson, where one child wore the beard and wellies of the giant while another wore smaller wellies to represent Jack, while the rest of the class discussed and made lists of the words they could use to describe the two characters.

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good overall and pastoral care is excellent. Staff know and care for the pupils in an exemplary manner, as noted by the parents in numerous, and at times touching, testimonials to what the school has done to support their child and family. Parents say staff 'go beyond the call of duty' in the time and effort they give to help and encourage their children. The support of those with learning difficulties is outstanding, showing both personal warmth and a focus on improving skills. There are excellent links with a wide range of agencies that help ensure the care provided is appropriate and high quality. Child protection procedures, checks of those who help in school and other activities are managed very effectively. Academic guidance is good. The checks of initial skills and the progress made is conscientious and thorough. However, in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1, assessment is overly cautious and often below the levels that pupils are actually achieving. This sometimes 'undersells' what the pupils can do and the progress made.

Leadership and management are outstanding. Key to this is the exemplary leadership of the headteacher. A very large number of parents who wrote to inspectors praised the way the head combines a firm but fair approach to running the school, coupled with personal warmth that ensures everyone feels valued and important. The assistant headteachers model excellent teaching skills and lead the key stages very effectively. Staff work very well as a team and share high expectations of themselves and others. While self-assessment procedures are sometimes a little modest, the school accurately identifies areas for further improvement. Governors are developing their role very effectively with the determination that they will appoint the very best new leaders for their school in forthcoming changes. The school contributes to community cohesion very effectively within the school, local and global communities, including through links with a school in Uganda. With everyone connected with the school being totally committed to its further success, the school is very well placed to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision for children in the Nursery and Reception groups is excellent. Key to this is the very enthusiastic and experienced leadership of the assistant headteacher. She is very supportive of the staff team and leads by example through excellent teaching and a determination to provide a high level of care and education. Staff have developed an attractive learning environment where the outside areas are particularly stimulating, and encourage imaginative play coupled with the development of basic skills. Thoughtfully organised areas and effective

planning ensure that activities build firm foundations for children's learning. Children enter with skills that are broadly in line with expectations for their age. Several have above average abilities whilst others have different skills, including those with a range of learning difficulties. At the end of their time in Reception most children achieve the goals expected for their age and many exceed these in several areas. Because all staff support children very effectively their personal development and well-being are assured and their welfare is promoted very effectively. The procedures to check and track the progress made are good but somewhat cautious, particularly in the area of children's personal development and some aspects of communication. Nonetheless, because of imaginative and stimulating activities the children make excellent overall progress and become keen and enthusiastic young learners.

What the school should do to improve further

- Check that assessment accurately reflects the amount of progress made by the pupils to ensure that subsequent activities challenge all groups appropriately.

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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
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?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1
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?	1
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
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

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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

29 April 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Aboyne Lodge Junior Mixed and Infant School, St Albans, AL3 5NL

Thank you very much for looking after us when we visited your school recently. We really enjoyed speaking to several of you and meeting you in lessons, at lunchtime, in assembly and when we spoke to the school council. We think your school is outstanding - well done everyone!

These are some of the best things we found.

- Mrs Crawley does a great job of leading the school so that everyone knows what they have to do and therefore work really well together.
- Your parents support you and the school very well and you are all very proud to be associated with Aboyne Lodge.
- Your behaviour is excellent, you are polite, kind and hard working and you make lots of progress in everything you do.
- The standards you reach in your work are very high because the teaching and your learning are really effective.
- The curriculum is interesting and there are some exciting things for you to do and find out about.
- The staff are a really enthusiastic team and look after you very well so that you feel happy and grow in confidence.

To help things to get even better we have asked that staff improve how they check what you know and can do so that they provide just the right amount of challenge in your work.

To help your school to improve even further please continue to try really hard in everything you do and show everyone how well behaved and enthusiastic you are.

Yours faithfully

Sue Hall

Lead inspector