

Abacus Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	133312
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	360479
Inspection dates	23–24 June 2011
Reporting inspector	George Logan

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	248
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stewart Cassidy
Headteacher	Heidi Danniells
Date of previous school inspection	10 June 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They visited 17 lessons taught by nine different members of staff. Inspectors held meetings with the Chair of the Governing Body, staff and pupils. They looked at pupils' books, records of their progress, teachers' lesson planning, playtime activities and the school's documentation, which included records of teaching and the main improvement plan. Responses to inspection questionnaires completed by staff, pupils and by 105 parents and carers were also considered.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- What evidence is there to support the school's view that the current Year 6 pupils have made good progress?
- How well do staff use assessment information to plan work which challenges all pupils to make good progress, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities and the more able?
- How robust and effective are the roles of middle leaders, given recent changes in the leadership of the school?
- How effective is the governing body in setting a clear direction for the school?

Information about the school

Abacus Primary is an average sized school and numbers are rising due to housing developments locally. Pupils are predominantly White British, with only a few pupils from minority ethnic groups. Very few are at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. Most children who enter the Reception classes have attended pre-schools and playgroups locally. The current headteacher was appointed in January 2011.

The before- and after-school provision on the school premises is independently managed and is subject to a separate inspection.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. Parents and carers feel that the pace of change has increased recently and have great confidence in the new headteacher. Older pupils are now making more consistent, though still satisfactory, progress and, following a period of decline, standards are rising at Year 6. There is good provision for pupils' personal development and for their pastoral support. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and behaviour is good. They feel safe and have confidence in adults to deal with their concerns. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and enjoy participating in physical activities. Pupils' contribution to the school in undertaking daily tasks is good, as are links with the local community. Attendance is above average.

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children receive a solid grounding in basic literacy and numeracy skills. However, some aspects of the curriculum, particularly opportunities for outdoor learning are underdeveloped. Pupils' learning, progress and achievement in Years 1 and 2 are currently good in reading and writing, leading to above average standards in English in the current year. They make satisfactory progress in mathematics. In Years 3 to 6, despite an improving picture, there are still inconsistencies in learning, reflecting variations in teaching quality and in planning for the full range of pupils' needs, including the more able. Expectations in lessons are not consistently high enough for what all pupils can achieve. In addition, assessment practice, particularly the quality of marking and the use of individual targets for learning, lacks rigour. Pupils do not have regular opportunities to evaluate the quality of their own work.

Overall, the revised curriculum motivates pupils well and provides good opportunities for cross-curricular use of literacy and numeracy skills. Teaching assistants provide effective support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, so that they make generally good progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The headteacher is working effectively to establish a new leadership team and redefine roles and responsibilities. However, with some members not yet in post and others requiring additional training, the impact of middle management is limited at present. Self-evaluation is accurate and an appropriate new development plan is in place. The satisfactory governing body, many of whose members are relatively new, shares the vision of the headteacher. The governing body is increasingly involved in setting the future direction for the school's development through their involvement in the school improvement plan. The school's strength as a community, the good support of parents and carers, rising standards and improving progress in Years 5 and 6 and the viable plan to improve assessment systems and increase pupils' progress, all indicate that the school has securely satisfactory capacity for sustained improvement.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching so that all pupils, including the more able, make consistently good progress and reach their potential by:
 - ensuring that planned tasks provide sufficient challenge for the full range of pupils in the class
 - embedding consistent assessment practice, particularly in the use of individual learning targets and in the development of pupils' skills and confidence in evaluating the quality of their own work and that of others
 - ensuring consistent good practice in the marking of pupils' work, so that pupils have a clear understanding of what they need to do to move their learning on at a brisk pace
 - giving greater priority to improved quality, presentation and rigour in pupils' written work.
- Strengthen the leadership and management of the school by ensuring that recently-appointed middle managers receive sufficient training and support to enable them to have a significant impact upon their areas of responsibility and upon pupils' progress and outcomes.
- Improve the quality of outdoor provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that planned learning opportunities are regularly provided in the outdoor area and that children have ready access to both indoor and outdoor learning.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

Attainment on entry to the school is broadly in line with age related expectations. Learning is most successful in English in Years 1 and 2 and in Years 5 and 6 because activities are usually matched appropriately to the needs of different groups. This is a stronger feature in relation to pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, in part because of the effective individual support and challenge they receive. However, in many lessons in Years 3 to 4, work is not closely enough matched to the needs of all pupils. Hence sometimes more able pupils find it too easy or middle ability pupils find it too hard.

Attainment by the end of Year 6 over the past three years has been broadly in line with national averages. Although it is now rising, progress across the school remains inconsistent, reflecting the variations in teaching. For example, in a Year 1 mathematics lesson, worksheet activities were too difficult for middle ability pupils to tackle without support. For some older pupils, the pace of their mathematics lesson, while appropriately focused on the needs of the higher ability pupils, was too fast for other pupils who found it difficult to keep up and this affected the outcomes. In general, outcomes are best when teachers build on pupils' enthusiasm for learning. This was evident in, for example, a successful mathematics lesson in Year 6, because the teacher had a secure grasp of the material and provided good practical opportunities for estimating and measuring.

Personal development outcomes, including behaviour, are good. Pupils have good social skills and treat each other, and adults, with courtesy. The school council gives pupils a good awareness of the democratic process. Older pupils take responsibility for those who are younger. Good social skills and broadly average, but improving, basic skills ensure that

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pupils are satisfactorily prepared for later life. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Recently established links with China have been creatively developed through the curriculum, so that pupils have an increasing awareness of the challenges of living in a very different society.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

How effective is the provision?

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with the strongest practice towards the top of the school. Relationships are good and pupils are keen to learn. Staff make effective use of interactive whiteboards to enhance their teaching. Though drawing upon a good curriculum, lesson plans do not consistently provide for the full range of pupils' capabilities. The curriculum is generally well adapted for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Skilled support staff work effectively with individuals and groups, so ensuring that these pupils make generally good progress. The school recognises that there is inconsistent practice in assessment across the school. Individual learning targets have been identified in some classes but not in others. Their impact on pupils' learning is, therefore, limited. While work is frequently marked, pupils are not consistently given guidance as to next steps in learning. Opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work and that of others are limited. Expectations of the quality of pupils' written work are inconsistent and, in general, not high enough. In most lessons teachers keep a close eye

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on how well pupils are getting on and intervene to support where necessary. They use sound questioning techniques to probe and extend learning in lessons.

The curriculum offers a good range of learning experiences, with a good and increasing impact on outcomes. The use of topics promotes cross-curricular skills effectively. Hands-on experiences, when planned for, extend pupils' thinking and development well. There are good opportunities for art, sport and physical development. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is carefully planned. External partnerships, including the partnership with a local special school, contribute well to improving teachers' practice and extending pupils' learning. A good range of special events, visits, enrichment activities and good extra-curricular provision all make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and enjoyment. They also contribute to pupils' good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for able pupils is enhanced through activities arranged by the local group of schools.

All staff are responsive to pupils' needs. Transition arrangements are well planned, particularly in supporting pupils identified as potentially vulnerable. The school works effectively with support agencies. There is consistently good practice, as seen in several case studies, in supporting the health, social and behavioural needs of pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

In a short time, the headteacher has set a clear plan to deal with a range of issues such as the quality of teaching, the organisation of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the overall leadership structure of the school, while retaining the school's existing strengths, particularly in relation to pupils' good personal development. Her purposeful leadership is supporting a clear agenda for improvement, which is accurately reflected in the school improvement plan. The headteacher's efforts have been recognised by parents and carers who sense that the school is now on the right track. Together, the staff form an enthusiastic and committed team. However, currently, much depends on the efforts of the headteacher and a cohesive senior leadership team is just beginning to emerge. The roles of middle leaders in monitoring progress and checking the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility are underdeveloped. Well-structured tracking systems are in place to monitor pupils' progress. These are being refined further to address some inaccuracies in past data. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory. While pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities have well-targeted support and most make good progress, the progress of the other pupils is not as consistent because teaching and

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assessment are not always sufficiently rigorous in meeting the needs of the full range of pupils.

Governors have defined responsibilities and are now much more visible in school while carrying these out. Statutory responsibilities are met. The governing body closely monitors all aspects of health and safety, and safeguarding procedures are satisfactory. Governors are working to develop their knowledge and skills in the interpretation of school performance data.

The school works well with parents and carers, whose views are regularly sought and acted upon. Links and partnerships with agencies ensure good support for pupils who have specific needs. Community cohesion is effectively promoted in relation to diverse faiths and lifestyles through the curriculum. Local links are well established and there are well-developed international links with Spain and China. However, pupils' engagement with other communities nationally is more limited.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	3
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	3
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Early Years Foundation Stage

Good induction arrangements, linking to all pre-school settings and including home visits, establish an effective partnership with parents and carers and ensure that children feel safe. Children's welfare is a priority and they receive sensitive caring support. Children fully understand daily routines, behave well and build good relationships with adults and with other children. The indoor environment is attractive and generally well-resourced. However, the outdoor area remains underdeveloped and has few resources to promote learning. As a result, children are seldom tempted to go outside or able to play purposefully outdoors.

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Satisfactory teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy enables Reception children to make sound progress in these areas. Ultimately, outcomes across all areas of learning are broadly in line to those expected on entry to Year 1. Focused adult-led activities, with support from capable teaching assistants, ensure that children systematically develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is sound, overall. While children have regular opportunities for satisfactorily developed practical activities indoors, there are relatively few opportunities for children to make choices or to take independent responsibility for their learning by initiating activities.

Assessment observations are satisfactory and provide a generally accurate picture of children's learning and attainment. The school plans to introduce 'learning journey' files which track the development and progress of individual children and can be shared with parents and carers. The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. However, both the leadership and some key aspects of organisation are in the process of change, in preparation for the new school year.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

Views of parents and carers

Around half of the parents and carers responded to the survey and this is higher than usual. Almost all are happy with the school and the care it provides for their children. The vast majority feel that the school engages well with parents and carers and all feel that their children enjoy school. One said, 'A fantastic school. The new headteacher has really made a difference. The school is warm and welcoming.' Several parents and carers commented positively on the impact of the headteacher and feel that the school is moving forward. Inspection findings largely support parents' and carers' positive views of the school.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abacus Primary School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 105 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 248 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	81	77	24	23	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	88	84	17	16	0	0	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	60	57	43	41	2	2	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	69	66	35	33	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	72	69	32	30	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	66	63	38	36	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	77	73	27	26	1	1	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	62	59	38	36	1	1	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	68	65	35	33	1	1	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	56	53	45	43	2	2	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	58	55	46	44	1	1	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	83	79	20	19	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	81	77	24	23	0	0	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



27 June 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abacus Primary School, Wickford, SS12 9GJ

Thank you for making us welcome when we visited your school. We enjoyed meeting you, hearing your views and spending time in lessons. We found that although yours is a satisfactory school, it has lots of strengths. These are the things we liked best.

You have good attitudes to learning.

You feel safe in school and behave well.

You miss as few days from school as possible.

You make a good contribution to school and have good links with the local community.

Staff care for you and support you well.

You understand the importance of eating healthily and staying fit.

The new curriculum offers you interesting topics, activities and visits. The provision for clubs and after-school activities is good.

The headteacher and governors are really keen to make the school better.

To help you to do better, we have asked the school to do the following things:

- ensure that teaching is well-planned, with better marking of work and use of targets, so that you make faster progress
- ensure that staff with leadership responsibilities have the training to help them keep a close eye on your learning and progress
- provide lots more activities in the outdoor area in the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children learn as much outside as they do inside.

All of you can help by continuing to work hard and doing your best. We hope that you will have every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

George Logan (on behalf of the inspection team)

Lead inspector

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