

# Abel Smith School

Churchfields, Greencoates, Hertford, SG13 8AE

**Inspection dates** 13–14 November 2013

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Achievement of pupils		Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching		Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school.

- Teaching is consistently good or better in all age groups and subjects, and much is outstanding. Teachers are enthusiastic and plan interesting lessons that engage the pupils' imagination and foster their love of learning.
- Governors, senior managers and teachers are united in their vision for the school. They are ambitious for their pupils and are committed to maintaining a happy and positive learning environment where pupils are able to flourish.
- Governors ensure that resources are used well to ensure that all pupils make outstanding progress. Specific funding such as the 'pupil premium' funding is used very effectively to minimise any gaps in achievement between different groups of pupils.
- Parents and carers are extremely supportive and have great confidence in the school to keep their children safe.
- Pupils arrive punctually in school and quickly settle into their lessons. Attendance is consistently above the national average.
- The school is led very well, and the headteacher is an excellent role model for both pupils and teachers. Governors are very knowledgeable about the school's performance. Together they work very effectively to drive continual improvement. Subject leaders are not always so effective in checking and improving the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum is imaginative and well planned to ensure that it offers excellent opportunities to develop pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy and promote their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Pupils make rapid progress in their learning and achieve standards that are consistently above those seen nationally. They have very positive attitudes to learning and speak enthusiastically about their lessons. Pupils, particularly the older ones, often take responsibility for their own learning.
- Pupils behave extremely well in lessons and around the school. They feel very safe at school and enjoy the wide range of activities that are planned for them.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 16 lessons or parts of lessons, including seven joint observations with members of the senior leadership team. They looked at a range of pupils work, visited an assembly and spent some time in a reading workshop for a group of parents.
- Meetings were held with the Chair of the Governing Body and three other governors, the headteacher, other school leaders and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors spoke to two groups of pupils, as well as more informally to pupils in lessons and around the school. An inspector also listened to some pupils reading.
- Inspectors looked at the school’s records of the monitoring and quality of teaching and learning, pupils’ standards and progress and procedures for keeping pupils safe. They also reviewed documents and policies, including those relating to managing the performance of staff, and the school’s judgements on its own performance and plans for improvement.
- There were 62 responses to the online questionnaire called Parent View and 18 questionnaires completed by staff. All these views and observations were considered by the inspection team.

## Inspection team

Gillian Scobie, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kewal Goel

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Abel Smith School is an average-sized primary school.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and the remainder are from a range of other ethnic backgrounds. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium, which, in this school provides additional funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, is below the national average.
- The proportions of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported by school action, school action plus or a statement of special educational needs are below the national averages.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards for Year 6, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' progress and attainment in English and mathematics.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the effectiveness of subject leaders in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning, by ensuring that feedback to teachers is accurate and clearly identifies areas for further development.

## Inspection judgements

### The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Children join Nursery and Reception with the knowledge, skills and abilities expected for their age. They make rapid and sustained progress in all areas of learning and develop an excellent level of social skills. They become confident in their ability to recognise new sounds and will regularly read difficult words accurately. They also develop a good understanding of basic mathematics and enjoy their number work.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding, those from other ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language make equally rapid progress. The small number of pupils who are disabled or have special educational needs are sometimes held back by the complexity of their needs, but even in these cases their progress is never less than good.
- By the end of Year 2 pupils' attainment is above average across all their subjects and achievement is particularly strong in reading and mathematics.
- By the end of Year 6 pupils in all groups reach standards that are consistently above national expectations for their age and ability. They work hard and make rapid progress in English and other subjects. They do particularly well in mathematics.
- The attainment of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium funding is consistently above national averages in all subjects. On average there is a gap of almost three terms between their achievement and that of their classmates by the end of Year 6, but they make similarly rapid progress and the gap is continuing to close.
- Pupils develop their skills in English, mathematics and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as a learning tool very well, and are very well prepared for the next steps in their learning. School records show that pupils across all years and groups have made rapid progress in mathematics, writing and reading since the beginning of this academic year.
- The phonics screening check for pupils in Year 1 shows that most pupils achieve well above the national expectations. All the pupils who retook the check in 2013 achieved at least the expected standard.
- Pupils love reading both at home and in school and talk enthusiastically about the books they have enjoyed. They particularly remember the school's Roald Dahl birthday celebration and many have been inspired to read his books.

### The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching across the school is consistently at least good, and in many lessons it is outstanding. Teachers are very enthusiastic about their subjects and demonstrate high expectations for their pupils. They plan interesting lessons that fire pupils' imagination and ensure that they make sustained progress and achieve outstanding results.
- Lessons are carefully planned to build pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy, and very often include elements that help to develop their social, moral, spiritual and cultural awareness and understanding of the world around them.

- Teachers and teaching assistants work very well together. They know their pupils well and are able to intervene appropriately to support learning and ensure that everyone is able to achieve their very best.
- Excellent relationships between pupils and adults have built a very positive learning environment where pupils feel safe and confident and are willing to take risks in their learning. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson looking at calculating percentages, a group of pupils set themselves very challenging problems and persevered until they were sure they had found the correct answer.
- The school makes excellent use of modern technology to support pupils' learning. Pupils are developing a high level of ability in using ICT effectively and in one class were able to create a well-researched and informative slide show explaining Queen Victoria's family tree using a range of 'hyperlinks'.
- The way teachers ask questions to check pupils' understanding and make them think harder is often outstanding. In a geography lesson the teacher used questions very effectively to encourage a pupil to discover the importance of the equator to the earth's climate and how it affects life on earth for herself. Her enjoyment of the subject was tangible and she made excellent progress in her ability to research and deduce meaning from what she had discovered.
- The school encourages pupils at all stages to become independent learners. As a result pupils are always engaged and enjoy their learning, and are able to learn exceptionally well.
- Marking is nearly always detailed and completed regularly. Comments consistently celebrate what has been done well and give careful guidance on how to improve. Pupils respond positively to the marking of work done in class and at home, and are able to improve their work quickly and accurately from the guidance given.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding**

- The behaviour of pupils across the school, in their lessons and during their free time is exemplary and there is an excellent atmosphere of shared enthusiasm for learning.
- Pupils arrive punctually and are keen to begin the school day. They enjoy their lessons and work cooperatively, discussing their learning and willingly sharing their knowledge with each other.
- Pupils are very polite to school staff, visitors and each other. They move sensibly and responsibly around the school and this adds to the feeling of a calm and purposeful climate that fosters positive attitudes. Pupils play well together and nearly always show each other a high level of respect and courtesy.
- The older pupils know how well they are doing in their lessons and what they need to do to improve their skills and understanding. Their targets are recorded in their homework diaries and this forms an excellent mode of communication between home and school that supports progress and learning well.
- Pupils are fully aware of different forms of bullying and know how to keep themselves and each other safe, both outside school and when using the internet. There is very little evidence of bullying in the school, but where it has occurred pupils, staff and parents agree that it is quickly and effectively dealt with, ensuring that pupils always feel safe.
- Pupils are keen to develop healthy lifestyles. There is an excellent range of sports clubs, both

competitive and non-competitive, within the school and participation rates are very high. Pupils are very proud of the school's participation in local tournaments.

- The vast majority of staff, parents and carers agree that behaviour is outstanding, and school records show that incidents of poor behaviour are rare. They agree almost unanimously that the school keeps the pupils very safe and have confidence in the high levels of care they receive.
- Attendance has steadily improved and is now above the national average for primary schools.

### **The leadership and management are outstanding**

- The headteacher is relatively new to the school but has quickly established herself as an excellent role model for the staff. They have confidence in her and share her focused vision for the future of learning and pursuit of excellence.
- Leaders and managers, including the governors, know the school well and share their ambitions with the staff. Their own evaluation of its effectiveness is very accurate and they have built a well-informed and realistically focused action plan for further improvement.
- All the school's leaders, including the governors, are ambitious for their pupils. They set high standards and work hard to ensure a continuing and improving climate of excellence across the school. However, monitoring and evaluation by subject leaders are not always totally effective. They are able to correctly identify strengths of teaching staff but are not always able to accurately define areas for further development in order to encourage and develop excellent strategies for learning.
- The processes and strategies used to monitor pupils' progress and attainment are very effective and regularly evaluated. Leaders use the information to help them work cooperatively with class teachers to ensure excellent outcomes. As a result all the teachers know their classes well and are confident in their ability to maintain high levels of achievement across the school.
- The curriculum is well planned to stimulate learning and ensure that pupils are able to achieve well. Based on the International Primary Curriculum, it closely integrates aspects of literacy and numeracy and personal, social and health education, and promotes the social, moral, spiritual and cultural development of pupils at each stage of their education. The school makes excellent use of trips and excursions to develop educational opportunities for learning. The trip made by Reception children to the fire station, for example, has led to a range of excellent learning activities across all aspects of the curriculum.
- The school has worked closely with the local authority to maintain and further develop the quality of teaching and learning. The local authority representative has praised the rapidity with which the new headteacher has been able to embrace and champion the qualities demonstrated by the school, and is impressed with her ability to quickly identify ways to introduce strategies that will further improve what is already an outstanding performance.
- The management of available funding is closely and rigorously monitored by the governing body. Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to support the learning needs of individual pupils. The school monitors each pupil carefully to identify any social and emotional needs that may hinder learning. As a result eligible pupils are able to attain standards that are consistently higher than those seen nationally and the gap is closing between them and their classmates.
- The school is proud of its tradition of promoting sports and physical education across the school.

It is already very well equipped and through strategic use of sports funding has been able to enhance the existing provision by the addition of two apprentice sports leaders who will further advance the school's excellent track record locally.

- The governors and senior leaders see safeguarding as an important aspect of their role, and as a result of their diligence and attention to detail the school's safeguarding arrangements meet current national requirements.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The well-established governing body incorporates a wide range of knowledge and skills to support the school well. The governors are ambitious for the school and proud of its achievements, and have great confidence in the new headteacher. They visit regularly and know the school's strengths. They have an excellent understanding of how to monitor school progress and achievement using all the available information, and regularly ask challenging questions about all aspects of school life. As a result, they consistently hold leaders to account and ensure that they deliver a high level of outstanding teaching that is able to maintain pupils' excellent achievement. They set rigorous targets for the headteacher and other teachers at all levels and ensure that staff are rewarded appropriately for all their hard work. They monitor the use of resources carefully are fully aware of how the pupil premium funding and sports funding are being spent and the impact on learning.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117111
<b>Local authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	427237

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

<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	240
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mike Lewis
<b>Headteacher</b>	Gillian Langan
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	26 March 2009
<b>Telephone number</b>	01992 583244
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