



Abel Smith School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117111
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 279988
Inspection dates 29 November 2005 to 30 November 2005
Reporting inspector Mr. Geof Timms LI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Churchfields
School category	Community		SG13 8AE
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01992 583244
Number on roll	221	Fax number	01992504702
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs.Margaret Rice
Date of previous inspection	Not applicable	Headteacher	Mr. Richard Boulton

Age group 4 to 11	Inspection dates 29 November 2005 - 30 November 2005	Inspection number 279988
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Abel Smith Primary School serves part of central Hertford. It is of average size for a school of this type and most children come from above average social and economic backgrounds. The numbers eligible for free school meals are well below average. Almost all children are White British, with a small number from other ethnic minority backgrounds. No children are at an early stage of acquiring English. The proportion of children with special educational needs is well below average. The attainment on entry to the school of most children is broadly typical given their ages. The headteacher and deputy headteacher have both been appointed recently.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Abel Smith Primary School is a good, effective and improving school. This view is shared by the school and the inspection team, and is the result of the school's very good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. The new senior leadership team have correctly identified improvements needed in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2, and have already taken steps to improve provision and raise standards. There has been an appropriate focus on the results of national tests and on raising the teachers' expectations of what children can achieve. Because of this the school provides good value for money. Among the main strengths in the school is the children's personal development. Children are very well-behaved and have good attitudes towards learning, especially where the teaching is strongest. A good proportion of the teaching is of high quality and this results in the very high standards evident by the time children leave the school. Less strong progress has been evident in the Foundation Stage (Nursery and Reception classes), and in Years 1 and 2 in recent years, but nursery provision has improved and current standards in Year 2 are improving rapidly. The staff have to work hard to overcome the deficiencies evident in the buildings and grounds, including the small space in older children's classrooms, and the lack of modern resources as teaching aids in most rooms. The improvements made over recent months have been popular with parents and are clearly having a positive impact on teaching and learning, and on raising standards still further. The senior leadership team consists of hard-working and very able staff who know where improvement is needed. Because of this the school has an excellent capacity to improve further in the future.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue the planned improvements to the Foundation Stage, particularly by addressing the outdoor provision and the assessment and planning for children's learning. - Seek to improve the resources and weaknesses in both internal and external accommodation.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Overall, pupils' progress by Year 6 is good and pupils achieve high standards. The majority of the children starting in the Nursery class have attainment that is similar to that typically found nationally. The attainment in the Reception class is also broadly typical. Children make satisfactory progress and the majority achieve in line with the levels expected by the end of the Foundation Stage. The weakest areas are their knowledge and understanding of the world, and their creative development. Strengths include their personal, social and emotional development. The school has evaluated the progress made and recognised that achievement could be improved. The leadership team has begun to raise expectations and standards. In recent years, children in Years 1 and 2 have made at least satisfactory progress, although standards have fallen slightly

and there has been a small amount of underachievement evident, especially in writing and mathematics. The school has addressed this and the current teaching and learning in these years have been strengthened. It is already evident that this has raised standards and the current Year 2 are likely to achieve better than others in the recent past. Achievement in Years 3 to 6 has been outstanding in recent years. This has enabled children of all backgrounds to reach very high standards before they move on to secondary school. These standards are the result of very effective teaching and the very good attitudes towards their lessons that children demonstrate. In the 2005 national tests the standards were high compared to the national average in English and science, and well above average in mathematics. The science results were particularly strong with almost all pupils reaching a level higher than that expected. The targets set for pupils' achievement are sufficiently challenging. Children with special educational needs make equally good progress due to the very good inclusion and support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Children have exceptionally good attitudes to learning and behave extremely well in lessons because they enjoy school. Adults nurture the children's self-esteem and self-confidence from when they start in nursery and this helps them to develop high levels of independence. On the very few occasions when problems occur, children are confident to try to work things out for themselves first before going to an adult to ask for help. Relationships are very good. Attendance is above average. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Exceptional opportunities for the children to develop healthy lifestyles and adopt safe practices are resulting in high levels of self-respect and self-awareness. Healthy practices permeate the whole school and the children enjoy immensely collecting points in their healthy eating passports. A new school council involves the children well in decision-making about improvements they see as important, such as refurbishment of the toilets. The children take part in numerous local events and support various charities both nationally and internationally. Consequently, they make a positive contribution to the local and wider community and are learning to become good citizens.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of the teaching and learning is good overall. However, there are examples of outstanding teaching throughout the school, and the leadership team has a strong focus on raising all of the teaching to the level of the best. A particular strength is the identification by teachers of individual children and planning interventions to address their specific needs. The best teaching is evident where the teachers have very good relationships with children. This helps develop positive attitudes towards learning. These lessons have very good pace and resources chosen are very effective in extending

children's knowledge and understanding. This happened in a lesson about evacuees where the teacher had assembled the items children would have taken with them to their new homes, and used this to inspire their written work. Teachers' questioning skills are effective in most lessons. Questions are often targeted at specific children, based on the level of their prior attainment. The teaching assistants offer teachers a very good level of support. They help ensure the full inclusion and good progress of all children, especially those with special educational needs. In the few instances where the teaching is weaker it does not always offer children sufficient challenge or guidance on how to improve. The use of information and communication technology is not fully embedded in lesson planning, and opportunities to use computers in everyday lessons are missed. Teachers work hard to make up for the old-fashioned nature of some resources and to overcome the problems of the small classrooms, especially for the older children.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Good opportunities are planned for children in the Nursery to explore, investigate and use their imaginations through a very wide range of structured activities that enable them to make good progress. This is not always the case for children in the Reception class. Creative development and knowledge and understanding of the world are planned sufficiently well for the children to make satisfactory progress. The curriculum for children in Years 1 to 6 is good. A very good range of extra-curricular clubs enriches the curriculum very well. Regular sport and physical education lessons provide good opportunities for the children to be active. Visits make learning fun and bring subjects alive, especially for children in Years 3 to 6. An extremely well-planned programme for the children's personal, social and health education ensures they have high levels of knowledge about the need to keep themselves safe. Involvement in the 'crucial crew' citizenship initiative gives Year 6 children extremely good guidance and prepares them well for making appropriate choices as they get older.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school has very good arrangements in place for ensuring pupils' safety and health. Child protection and health and safety procedures are very clear and well known by staff. Parents value the school's induction procedures, particularly into the reception class. These are very good and so children settle quickly. Children are given extremely good support for their personal development. As a result, they are keen to take responsibility and make a positive contribution to the school. Guidance to help them learn is good. Targets in literacy and numeracy are used very effectively to guide and support the children's learning in most lessons. Planned work includes challenge for the more able and support for those that need special help. The effective use of targets is not yet consistent across the school so work is sometimes not challenging enough to ensure progress is always good or better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school has had significant recent staff changes, particularly to senior management, with a recently appointed headteacher and deputy headteacher. The current leadership and management is good, with some outstanding aspects, particularly regarding the clear focus on raising standards where they are weaker. The improvements already made, and the recognition of those areas requiring further improvement, lead the inspectors to find that the overall capacity to improve is outstanding. The school's self evaluation is accurate and based on clear evidence. Parents are regularly surveyed for their opinions and they are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Pupils' views now have a channel through the newly formed school council. The headteacher has provided the school with a clear and dynamic focus on raising standards, especially in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2. This has already resulted in improved achievement and children making better progress. The senior leadership team make very good role models as teachers and as leaders. The arrangements for performance management are appropriate and this has already seen results in improved expectations in mathematics. The management of special educational needs provision is very effective. There are good plans to develop the provision for more able children on similar lines. The restructured subject leadership is proving successful and staff are working together well to take the school forward. The governing body is effective and provides the school with a very good level of support and challenge. They work well with senior staff and have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, focusing appropriately on the standards achieved throughout the school.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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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?	2	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	NA

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for welcoming us to your school when we visited. It was a pleasure to talk to you and to watch you working and playing. We particularly enjoyed meeting some of the school council who told us a lot about the things you like doing at school and what you would like to see improved. This letter is to tell you about some of the important things we saw. Your parents are very happy with your school, and you told us you are very happy there as well. You are lucky at your school because Mr Boulton, the teachers and other adults all look after and care for you very well. They encourage you to be healthy and to stay safe, and are working very hard to ensure you learn new things and to make the school even better in the future. You behave well in lessons and in the playground and this helps the teachers teach you so well. You have lots of very good opportunities to take part in sports, music and trips out and about. Most of you work very hard and try to do the best you can. Your teachers are keen to make the school even better for you and we think they are very good at knowing how they can do this. They are particularly trying to make things better for the younger children, including their outside area. The school buildings are in need of improvement and some of you are very squashed in small rooms! This makes it difficult for the teachers to help you as well as they would like. We also think you would benefit from some more modern resources in classrooms, such as the interactive whiteboard in the computer suite. Even so, you are lucky to be at such a good, friendly school. Keep working hard and enjoy your time at Abel Smith!