

Abbeyfields First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122245
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	292351
Inspection dates	12–13 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Janice Stephenson

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

Type of school	First
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	304
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Pearson
Headteacher	Mrs Dianne Greenwood
Date of previous school inspection	1 November 2002
School address	Abbot's Way Morpeth Northumberland NE61 2LZ
Telephone number	01670 513582
Fax number	0

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Abbeyfields First School is larger than average and has a resource base for children with severe and complex learning difficulties and/or disabilities, especially autism and communication. Currently, there are 26 pupils in the special group. Therefore, the percentage of pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. Pupils come from a variety of social backgrounds and this is reflected in their attainment on entry, which is average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than average. Most children are White British and there are more boys than girls in each year group.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Abbeyfields School judges its effectiveness to be outstanding. This evaluation is spot on and gives a real insight into the quality and impact of its provision. It is an excellent school where all pupils are treated equally and with respect. All adults are highly professional. They show great care and work hard to ensure consistency in achieving the school's motto that 'every child is special'. The high quality provision helps pupils to learn and grow together within a safe, secure and challenging environment, enabling them to develop as confident, happy and successful individuals. Outstanding links with parents, schools and other agencies contribute to the excellent provision the school offers.

The school's success is mainly due to the passion, determination and vision of the headteacher. She has welded together a most effective team of professionals at all levels, whose shared aim is to provide the very best education and care for all pupils, including those with extremely complex needs. As a result, pupils benefit from experiences that are of the highest quality. The school's approach is characterised by energy, enthusiasm and commitment. The excellent, positive relationships that exist underpin pupils' impressive personal qualities and well-being. The school is constantly moving forward through an approach that encourages evaluation and self-criticism. It is led and governed with drive, imagination and realism. These qualities ensure that the school accurately identifies areas for further development. For example, the leadership team has recognised the need to focus on a play-based approach to learning for children in the Reception classes. The school gives excellent value for money and is exceptionally well placed to continue to be very successful.

All pupils, no matter what their backgrounds or abilities, achieve exceptionally well. By the end of Year 2, they attain standards that are significantly higher than the national average. This excellent progress continues into Key Stage 2, with pupils leaving the school at the end of Year 4 achieving standards that are much higher than those usually seen at this point in the key stage. Children in Nursery have an excellent start to their education. Although progress is good in Reception classes, some activities are too formal and restrict opportunities for children to take greater responsibility for their own learning and make the outstanding progress seen by pupils elsewhere in the school. Achievement is very good overall in the school due to the consistently high quality of teaching. All staff know the children well and provide experiences that are interesting and challenging. Assessment systems are very rigorous and provide staff with a very clear picture of what needs to be done to ensure that all pupils reach the highest standards they can.

The curriculum is good. The many rich opportunities provided in subjects such as art, music and sport help pupils to develop their individual skills and talents. There are missed opportunities in the Reception curriculum for children to learn through play and explore ideas for themselves. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to stay healthy. They keep themselves and others safe and understand how to become responsible members of their school and local community. The school sees these skills as paramount to pupils becoming successful young citizens.

What the school should do to improve further

- Review the Reception curriculum so that children have more opportunities to find out for themselves and to learn from play.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve exceptionally well and attain standards that are significantly higher than average because of very effective and consistently high quality teaching. Children join the school in Nursery with levels of attainment that are broadly typical for their age, except in personal and social education, which is below that expected. Children make good progress in the Foundation Stage, particularly in their personal development, moving into Year 1 as confident young learners who cooperate and work well together. Progress in Reception is not as quick as it is in other classes because some tasks do not always match children's developmental needs. Nevertheless, by the time they move into Year 1 the majority are reaching the learning goals expected for their age. Pupils make excellent progress in Key Stage 1 and, by the age of seven, they are attaining standards that are significantly above average. This has been the picture over the last four years. Learning accelerates further in Key Stage 2, with pupils attaining standards that are significantly above those normally expected when they leave the school at the end of Year 4. The priority given to improving boys' writing is very successfully raising achievement because teachers have adopted different teaching styles to capture the interest of boys. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress and achieve their challenging individual targets because of excellent, high quality support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual moral, social and cultural development, is outstanding. Children enjoy coming to school and many parents have chosen Abbeyfields because of its enviable reputation. One parent said, 'I couldn't have chosen a better school for my children.' Pupils are exceptionally polite, friendly and behave very well because they know that this is expected of them. They relish opportunities to care and support each other and this can be seen in the work of 'big friends' who are vigilant in ensuring that the youngest children and those with complex needs are included in the life and work of their school. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to look after themselves and how to stay safe. They fully understand the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity and say that this 'will help them to learn better'. Pupils make a very good contribution to the school community and pupils taking on the role of 'planet protectors' are very proud of the work they do for conservation. Attendance is satisfactory; some pupils with complex difficulties and disabilities are away in hospital for significant periods of time. Pupils' outstanding attitudes to one another illustrate the school's inclusive nature and its commitment to ensure that pupils have all the personal attributes to become well-rounded citizens for the 21st Century. As one child said, 'It's very important that we get on with people from other places.'

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

The consistently high quality of teaching ensures that pupils achieve very well and reach very high standards. Relationships are excellent and pupils respond positively to teachers' high expectations. Learning, throughout the school day, is a shared experience. This is clearly evident in outstanding assemblies, with everyone interacting in learning French and where they reflect

together upon the culture of another country. Pupils respect their teachers and regard them as experts. They are keen to learn, listen attentively and concentrate extremely well. Teachers use assessment extremely well to pinpoint pupils' progress and carefully identify next steps in learning. This was seen in Year 3, where lower attaining pupils were successfully calculating complex money problems. Well-matched, challenging work and sharp questioning bring relevance and enjoyment to learning and adults are always on hand to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. Different teaching styles and resources have been used successfully to accelerate boys' progress in writing. Teachers use information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning well. Teaching is good in Reception classes but some activities do not match children's different developmental stages. Teaching for the specific group of pupils with complex learning needs is very effective and helps pupils who have emerging literacy difficulties overcome any barriers. All adults in school are highly skilled and work very effectively to raise standards for pupils of all abilities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's curriculum is good and subjects are linked together effectively to ensure that learning is well structured and interesting. Staff work very well together and constantly review and adapt what is taught to suit the needs of pupils, searching for new ways to make activities exciting and relevant. The curriculum for children in the Foundation Stage is sometimes too formal and this inhibits them from making very good progress overall. Pupils have many opportunities to talk with friends, in groups and to the whole class. Their communication skills and understanding of others' needs are boosted by the use of signed English (Makaton). Very good use is made of visits within and beyond the community and of visitors to the school. There is a very good range of clubs and activities. Enrichment permeates the school day from early morning music to after-school sports activities. The curriculum for those taught in the specific group for pupils with complex learning needs is flexible and highly individualised for all pupils, providing a unique pathway to help develop their basic skills and personal development very well.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The school's outstanding care, guidance and support enable all pupils to be successful learners. Pupils know that staff have very high expectations for everything they do and they respond very appropriately by always trying their best. The impressive relationship and respect between pupils and staff is clearly recognised and valued by parents. Staff have a very keen awareness of the needs of all pupils and ensure that pupils are happy, safe and secure, and appreciate the exceptional range of support they are able to access. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make very good progress because of highly skilled adults and outstanding links with parents and outside agencies. Child protection procedures are clearly set out and understood by staff and arrangements for safeguarding pupils are well established. Pupils' progress is meticulously tracked and they know exactly what they have to do to improve their work and reach the highest standards they can.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's leadership and management are pivotal to the school's success in raising the achievement and attainment of pupils and ensuring that personal development is of the very highest standard. She is very well supported by an excellent deputy headteacher, senior leadership team and governing body.

Improvements since the last inspection have been excellent. There is a superb team spirit among the staff and all are valued and encouraged to develop and use their particular skills to promote pupils' learning and well-being. The leadership team rigorously monitors all aspects of school life and mentors all staff involved in the teaching of pupils. As a result, the team is fully aware of the need to review the curriculum for Reception children to ensure a better balance between play and formal learning activities. Governors are exceptionally knowledgeable about the school and are very rigorous in their desire to continually improve standards and provide the very best education for pupils. This can be seen in the way in which governors have allocated funds to secure very high levels of teaching support. One governor said, 'We are always looking for new ways of doing things.' This perfectly describes leadership at Abbeyfields School. As soon as one challenge has been addressed, they are ready to face another one. Areas for improvement are tackled head on and action, including very effective training and support for staff, is taken immediately. The success and inclusion of learners in the special group are central to the school's vision, and very effective systems identify any potential barriers to their learning.

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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	2
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	1
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	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 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?	1

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

14 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Abbeyfields First School, Morpeth, NE61 2LZ.

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. We thoroughly enjoyed your school and you were all brilliant in helping us to understand how it works and what makes it such a fantastic place.

Your school is outstanding. We were very impressed with the way that you care for each other and the way that you behave around school - even on a very rainy and miserable day when you had to spend playtimes indoors!. You told the inspectors that you enjoy school very much and this shows in the enormous pride you have when talking about the different things you do. This was particularly the case when you spoke about the many visits you make to other places, such as Vindolana or a Hindu temple, to support your learning. You also told us enthusiastically about the different types of work you do in classrooms.

You said that your teachers are 'nice and cheerful' and that they make 'lessons fun'. We agree with you and we think that your teachers are very good and that you work very hard. We also think that there should be lots more opportunities for children in the Reception class to learn new things through play that is fun and interesting to them.

Everyone works very hard to ensure that you are happy, well cared for and enjoy your learning. I hope that Elvis and Robert are very well and are still telling you about their adventures in France.

It was great to spend some time with you and I hope that you continue to enjoy school as much as you do now.

Yours sincerely

Jan Stephenson

Lead Inspector