

Abbeyfields First School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	122245
Local Authority	Northumberland
Inspection number	340111
Inspection dates	12–13 November 2009
Reporting inspector	Moira Fitzpatrick

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	3–9
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	272
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Colin Pearson
Headteacher	Mrs Sandra Ford
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Abbot's Way Morpeth Northumberland NE61 2LZ
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 14 lessons, and held meetings with governors, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work, and looked at the school's tracking data, minutes of governors' meetings, the school's improvement plan and records of monitoring and evaluation of the school's work. The views of parents were considered from the 87 questionnaires that were returned.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the accuracy of teachers' assessment and its use in planning work to challenge all children
- the impact of curriculum developments on children's enjoyment of learning
- whether children in the Special group, who have severe learning difficulties, make the same progress as their peers in other classes
- the impact of new leadership on the work of the school.

Information about the school

This larger than average size First school serves children from a predominantly White British heritage. The proportion of children eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above average and the proportion who have a statement of special educational need is very high. The school hosts a resource base (Special group) for children with severe learning difficulties, all of whom have a statement of special educational need. Many children travel from beyond the school's catchment area to attend the school. The school holds many awards, including the Activemark, the Quality Mark and the Healthy Schools award. A new headteacher took up post in September of this year.

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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

Abbeyfields is a good school, with a number of outstanding features. Parents recognise how well it meets their children's needs, whatever they are. The comment of one parent speaks for many, 'The children are always happy and smiling, whenever you see them in school or around the grounds.' The school has withstood well some staffing turbulence since the previous inspection. The recently appointed headteacher has quickly analysed where there are weaknesses and has set appropriate targets for improvement. She has been very well supported by the able and dedicated senior leadership team and a very supportive governing body. Together, they have monitored provision and accurately identified the correct priorities for further improvement. There has been good improvement to many aspects of provision since the previous inspection. For example, there has been good development of the curriculum in meeting children's needs and interests, and staff are now more aware of the need for regular and accurate assessment of children's learning. Taking into account past progress and current strengths, the school is well placed to continue to improve.

Standards are broadly average, which taking into account the high proportion of children with severe learning difficulties and others with special educational needs and/or disabilities, represents good achievement overall for children. Results in national assessments at the end of Year 2 dipped from well above average to average in the last two years as a result of more stringent assessment by teachers to ensure that children joining Year 3 were given correct starting points for their Key Stage 2 curriculum. By the end of Year 4, children's attainment has been better in English than in mathematics, but action taken by the school is raising standards in the former subject this term.

Teaching and learning are good and children make good progress, because the well planned, lively curriculum is strongly biased towards practical activities and children are eager learners who work hard. Children in the Special group make outstanding progress because teachers and support staff have an excellent understanding of their needs and take meticulous care in planning to meet these. In the rest of the school, teachers' assessment of children's needs and next steps for development are less accurate or consistent, so that while progress is good overall, there are instances when it is only satisfactory. This is especially the case for more able children, who are not always fully challenged in lessons. Children's knowledge of their learning and how to improve is developing but is not yet a feature of learning in all classes. The exception to this overall good progress is in the Reception class, where provision and teachers' planning are not based on a regular and robust assessment of children's needs. Here learning is, on occasion, inadequate because there is either a lack of challenge or activities provided do not excite or motivate children. This reduces children's learning and progress to

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satisfactory rather than good in the Early Years Foundation Stage, despite children making good progress in the Nursery class.

Children enjoy their learning because they feel safe with adults and are very comfortable in seeking help when they need it. The school truly lives up to its claim of a school, 'where every child is special.' Staff provide excellent care, guidance and support for children. Families much appreciate this, and parents' questionnaires are almost unanimously supportive of the school. Children report that they feel very well cared for and that there is always someone to help and give advice. They are happy and confident, and grow into caring young people in this secure environment. They develop outstanding personal qualities, such as excellent behaviour, caring attitudes and a very good understanding of how to stay fit and healthy. They eat healthily and take part in plenty of vigorous exercise. Children of all ages thoroughly enjoy the opportunities for both learning and adventurous play in the school's lovely grounds.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards further by improving all aspects of assessment, including:
 - the accuracy of teachers' assessment of children's learning
 - teachers' use of assessment in planning learning activities that closely match the needs of all groups of children, and especially the most able
 - children's knowledge of how well they are doing and how they can improve.
- Improve provision in the Reception class by rigorous monitoring of teachers' daily planning and use of resources to ensure:
 - that they take account of children's differing needs
 - provide activities that are challenging, stimulate children's curiosity and
 - allow them to work independently
 - they promote learning at a good rate.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**2**

From a wide range of starting points, the majority of children make good progress. This is because they thoroughly enjoy school and have very positive attitudes to learning. They join in all activities with enthusiasm and work hard to complete their tasks. Children with severe learning difficulties make excellent progress because their needs are exceptionally well known to staff and they are given every support to develop independence and succeed. Attainment varies year on year between average and above average, depending on the varying abilities of different cohorts of children. There has rightly been an increased focus on raising attainment in mathematics in Key Stage 2 this year. This is because a trend of better attainment in English by the end of Year 4 was noted by the school in the last year. As a result of the school's response, children have more opportunities to use and apply their mathematical knowledge, and standards are improving to match those in English.

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Children develop outstanding personal skills. They understand the need for tolerance and understanding and are accepting of difference. They are considerate and supportive of each other because they follow the excellent example set by all staff. Their excellent behaviour makes a significant contribution to their learning because little time is wasted in lessons. However, more able pupils are not always enabled to make maximum use of the time available. Children readily take on responsibility and are proud to serve the school community either as members of the school parliament, Big Friends or as playground friends. They also make a good contribution to the wider community by giving concerts for local residents and raising money for charities at home and abroad. By the time they leave they are well prepared for the next stage of learning and as good citizens of the future.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
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	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Classrooms are lively and purposeful learning places for children because teachers make clear their expectations for work and provide tasks that are interesting, though not always closely matched to the needs of different groups. Children are encouraged to be

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

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active learners and share their ideas and opinions. The support given by teaching assistants contributes well to pupils' good progress. This is particularly true for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities who often make better progress than others. Children in the Special group make excellent progress because staff make exceptionally accurate assessments of their learning and needs and match these with just the right small steps to move them forward at a very good rate. In other classes, teaching and learning are sometimes satisfactory when children are not excited or engaged by classroom activities because they are not challenging enough. The assessment of pupils' progress is variable and does not contribute enough to sharp planning for the next steps of learning for all groups of children. Teachers' marking and feedback in books varies from class to class, and does not always give enough guidance to children on what and how to improve.

The curriculum provides a good balance of relevant and interesting themes that are well planned to engage pupils and build progress. Literacy is well developed across the curriculum and there are increasing opportunities for children to develop numeracy skills. Teachers use computers well to support the curriculum, for example, in a Year 3 lesson researching the origin of myths, children confidently accessed the internet in a search of answers. Skills are well developed through the wider curriculum and children's artwork is a strength of the school. The curriculum is further enhanced by an exciting range of clubs and after-school activities which enjoy a high take up. A wide variety of educational visits, including the opportunity for a residential stay, give children many opportunities to learn away from the classroom.

Staff know children and their families very well. They have the complete trust of parents and carers who are unanimous in agreeing their children are well cared for and safe in school. Inspectors wholeheartedly agree. Children thrive in the secure knowledge that all adults care about them and for them. They are quick to explain that, 'you don't get stuck in lessons because the teachers always help you.' The introduction of the Early Bird scheme, which allows parents to join children in class for an early start to the day, has been welcomed by parents and children alike and typifies the school's constant search for ways of strengthening the partnership with parents and carers for the benefit of the children.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

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

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The school has well embedded systems for monitoring and evaluating its work and staff are accustomed to taking a lead in improving the school. The new headteacher has brought a fresh focus and given appropriate redirection to the work of the school this term. There is a stronger focus on teachers' use of assessment and the headteacher has begun using assessments of children's learning in the last year to set targets for the current year. This is already beginning to impact on raising standards by giving teachers more detailed information about children's learning and making them more accountable for the progress that children in their classes make. This is giving a necessary drive to improve the quality of teaching even further; the headteacher is ambitious for all staff to aspire to be outstanding teachers. Staff have risen to the new challenges well and are keen to implement change, learn from each others' good practice and reduce inconsistency. Leadership of the Special group provision for children with severe learning difficulties is excellent in promoting high quality teaching and support for children and their families. There is a relentless and successful drive to find the best support for each child's needs. The school's promotion of equal opportunity is excellent.

Governors bring a range of expertise to the service of the school. They are extremely supportive and know the school well. Governors are knowledgeable about most aspects of the school's work, and are developing their expertise in assessment and target setting under the leadership of the new headteacher. Good communication and links with parents ensure that governors have their finger on the pulse of the community. Community cohesion is good, and while evaluations have been informal, but effective, in the past, the school has produced a draft evaluation of community needs this term. Governor discharge their responsibilities for the safeguarding of children well. All procedures and practices fully meet requirements and are of good quality.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

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Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage varies between good in the Nursery class, and satisfactory in the Reception class. Children usually begin school with skills that are appropriate to their age, with some showing weaknesses in speech, language and communication skills. In some years their overall attainment when children start school is below average. Children in the Nursery class make good progress because key workers know the children well and planning takes good account of their needs. Activities planned for in and out of doors in the nursery engage and excite children, so that their curiosity leads them to explore and become independent learners. In the Reception class there is not enough detail in teachers' planning for children's differing needs so that progress is more often satisfactory than good. Staff are not so adept at using and adapting resources to challenge children at different levels, so that often there is too little to excite or motivate children to find out for themselves and learning slows. In some instances, these weaknesses restrict noticeably the development of children's social skills and their confidence to learn for themselves. Where good teaching engages the children, as in the celebration of Kipper's birthday, their enjoyment of learning is evident and they show clearly how much they are capable of. In both nursery and reception, effective partnerships with parents promote children's sense of well being. Safeguarding and risk assessments are robust and ensure children are safe and cared for well. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There have been significant changes to staffing in the Early Years Foundation Stage since the last inspection, and while the leader is aware of current weaknesses in provision she has not yet had time to discover the detail of these weaknesses this term.

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

Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. They value all aspects of its work and are high in their praise for the dedication of staff, who care for their children so well. The parents and carers of children in the Special class are delighted with the provision that is made for their children's very specific needs and comment very positively about it. For example, one parent commented, 'Since starting in Special Group, our son has progressed in leaps and bounds. He is very happy in school

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and has grown in confidence.' Parents are also grateful for the many successful links that the school makes with external specialists who help and support their children. Many parents commented on the changes to school this term and in particular commented on how much they liked the Early Bird system which allows them to enter school with their children and help them settle into class.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Abbeyfields First 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 87 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 272 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	59	81	12	16	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	57	78	16	22	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	45	62	28	38	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	50	68	18	25	3	4	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	60	82	13	18	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	48	66	24	33	0	0	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	47	64	22	30	0	0	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)	49	67	22	30	2	3	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	49	67	22	30	2	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	45	62	22	30	1	1	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	41	56	32	44	0	0	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	48	66	21	29	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	59	81	14	19	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 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 inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

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 were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

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 pupil's 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.



15 November 2009

Dear Children

Inspection of Abbeyfields First School, Morpeth, NE61 2LZ

Mr Cain and Mr Horne join me in thanking you all for the lovely welcome you gave us when we inspected your school recently. You helped each one of us a great deal by talking about your school and showing us how well you get on with each other and enjoy your learning. This letter is to tell you what we thought of your school and what it might do to get even better. First, we agree with all of you that yours is a good school. Here are the reasons why:

- you are kind and considerate to each other and your behaviour is excellent
- you work very hard in lessons to please your teachers and make good progress
- children in the Special group, you make excellent progress, because the teachers plan your learning so well
- you are all extremely well cared for and feel safe and happy in school, because you know where to turn for help if you need it
- you enjoy healthy food and take plenty of energetic exercise
- your headteacher, staff and governors have a good picture of what needs to be done to improve the school and are looking for ways of making your school even better.

To help them do this we have asked that senior leaders and governors:

- improve the levels you reach in your reading, writing and mathematics even further
- help your teachers and you to have a better understanding of how well you are learning and what you need to do to 'learn the next step'
- make some changes in the Reception class so that children there learn as quickly as the rest of you do.

We know that you will help all of this happen by working as hard as you do now. Our very best wishes for a happy and successful year.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Moira Fitzpatrick

Lead inspector

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