

Abacus Primary School

Tresco Way, The Wick, Wickford, Essex SS12 9GJ

Inspection dates

23–24 November 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, ably supported by staff and governors, has ensured that good standards have been maintained at the school since the previous inspection. Despite many changes to the staff team over the past 18 months, the school has been well led and managed and pupils at the school are making good progress in their learning.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good overall. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to develop pupils' learning in a wide range of subjects. However, in mathematics, pupils are not always challenged to do their best. This particularly applies to the most able pupils. Consequently, they do not achieve the higher standards that they are capable of.
- Their role of middle leaders, in monitoring and improving teaching and pupils' progress, is underdeveloped. Many are new to their posts, and have not yet had an impact on improving outcomes.
- The teaching of reading is a strength of the school. Effective teaching of phonics underpins the development of early reading and, as they move through school, pupils develop good reading habits and read widely and often.
- The curriculum is varied and interesting, enabling pupils to achieve good outcomes in a range of subjects.
- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Although writing is generally taught well, pupils are not given enough opportunities to write at length, in English or in other subjects. This prevents them from developing into more successful and resilient writers.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not make enough progress, particularly across key stage 2. The gap in attainment between them and their peers widens as a result.
- Children get off to a good start in the early years. They quickly learn school routines and develop confidence and good learning habits. However, assessment information is not always used well enough to provide challenging work for the most able children.
- The school makes good provision for developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Parents are supportive of the school, and hold it in high regard. Good relationships between home and school are established in the early years and are maintained as the children progress through the school.
- Staff provide good levels of care, guidance and support for pupils. Arrangements for safeguarding are thorough and well documented.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - developing the role of middle leaders in checking on and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in their subject areas
 - improving the support provided for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities so that they make better progress, particularly across key stage 2.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that assessment is used more effectively in the early years to plan activities which provide greater levels of challenge, particularly for the most able
 - ensuring that pupils get more opportunities to write at length
 - providing greater challenge in mathematics lessons, particularly for the most able.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Senior leaders, including governors, have ensured that good standards have been maintained at the school during a period in which there have been many changes to the teaching staff. A strong and effective focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning has resulted in pupils currently at the school making good progress across year groups.
- The school is popular, and regularly oversubscribed. The headteacher's effective leadership is valued by staff, parents and governors and has helped to create a positive, nurturing ethos which underpins all aspects of the school's work. Parents spoken to during this inspection, and an overwhelming majority of those who responded to Parent View say that they would recommend the school to others.
- There have been significant changes to the middle leadership team over the past year. Since September 2016 a new deputy headteacher has taken up post and there have been changes to the leadership of mathematics, English and SEN and disabilities. The cycle of monitoring and evaluation, involving this new leadership structure, has yet to be fully embedded. However, there are signs that the additional capacity is already having a positive impact on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Effective monitoring ensures that school leaders have an accurate picture of overall performance. The headteacher makes regular observations of teaching and learning in classrooms and provides helpful feedback to teachers about strengths and areas for development. Staff say that they feel well supported and that they have good opportunities for professional development.
- The school provides pupils with the opportunity to study a wide range of subjects. There are high-quality displays of pupils' work across walls in corridors and classrooms, showing the range of subjects studied in geography, history and science. Pupils also study computing and have regular opportunities to learn about different faiths and cultures.
- Leadership of the school's provision to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities has not been effective enough to secure good outcomes for these pupils in writing and mathematics. The gap in attainment between them and their classmates in these subjects widens as they move through key stage 2.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development effectively. Pupils are taught about British values such as tolerance and respect through relevant class and assembly themes. Pupils also learn about democracy through activities such as the elections to the school council.
- The primary sport premium funding is used effectively to enhance the school's good-quality provision in this area. Specialist coaches are used to develop staff and pupils' skills. The funding has also been used to increase pupils' participation in competitive sports events with local schools. New activities, such as trampolining, have proved extremely popular and have further improved the skills of the school's many gymnasts.
- The local authority has provided useful support and challenge for school leaders since the previous inspection. The light-touch support that the local authority now provides reflects the school's capacity to sustain improvement.

Governance of the school

- Governance is effective.
- Governors provide good levels of challenge and support to the school. During a time when there have been several changes to the school's leadership team, they have helped to ensure that good standards have been maintained.
- The resounding support of parents and staff, in the respective surveys, are testament to governors' successful role in the strategic leadership of the school.
- Governors are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. They are committed to the school and share the headteacher's ambition for the school to improve further.
- Governors make regular visits to school to check for themselves on how the school is performing.
- Governors understand the link between pay and performance and ensure that decisions about pay reflect the impact of staff on the school's performance.

Safeguarding

- Safeguarding is effective. School leaders have created a culture where staff and pupils feel safe and valued.
- The school's safeguarding policies and procedures are up to date and fully compliant with current requirements. There are good systems in place for staff to register any concerns that they may have about a pupil. Any issues that are reported are followed up promptly and thoroughly by senior members of staff.
- Staff have received training appropriate to their roles and responsibilities. They have completed the training on the 'Prevent' duty and understand the need to be vigilant about extremism.
- School leaders ensure that rigorous checks are made on all adults who work in the school, whether members of staff or volunteers. The school's single central record, for recording these checks, is extremely well maintained and audited regularly.
- Children say that they feel safe in school. Those spoken to during this inspection said that incidents of poor behaviour and bullying are extremely rare. One pupil said to an inspector during a discussion on safety, 'teachers are really good at sorting problems out'. Pupils are also taught how to stay safe when using the internet or social media.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- School leaders have ensured that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment has remained good since the previous inspection. Teachers have strong subject knowledge and high expectations. They use good questioning to establish what pupils know and then challenge them to think more deeply and move on in their learning. As a result, pupils make good progress in a range of subjects, including English and mathematics.
- The teaching of phonics is effective. Children enjoy the phonics sessions, joining in enthusiastically with the sounds and actions linked to different letters. They make good progress in their early reading and writing as a result.
- Pupils continue to be taught well in reading as they move through the school. This is

reflected in the end of key stage reading results, which are above the national average at the end of each key stage.

- Mathematics teaching is generally effective. Pupils learn the basics of number well and are taught how to compute effectively. However, too often pupils are required to repeat the same type of problem rather than being given opportunities to use their knowledge of mathematics to investigate and solve problems. This prevents pupils, particularly the most able, from being able to demonstrate what they know, and move on to more difficult activities.
- The teaching of writing is improving and this was apparent in the books seen during this inspection. A recent successful focus on grammar, punctuation and spelling has resulted in pupils making better progress in these aspects of writing. However, too few opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their writing through extended pieces of work, in English lessons and in other subject areas. This is preventing pupils from developing into more successful writers.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan and teach lessons that engage and enthuse pupils to work hard. They provide opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas during lessons with their friends. Teachers use questioning well to assess pupils' progress in lessons in order to establish what pupils know, and then challenge them to think more deeply and move on in their learning.
- Where pupils struggle with their learning, and begin to fall behind, teachers and teaching assistants provide good support to help them to catch up. This is particularly effective in reading, where early intervention and additional support is used effectively to help these pupils to make good progress and catch up with others in the class.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying. They say that there is very little bullying at the school and told an inspector that teachers 'are really good at sorting things out'. Pupils from each year group are also selected and trained to act as bullying ambassadors. They make themselves available at playtimes to speak to anybody who might be experiencing problems.
- Values such as respect and tolerance are understood well by the pupils. Good teaching, in class and through themed assemblies, helps pupils to appreciate how to live these values around the school.
- Pupils respond extremely well to the wide range of responsibilities that they are given as they get older. During this inspection, Year 6 pupils took prospective parents on a tour of the school, following a presentation from the headteacher. Parents leaving the school commented on how mature and informative their guides had been.
- Pupils show a good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy. A wide range of clubs are available for pupils and the school enters, and often wins, local sporting events. During this inspection, some gifted and talented gymnasts were seen working on new routines.

- Almost every parent who responded to Parent View, Ofsted online survey, said that their children are happy at school, well cared for and safe. Parents value the school's role in the local community. As one parent said on Parent View, 'There is excellent community spirit and a welcoming, positive ethos at the school. Staff are helpful and passionate about the progress of students.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy school. They are punctual and attend regularly. Overall rates of attendance are above the national average and few pupils are persistently absent.
- Pupils develop good attitudes to learning. They work well in lessons and show good determination to succeed. However, pupils' positive attitudes are not reflected in the way in which they present their work. Not enough pupils take pride in their handwriting or presentation. As a result, work in books is often untidy and poorly presented.
- Pupils behave well. They form good relationships with one another and enjoy each other's company. They enjoy play times and, during the dinner break, they sit together and happily share a conversation over their meal.
- All members of staff feel well supported by school leaders and believe that behaviour is well managed. Parents share this view.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils generally achieve well at Abacus Primary School. The 2016 key stage 2 test results, and the work seen in pupils' books during this inspection, show that most pupils are well prepared for secondary school by the time they leave Year 6.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their early reading skills in the Reception class and Year 1. The percentage passing the phonics check in 2016 was above the national average, as it had been in the two preceding years. In 2016, the percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard in reading at the end of Year 2 was also above the national average. The percentage of pupils working at greater depth was almost twice the national average.
- The effective teaching of reading helps to ensure that older pupils develop an interest in reading for pleasure. Many pupils in key stage 2 read widely and often. Those spoken to during this inspection had developed good reading habits and demonstrated a good awareness of children's literature. The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading at the end of key stage 2 in 2016 was above the national average.
- Writing outcomes in 2016 were not as high as those seen in reading. At the end of key stage 2 the results were broadly in line with the national average for those reaching the expected standard and those working at greater depth. This does not represent good progress, from high starting points at the end of key stage 1, for too many pupils. School leaders have recognised this relative weakness and have put measures in place to secure improvement.
- School leaders recognised that the small number of disadvantaged pupils at the school were not making enough progress, over key stage 2, to catch up with other pupils.

They have taken action to address this, by ensuring that better use was made of the additional funding. As a result, the disadvantaged pupils currently at the school are well supported and are making good progress.

- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities receive additional support, both in class and within small withdrawal groups. However, the progress that they make in reading and writing is too slow. This means that the gap between their attainment and that of their peers widens as they move through the school.
- The percentage of pupils working at the expected standard in mathematics at the end of key stage 2 was just above the national average in 2016. However, progress is not as rapid as it should be, particularly for the most able pupils, and too few achieved the higher score in the tests. Evidence seen in books reflects improvements to the quality of teaching this year, but these improvements need to be sustained and built on so that more pupils make better progress.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start at the school with skills and abilities which are generally at or above those typically seen. They make good progress in the Reception class. Over the past two years, an above-average percentage of pupils have achieved a good level of development at the end of the Reception Year. This means that almost all children are well prepared for the next stage of their education when they move into Year 1.
- The early years is led well. Good procedures are in place to ensure children's safety and a broad range of activities is provided that meet children's needs and help them to make good progress in their learning.
- From the start of their time in the Reception class children are encouraged to develop independence and good attitudes to learning. Children come into school each day ready to learn. They show good social skills, hanging their coats up and registering themselves on the attendance board. The calm, purposeful start to the day sets the tone for the learning that follows.
- Children's behaviour is good and shows that they feel safe. This is because staff provide a caring, nurturing environment in which children learn how to get on with each other, take turns and communicate effectively. Children talk politely to each other and to the adults who teach them. They enjoy playing together and working together.
- The early years staff have a good knowledge of each individual child, and their strengths across the different areas of learning. However, this information is not always used well enough to plan activities which challenge children to think more deeply. As a result the progress that they make, in areas such as number, is not as rapid as it could be.
- The learning environment is attractive and well organised. Staff provide a range of exciting activities for pupils, both inside and in the outside area.
- The school regularly shares information with parents about the activities that children are engaged with in school through an online facility. Parents appreciate the opportunities that they have to view photographs and details of various learning activities that their children are involved in during their days in school.

School details

Unique reference number	133312
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10023422

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	327
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stewart Cassidy
Headteacher	Heidi Danniells
Telephone number	01268 571018
Website	www.abacusprimaryschool.co.uk
Email address	head@abacus.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 June 2013

Information about this school

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- There have been a number of changes to the teaching staff since the previous inspection.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is well below the national average.
- The early years consists of two full-time Reception classes.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well below the national average.
- The school meets the floor standards, which are the government's minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in all classes. Five lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher. Inspectors also observed other aspects of the school's work and scrutinised work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders for mathematics and English.
- The lead inspector spoke with a group of governors.
- An inspector met with groups of pupils to discuss behaviour and safety. Another inspector listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour and attitudes in classrooms, and at breaks and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with parents before school and scrutinised the 80 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also considered 19 questionnaires completed by staff and 52 completed by pupils.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation relating to the school's safeguarding arrangements, and records relating to behaviour, attendance and the quality of teaching and learning.

Inspection team

Paul Tomkow, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Ceri Evans	Ofsted Inspector
Amanda Godfrey	Ofsted Inspector
Annie Hookway	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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