

Inspection of Abbey Infants' School

Cleveland Terrace, Darlington, County Durham DL3 8JA

Inspection dates: 16 and 17 November 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Abbey Infants is a welcoming and happy school. Staff and pupils are inspired by the school motto to 'Aim high, Work hard, Achieve together.' These values run through every aspect of the life of the school.

Pupils feel safe because they know that adults listen to them and care about them. They learn to express their thoughts and feelings in personal, social, health and economic lessons. Pupils can also access Lego and sand therapy sessions delivered by trained members of staff.

Around the school and at breaktimes, pupils are kind and considerate. They respond to the high expectations expressed by staff. Bullying is rare and pupils are confident any concerns would be sorted out quickly.

Pupils benefit from the close ties with Abbey Junior School. Older pupils act as role models, supporting younger pupils in their play at lunchtime. Year 2 pupils access the junior building and know what to expect in Year 3. This helps to ensure a smooth transition.

The school offers a variety of clubs such as multi-skills, French, football and dance. These are very popular and enable pupils to develop their talents and interests.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Abbey Infants and Abbey Junior school adjoin each other. One governing body and senior leadership team lead both schools. Some subject leaders are based in the junior building but lead the curriculum from early years onwards. Subject leaders are passionate about their curriculum areas. They offer training and advice to colleagues in delivering the curriculum.

The curriculum is broad, well organised and ambitious. In most subject areas, specific skills, knowledge and vocabulary have been identified and prioritised. End points and assessment activities are clear. In geography, this includes a structured approach to fieldwork. Pupils enjoy the practical approach to the subject and can recall their previous learning. In mathematics, the curriculum is designed to feature regular recaps to make learning memorable. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in learning.

In some subjects, such as history and religious education (RE), leaders are redesigning the curriculum content. Through their monitoring, leaders have recognised that pupils are less confident in these subjects. The history leader is looking to identify subject-specific vocabulary to teach in the planned topics. The new RE curriculum is detailed and ambitious, but still in its infancy.

Leaders believe learning to read 'unlocks the rest of the curriculum'. In early years, children develop their language and listening skills through songs, rhymes and

interaction with adults. Leaders have made sure that staff have the expertise to deliver the new phonics programme. Daily phonics sessions are taught consistently well. The books that pupils read are closely matched to the sounds that they know. Pupils who fall behind are given the right support to get them back on track. Pupils learn to read fluently and develop a love of reading. They have opportunities to read for pleasure and enjoy their daily story time sessions.

The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) attending this school has increased in recent years. Pupils join the school from a range of different nurseries. Leaders work with the nurseries to find out about pupils' individual needs. This helps them to make sure that the right support is put in place. Pupils throughout school develop well socially and academically. Teachers make adaptations so that pupils with SEND can access the curriculum. A personalised curriculum is in place for some pupils with a high level of need.

Leaders promote pupils' personal development well. Leaders enrich the curriculum by inviting a variety of visitors into school. Pupils also visit places of interest such as the local mosque, Raby Castle and Hardwick Park. Pupils are taught how to keep physically and mentally healthy. Through assemblies, they learn about fundamental British values. Pupils hear stories about inspirational people and reflect on how they can further improve their own actions.

Pupils behave well, particularly in early years. The children in Reception have learned the class and lunchtime routines well. They enjoy receiving praise for their positive actions. Leaders have systems in place to follow up any pupil absence. Pupils' attendance is good.

Members of the governing body are well informed about the strengths of the curriculum and the areas to develop. They ask pertinent questions when challenging senior leaders and undertake various monitoring roles. Staff appreciate the efforts of senior leaders to reduce their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders ensure that pupils learn about online and offline risks. Leaders regularly update parents with newsletters about online safety and parental controls on electronic devices.

Staff are fully aware of the school's safeguarding procedures and receive up-to-date training on child protection issues. Leaders work with partner agencies to support pupils and families who are in need.

Senior leaders who oversee staff recruitment ensure a rigorous selection policy is followed. Thorough checks are made prior to new staff joining the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The previous RE curriculum based on the locally agreed syllabus lacked sufficient detail and ambition. As a result, pupils have a limited understanding of faith and the religions they have studied. Leaders should fully implement the new RE curriculum and ensure that this is embedded in the school. Staff require further training to enable this. Leaders should also identify any gaps in pupils' learning from previous years and include opportunities to catch up in the new curriculum.
- In the majority of subjects, leaders have identified the knowledge they want pupils to learn and when. In some subjects, such as history, teachers do not know precisely what should be taught. Leaders should ensure that teachers know the exact content leaders want pupils to learn.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	136988
Local authority	Darlington
Inspection number	10229019
Type of school	Infant
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	263
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Emma de la Motte
Headteacher	Jonathan Briggs
Website	www.abbeyfed.darlington.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	June 2008

Information about this school

- This is one of the two schools that form the Federation of Abbey Schools Academy Trust.
- The two schools share members of staff, including senior leaders.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, the SEND coordinator and the early years leader.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in four subjects: reading, mathematics, history and geography. To do this, they met with curriculum leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, listened to pupils read and met with teachers and pupils. Inspectors also looked at curriculum documentation.

- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector scrutinised the single central record and reviewed safeguarding paperwork and systems. The inspectors spoke to leaders, teachers, support staff, governors and pupils. The lead inspector met representatives of the local governing body.
- The lead inspector met with the trust representatives, including the chief executive officer.
- Responses to the pupil, parent and staff surveys were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Mary Cook, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nichola Irving	Ofsted Inspector
Lynn Chambers	Ofsted Inspector

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