

Abbey Woods Academy

Wimblestraw Road, Berinsfield, Wallingford, Oxfordshire OX10 7LZ

Inspection dates

23–24 May 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Although much improved, the remaining variability in the quality of teaching means that pupils' progress is not consistently strong enough across classes and subjects.
- Pupils are starting to catch up with others nationally but, for some, there is still a long way to go.
- While rising, outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not consistently good. Leaders do not check thoroughly the difference made by funding for these pupils.
- Pupils' writing is improving. However, in some classes, they do not write for long enough to make quicker progress.
- In some classes, pupils' understanding lacks sufficient depth for them to be able to use their learning confidently in different situations, including the most able.
- Teaching is notably stronger than it was in the past, but teachers do not consistently provide the right level of challenge to meet the differing needs of pupils across the class.
- Leaders are not consistently precise and incisive enough in their feedback to teachers about ways to improve their practice.
- Some pupils still miss too much school.
- Changes in the leadership of the early years have meant that improvements over time have not been as quick as they could have been.

The school has the following strengths

- The combined effort of leaders and staff at all levels has eradicated previously widespread inadequacies. Leaders are realistic about the challenges that remain and there is a shared determination to succeed.
- Middle leaders make a significant contribution to the school's successes. They know what needs doing next to raise standards further, for example through developing pupils' understanding of what they read.
- Staff have significantly raised their expectations of what pupils can achieve.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare have improved substantially since the previous inspection and are now good. Pupils' hard work and positive attitudes are contributing well to their improving progress.
- The trust has begun to consider ways to expand the small rapid improvement board into a full local governing body.

Full report

In accordance with section 13(4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management further by:
 - sharpening the focus on the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able
 - checking thoroughly the impact that the use of additional funding has had on pupils' outcomes and adjusting spending decisions as necessary
 - providing consistently high-quality feedback and support to teachers to help them refine their practice
 - securing greater consistency in the quality of education across a wide range of subjects
 - establishing sustainable governance arrangements.
- Secure consistently good or better teaching and outcomes by:
 - providing the right levels of challenge, particularly for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and the most and least able more consistently
 - promoting a deeper level of understanding for pupils so that they use and apply what they have learned in different contexts, including the most able
 - making sure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to write for longer periods to develop the full range of their skills
 - implementing plans to strengthen the teaching of pupils' reading comprehension skills.
- Ensure that Reception children attend regularly, and reduce the proportion of disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities who are frequently absent across the school.
- Establish high-quality leadership of the early years to secure the necessary improvements to bring the overall quality of provision to at least good.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- The quicker pace of improvement achieved recently has not been sustained for long enough to secure a good quality of education for all pupils. Pupils' progress is accelerating but remains more uneven than it should be. Many pupils still have some way to go to make up on lost ground.
- While the school is definitely moving in the right direction, leaders' focus on key groups, such as disadvantaged pupils, those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and the most able, is still not sharp enough. Leaders and governors do not check carefully enough what difference their spending of additional funding makes. This includes the pupil premium and additional funding for special educational needs and sports.
- Leaders have not secured consistently good teaching. While they have successfully eradicated previous inadequacies, the guidance senior leaders offer teachers is not consistently precise or incisive enough to lead to more significant improvement.
- Feedback for teachers provides them with a broad picture of the strengths of their practice and points for improvement. Teachers are very receptive to feedback and keen to improve, but not all leaders make enough of opportunities to prompt staff to evaluate and adapt their own teaching.
- Written monitoring records of teaching and learning are detailed, evaluative and constructive. However, leaders do not look closely enough at how well key groups of pupils are doing when considering the effectiveness of teaching.
- By their own admission, the focus of leaders and teachers has predominantly been on securing much-needed improvements in English and mathematics. There are also pockets of effective practice in subjects such as science, music and physical education. However, although pupils experience learning across a broad range of subjects, the overall quality of education across the curriculum is too variable.
- With greater clarity over headship arrangements, more consistent messages about the direction of travel have accelerated the pace of improvement in recent months. Staff morale is high. There is a strong sense of teamwork and mutual support. Staff value the calm, reassuring leadership of the headteacher. They feel they have a voice and a role in securing important improvements.
- In the course of this academic year, leaders have refocused their attention more sharply towards accelerating pupils' progress. They have lifted academic expectations substantially. Producing and working towards tighter and more streamlined plans for improvement have increased the momentum of improvement well. Leaders are establishing a much stronger programme of regular and cyclical checks to ensure that improvements are made and sustained.

- The quality of leadership by those responsible for key subjects or aspects of the school's work is a significant asset. These leaders are confident in both coaching staff and holding them to account for making the necessary improvements. They have a secure understanding of the school's effectiveness. They are also clear-sighted about what to do next, demonstrating strong capacity to make these changes happen.
- The leadership of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is developing well. Progress in this aspect of the school's work was previously slowed by the amount of time it took to secure sustainable leadership. There are strong links with other professionals to enhance support for pupils with higher levels of need.
- The special educational needs coordinator has begun to measure and check closely which are the most and least effective strategies for helping pupils to catch up. Several parents of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities commented on the improvements they have noticed.
- Most parents who spoke with inspectors are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Those who are more reserved still think that the school is moving in the right direction. They feel that communication with the school is much improved.
- The school promotes fundamental British values well. Pupils have a good understanding of the meaning of democracy, both within and beyond the school's confines. Pupils learn about a variety of faiths and cultures, and convey a strong sense of respect for difference. Their developing understanding of the values of family life, rights, responsibilities and community living prepare them well for their future lives.
- The leadership of the school's work to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has strengthened recently. The new leader has worked swiftly with staff to audit the varied opportunities pupils already have and plan proactively for how this can be further improved.
- There are indications that leaders' spending of the sport premium has made a positive difference. For example, leaders report that increased access to swimming lessons has improved pupils' proficiency and confidence in water. A wider range and greater number of sports opportunities for pupils are said to have increased participation rates. However, the evidence for these improvements is anecdotal, and leaders do not have the measurable data to back it up.
- Recent support from other schools in the trust has wisely had a dual focus: improving education for pupils and building the capacity of school leaders at different levels. Helpful local authority guidance for the early years has contributed to steady improvements over time in the environment and teaching. The local authority inclusion team has provided useful advice to leaders about how to develop their analysis of the outcomes of vulnerable groups, although this is still a work in progress.

Governance

- The trust is holding school leaders much more tightly to account than they have in the past. Robust and regular challenge is evident, including through joint monitoring activities. This has been one factor that has contributed to the recently accelerated pace of improvement.

- A small 'rapid improvement board' currently forms the local governance arrangements for the school. Governors increasingly strike the right balance between appropriate levels of challenge and support to make sure that school leaders are rigorous and systematic in their approach to securing improvements.
- Rightly, governors are sharpening their focus on the impact leaders have on pupils' outcomes. For example, they interrogate trends in attendance figures. They have recently begun to carry out a closer examination of how well disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are doing. Recent reports from the headteacher helpfully contain a more comprehensive range of information about these different groups. However, this work remains at an early stage of development.
- Governors are acutely aware of the challenges that remain to bring standards up to where they should be. With suitable timing, local governors and the trust have begun to think about how the rapid improvement board might evolve into sustainable local governance arrangements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have completely overhauled a number of safeguarding systems since the previous inspection. Site security concerns have been fully resolved.
- Rigorous and systematic pre-employment checks help to confirm the suitability of all adults to work with children. Regular quality assurance by governors and the trust ensure that all of these procedures are tight. Recently strengthened induction and training procedures ensure that staff have the relevant knowledge and understanding to carry out their different roles.
- Record-keeping is systematic and well organised. Leaders do not hesitate to consult other professionals or agencies if in doubt. Outcomes of any concerns are clearly recorded and dated, with individual responsibilities for next steps both actioned and signed.
- The trust's safeguarding lead very recently carried out a detailed audit of the school's safeguarding arrangements, identifying no concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too variable between classes and subjects to be considered good overall.
- Not enough teachers are sufficiently skilful at meeting the varying needs of different groups of pupils in their classes and providing the right level of challenge. Over time, teaching across the school does not move pupils on consistently well from their different starting points, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Teaching in some classes does not promote enough depth of understanding for pupils to secure quicker progress, including for the most able. This is sometimes because pupils know how to complete a particular task, but are unsure about the different situations where that learning may be useful to apply their skills and understanding in the future. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do not use what they have learned in extra help sessions consistently well in their classwork.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils have risen considerably during the current academic year. They now have generally high expectations and pupils are rising well to this challenge with increasing enthusiasm.
- Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution. They work well in partnership with the teacher to provide effective support, including to break down any communication barriers for pupils who speak English as an additional language. While teachers are teaching the whole class together, they listen carefully to pupils' responses to assess their understanding, picking up and tackling misconceptions as necessary.
- Adults make effective use of resources to support pupils' learning. In mathematics in particular, teachers utilise a wide range of apparatus and visual images to support pupils' understanding, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers think carefully about how to make lessons engaging and provide varied tasks for pupils to help make learning memorable. Pupils say that they enjoy this variety and recall their practical learning very well.
- There are many important strengths in the quality of questioning. Teachers prompt pupils to draw on their previous learning and give pupils opportunity to think, without providing them, too readily, with the correct answer. They target their questions to a range of pupils of different abilities, checking their understanding carefully.
- Where teaching is most effective, teachers have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. They use this information precisely to pinpoint strategies to accelerate pupils' progress. For example, in mathematics, they build strong foundations of skills and understanding that allow pupils to apply their learning in different contexts or situations. At other times, pupils flounder when faced with these challenges, because they do not have the depth of understanding required.
- Both parents and pupils commented on the regular homework which supports their learning in school well. They have noticed that teachers are expecting a lot of pupils academically now. Parents of older pupils explained how this is helping prepare them well for their secondary schools.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite, respectful and friendly. The school's ethos places a strong emphasis on respect at all levels, and pupils subscribe to this and take its importance seriously. In lessons, better teaching has helped make pupils much more enthusiastic to learn.

- Pupils are industrious and mostly work hard, which makes an important contribution to their accelerating progress. They usually feel well challenged, including the most able, and have positive attitudes towards learning from their mistakes. The quality of presentation in pupils' written work, including disadvantaged pupils, has improved markedly. They take pride in what they produce.
- The variety of learning opportunities and experiences offered promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils engage in moral debate and learn about different religions. They come together to sing a wide range of music, with appropriately adjusted levels of control and sensitivity, or enthusiasm and gusto, according to the song. They engage in various fundraising activities, often instigated by the pupils themselves. The headteacher has clear ideas about how to draw even more on the opportunities locally to further enrich pupils' learning experiences.
- Pupils feel safe. They have a suitably developing understanding of how to keep safe online, relative to their age. Parents are confident that their children are safe in school. They value the improvements that have been made to site security.
- Taking account of all available evidence, bullying is rare and dealt with well. Potential issues are logged and carefully tracked. Some parents expressed how the school's work to tackle bullying is much improved, reporting that both pupils and parents are listened to properly. Leaders are readily accessible at the school gate to hear any parents' concerns. Pupils say that adults help them to resolve any social issues and learn how to get on well together.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Older pupils are emphatic that behaviour has improved considerably. Inspectors agree. The overwhelming majority of pupils respond very well to the clear boundaries and high expectations now conveyed by leaders and staff.
- The new behaviour policy is securing a consistency of approach between lessons and breaktimes. Pupils like the system and think that lunchtime supervisors using the same strategies works well. Pupils' behaviour in the music assembly observed during the inspection was impeccable.
- In some classes, standards of behaviour are very high, although this is not entirely consistent across the school. However, the less consistently positive behaviour of a very few individuals seldom disrupts learning for others.
- Leaders have made procedures around investigating and tackling absence much tighter, with regular monitoring to check that any follow-up has made the necessary difference. Consequently, pupils are gradually attending school more regularly and fewer pupils than in the past are frequently absent. However, some of the potentially most vulnerable pupils account for most of the pupils who still miss too much school, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils' progress is not consistently strong across classes and a broad range of subjects. Pupils' skills in subjects other than English and mathematics do not build consistently enough across the school. Consequently, pupils are not set up as well as they should be for the next stage of their education.
- The legacy from previously widespread and significant underachievement remains. While rising steadily, standards remain lower than they could or should be, because the progress of current pupils is not consistently strong enough. Not enough most-able pupils reach the higher standards or outcomes of which they are capable.
- Overall, different groups of current pupils are making at least enough progress to ensure that they don't fall any further behind. Disadvantaged pupils are beginning to catch up steadily with other pupils nationally. However, these differences are not diminishing consistently well across the school.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are doing much better at key stage 1 now, where there is less of a legacy of underachievement to overcome. The picture at key stage 2 for this group is much more variable.
- Current pupils are making quicker progress in writing, in particular, than they or their predecessors did in the past. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to write for varied and engaging purposes. Most-able pupils use ambitious vocabulary and develop their use of figurative language. Pupils' spelling is improving, and pupils try hard to sound out increasingly ambitious vocabulary, making good use of their developing phonics skills. However, pupils are not always expected to sustain each writing task for long enough to fully develop their skills.
- Pupils learn a good range of concepts in mathematics. Teachers are getting much better at ensuring that pupils' learning builds systematically and logically over time. Pupils experience an increasingly rich range of activities that require them to reason or problem-solve, but the frequency of these valuable opportunities remains variable across the school.
- Younger pupils' knowledge and use of phonics is improving well this year. Training for staff and a more consistent approach to teaching phonics is paying off. Across the school, pupils have positive attitudes to reading. They have access to a range of appropriately challenging texts which they read with increasing fluency and expression. The literacy leader has identified correctly that developing pupils' comprehension skills consistently well is the next focus to raise reading standards further.
- Compared with previously very low standards, the attainment of the most able pupils is also rising. In some classes, most-able pupils, including those who are also disadvantaged, can explain their learning in more detail, revealing a greater depth to their understanding. In many cases, these pupils typically produce a better standard of work than their peers, but there is still a long way to go to ensure that they achieve as well as they should.
- Although they have the most significant deficit to overcome, current pupils are making some of the fastest progress towards the top of key stage 2 as a result of more consistently effective teaching.

Early years provision

Requires improvement

- Changes in leadership over time have meant that the early years provision has not improved quickly enough. Although better than at the time of the previous inspection, variability remains in the quality of the environment, teaching and children's learning and development.
- Leaders have not ensured that Reception children come to school regularly enough, getting them into good habits that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their schooling. Although adequate links with parents exist, the potential benefits to improving children's outcomes by strengthening parental links further have not been exploited. When in school, children are safe and keen to participate.
- There have been marked improvements in the environment, inside and out. During the inspection, an inviting 'Under the sea' role play area presented a wide range of learning opportunities, the theme extending beyond and across different areas. However, leaders and teachers are clear that this is still 'a work in progress' and there is more to be done. In the Reception Year, children do not engage and achieve consistently well enough when choosing their own activities.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and expertise are developing. Phonics teaching, especially by teachers, is effective. The importance of opportunities for children to develop their fine motor skills and make marks as a precursor to writing are now more fully realised. However, these opportunities have been strengthened too recently to have fully benefited current children, who are further behind in writing than in other areas of learning. Overall, however, current children are further forward in their learning and better prepared for Year 1 than those in the recent past.
- A significant proportion of children start school with a narrower range of skills and attributes than is often typical for their ages, particularly in communication, language and self-confidence. Adults check and build on individual children's capabilities to secure steady and sometimes better progress.
- Nursery children engage well and get into good learning habits. Resources are well organised to promote their independence. They learn to make choices and understand that eating fruit helps to keep you healthy. Adults prompt children well as they play, including to develop the vocabulary of children who speak English as an additional language.
- In partnership with the special educational needs coordinator, well-established links with other professionals provide useful guidance and support for children with specific individual needs. However, leaders have not ensured that additional funding for disadvantaged children has been targeted well enough.

School details

Unique reference number	139709
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10033969

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	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	238
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Denis Connolly
Headteacher	Grant Mottram
Telephone number	01865 340 420
Website	www.abbeywoodsacademy.oxon.sch.uk
Email address	office@abbeywoodsacademy.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	13–14 May 2015

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school. It is an academy sponsored by the CfBT Trust.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage, although the proportion who speak English as an additional language is slightly higher than average.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average.
- A higher proportion of pupils than seen nationally is disadvantaged.
- The school does not meet the government's current floor standards, which set out the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress.
- The school meets the requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.
- The current headteacher was appointed from September 2015. A new deputy headteacher joined the school in September 2016. The interim headteacher in post at the time of the previous inspection subsequently became the executive headteacher before reducing to a predominantly consultative role. Her involvement with the school ended at the end of 2016.

Information about this inspection

- At this school's last full inspection, it was judged to require special measures. Since then, it has had four monitoring inspections. This inspection began as the fifth monitoring visit, but was then deemed a full Section 5 inspection.
- The inspection team visited all classes to gather a wide range of evidence about what it is like to be a pupil in this school. They talked with pupils about their learning, scrutinised their work and heard some of them read. All observations in class were carried out jointly with a senior leader from the school.
- Inspectors spoke formally or informally with pupils, parents, staff, leaders, governors and a representative of the trust.
- Because this inspection began as a monitoring visit, no questionnaire responses were sought, in line with usual procedures. Over the course of this inspection and previous monitoring visits, inspectors spoke with as many parents, pupils and staff as possible, and took account of their views. They also considered the one response that had been received over the last 365 days to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school throughout the day and sampled a range of documentation, including records of safeguarding checks and leaders' own evaluations of the school's performance.
- Her Majesty's Inspector also took evidence into account that was gathered during monitoring inspections conducted since the school's last full inspection.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Joanna Toulon

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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