

# The Abbey Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	117449
<b>Local Authority</b>	Hertfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	326613
<b>Inspection dates</b>	26 September 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Martin Beale

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary
<b>School category</b>	Voluntary aided
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	204
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Sarah Cowper
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Elizabeth Grundy
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	6–7 October 2005
<b>School address</b>	Grove Road St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 1DQ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01727 851802
<b>Fax number</b>	01727 766991

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. The inspection focused on:

- the effectiveness of the action to promote reading for pleasure
- the effectiveness of the school's support for the achievement of its more vulnerable pupils
- the role all members of staff play in improving the school.

Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but the inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in the self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

This is an average sized school. Free school meal eligibility is low and fewer pupils than in most schools need support with their learning. The number of pupils at an early stage of learning English has increased and the school has a small number of children who are in the care of the local authority. Provision is made for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) through a Reception class, for which there are two points of entry in either September or January.

The school has gained the Activemark and Healthy Schools awards.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

**Grade: 1**

The school has improved much since the last inspection when it was judged as good. It is now outstanding in most areas of its work. The headteacher's determined and strong leadership are at the heart of the school's success. She is much respected. As one parent said, 'she brims with enthusiasm and purpose'. She has developed a strong staff team who are always looking for ways to improve pupil achievement and make school life more exciting. Parents are delighted with the school, and one reflected the views of many when writing: 'We can't believe how lucky we are to have such a wonderful school on our doorstep.' Parental support either at home or from the large number of volunteer helpers, makes a very significant and much welcomed contribution to the pupils' learning and achievement.

A striking feature is the pupils themselves, who are tremendous ambassadors for the school. In saying, 'they are developing into confident and capable children whilst being considerate towards other people's needs and feelings,' one parent could have been writing about almost any of the pupils not just her own. They have a keen understanding of how to protect the environment through their Green Council and have a major voice in developments through the school council. The local area is used extensively to enliven learning. Pupils give back to the community in many ways and show their care for others by taking the initiative in raising funds for a wide variety of charities both at home and abroad.

This is a happy school, in which the pupils gain much from stimulating lessons and a wide range of interesting activities both during and beyond the school day. These all contribute to the pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their thorough enjoyment of school life is reflected in their exemplary behaviour, very positive approach to learning and high levels of attendance. The strong focus on sport and nutrition means that pupils are very clear about how to adopt healthy lifestyles. They make sensible choices in their diet and participate in large numbers in sports activities. These are available to pupils of all ages as seen when many younger boys and girls took great enjoyment from football training after school. Close links with other schools mean pupils can test themselves through competition in many areas.

These close links with other providers are hugely valued by all and add considerably to the pupils' development. Year 6 pupils greatly enjoy their drama lessons and look forward to each Friday afternoon with relish. The pupils take great pleasure from being taught different skills by the specialist sports coach. Where the school identifies a particular talent, it goes out of its way to ensure this is nurtured, either at the school, or through extension courses provided by the local network of schools.

In writing, 'Abbey has catered beautifully for our two very different children and given them a great feeling of security and belonging from the start,' one parent summed up perfectly how the pupils' care and welfare are of paramount importance to all staff. Pupils know that any problems will be dealt with rapidly and show great respect for each other. The older pupils relish the opportunity to support new Reception children and to organise playground games. Break and lunchtimes are a hive of activity and add much to the pupils' enjoyment and fitness.

Parents and pupils greatly value the role of music in the life of the school. Almost half of the pupils learn an instrument and many perform in the large school orchestra, supported in this by sixth form students from the nearby boys' school. Their spiritual life is greatly enhanced through strong links with St Albans Abbey, which they attend each week.

The headteacher sets the pupils challenging targets and makes sure everyone does their utmost to make sure they are achieved. This, and the high quality of much of the teaching, contributes directly to the pupils' outstanding achievement. Pupils are engrossed in their lessons. They respond to the challenge and high expectations of their teachers. Lessons are exciting and made more interesting by the creative use of the new technology and some skilled and patient questioning that draws confident responses from the pupils. One pupil summed up his respect for his teachers when saying, 'Teachers really help you, particularly if you find something difficult.' From above average starting points, pupils make rapid progress so that standards are high by the end of Year 6 in all key areas. Test results have risen in recent years. Virtually all pupils reach national expectations in all subjects and very many exceed this level. This, and their exceptional personal qualities, gives them a very strong base for success at secondary school and beyond.

This outstanding achievement extends to pupils who find learning difficult or are new to learning English. Rigorous checking of progress and individually tailored programmes means that no pupil can slip through the net and fall behind. Teachers carefully check on those who might need more attention, and the skilled team of assistants provide carefully focused support. The expertise of outside agencies is utilised where further advice is needed.

The school is moving rapidly towards its goal of personalising learning. Pupils are very aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to move to higher levels, through helpful marking and clearly understood targets for improvement. They have some choice in the activities they undertake, and are expected to decide if these are at an appropriate level for the next steps in their learning. They evaluate constructively their written work and that of others, and from this identify how a piece of work can be improved. Reading standards may be high, but the school is working to encourage more reading for pleasure. This is at an early stage, but is being enthusiastically received, particularly by Year 6 pupils. It is already starting to have an impact on the reading choices of less successful readers.

There is no complacency here; everyone is striving to make the school even better. Governors have a clear overview of the school and share in shaping its future. They support and challenge the headteacher and staff in equal measure. The leadership of other staff has developed considerably since the last inspection. This is a major factor in the sustained progress of the school. They play a central role in the drive for improvement, basing their planning on a clear picture of the qualities in their areas. Honest and accurate school evaluation based on a thoughtful cycle of monitoring gives a strong platform for the school's move to the next level. This is a school that knows how well it is doing and where it is going. Its future is in very safe hands.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage** **Grade: 2**

The children get off to a good start in the stimulating and well-managed Reception class. The staff team is strong and pulls together to improve what it offers. Children work and play happily together, enjoy school and build firm foundations for the future. Parents are very pleased with the provision for their young children and as one wrote, 'I am so impressed, my child loves coming to school and is learning a lot.' Children's welfare is a high priority. Well-established routines help them to settle in and develop positive relationships, as seen amongst the group who started recently. There are robust arrangements to safeguard their well-being, and to support their transfer into Year 1. The children's progress is carefully charted and used to plan future learning. Activities are chosen to meet the needs of all children, and all adults work well with individuals and small groups. The children engage in interesting activities that balance tasks led by adults with plenty initiated by the children themselves. Entering with skills at least as expected for their age, children make good progress so that standards are above average by the end of Reception. The strong focus on teaching letter sounds makes a considerable contribution to the development of early reading and writing skills. The children respond positively to the stimulating environment, both indoors and out. The use of the outside space is developing well and has benefited considerably from the investment in play equipment and a covered area. Leaders are not complacent. They are looking forward to further extending the curriculum offered to children outdoors.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Fully utilise learning opportunities for Reception children in the outdoor classroom.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.</b>	<b>School Overall</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	<b>Yes</b>
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	<b>1</b>
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	<b>1</b>

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

<b>How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?</b>	<b>2</b>
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	<b>2</b>
How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	<b>1</b>
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	<b>2</b>
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	<b>1</b>
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	<b>2</b>

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	<b>1</b>
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	<b>1</b>
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	<b>1</b>
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	<b>1</b>
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>1</b>
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	<b>1</b>
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	<b>1</b>
How well learners enjoy their education	<b>1</b>
The attendance of learners	<b>1</b>
The behaviour of learners	<b>1</b>
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	<b>1</b>
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	<b>1</b>

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	<b>1</b>

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	<b>1</b>
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	<b>1</b>
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	<b>1</b>
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	<b>1</b>
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	<b>1</b>
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	<b>1</b>
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	<b>1</b>
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	<b>1</b>
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	<b>Yes</b>
Does this school require special measures?	<b>No</b>
Does this school require a notice to improve?	<b>No</b>

## Annex B



29 September 2008

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of The Abbey Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School, St Albans, AL1 1DQ**

You will probably remember that inspectors visited your school not too long ago. I am now writing to let you know what we found out. Before I do, I would just like to say thank you for making us feel welcome and for being so ready to share your thoughts about your school. We had a chance to talk to quite a lot of you, and have told your teachers how you were very helpful and polite. Through my discussions with you, it was great to hear how much you enjoy school. It was also good to hear about how safe you feel in school and that there is always someone to talk to if you are worried. You, your parents and teachers are right in thinking that your school is outstanding.

You make excellent progress during your time at school. Nearly all of you reach the standards expected by the time you move on to secondary school and very many of you do better than this. You attend very regularly, work hard and behave sensibly. Your teachers make learning interesting and you clearly enjoy extra activities such as music and sporting opportunities. All members of staff help to make sure you are safe and cared for very well. You take your responsibilities seriously and make a huge contribution to the life of the school. You have an excellent understanding of the importance of diet and exercise for a healthy lifestyle.

Your headteacher, other staff and governors are trying hard to make the school even better. I think that there is one thing in particular they could do, so I have asked everyone to make better use of the outside space for children in Reception.

I am sure that you and your teachers will work hard to make this improvement. You can play your part in helping the school to get even better by continuing to show such pride and enthusiasm for learning.

I wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Martin Beale  
Lead inspector