

Down Hall Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114936
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	378965
Inspection dates	12–13 January 2012
Lead inspector	Michael Sutherland-Harper

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	296
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Louise Davy
Headteacher	Lou Reck
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2009
School address	Brooklyn Drive Rayleigh SS6 9LW
Telephone number	01268 780018
Fax number	01268 783427
Email address	admin@downhall.essex.sch.uk



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Introduction

Inspection team

Ruth Brock

Additional inspector

Ruth Frith

Additional inspector

Michael Sutherland-Harper

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspection team observed 16 lessons across the school taught by 12 teachers and held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, and looked at pupils' books; the school's development plan; assessment data; monitoring and evaluation records; arrangements for safeguarding; and a range of policies and procedures. Inspectors listened to pupils read. In addition to replies from pupil and staff questionnaires, questionnaires from 141 parents and carers were received and analysed.

Information about the school

Down Hall Primary School is larger than the average-sized primary school. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage with very few pupils from minority ethnic groups. Current government floor standards have been met. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion of those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, including those with a statement of special educational needs, is below the national average. The proportion of pupils speaking English as an additional language is below the national average. The school has gained a number of awards, including the Healthy Schools status and the ActiveMark award. The school has recently had a partial new build.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	3

Key findings

- Down Hall Primary School is a satisfactory school.
- Leaders and managers have focused on strengthening provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and improving standards at Key Stage 1.
- Pupils make satisfactory progress. Rates of progress in English have improved, especially in writing and for boys. Progress in mathematics has been slower and is a focus area especially for girls, whose attainment in mathematics is behind that of boys.
- Pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils.
- Teaching is satisfactory overall with an increasing proportion of good teaching. Pace and challenge are inconsistent so that achievement remains broadly satisfactory.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is thorough. The school has worked on assessment procedures but pupils do not always know their current level or how to get their work to the next stages.
- Monitoring and evaluation procedures are supporting an improved analysis of progress and data, but lack sharpness with regard to dates and specific learning objectives.
- Pupils are well behaved and enjoy good relations with each other and adults. Pupils say they feel safe, and parents and carers agree. Safeguarding procedures are effective, with all staff trained appropriately.
- The headteacher and senior team are clear about which areas require further improvement. Curriculum delivery is enhanced through an engaging project-based approach.
- The recently reconstituted governing body is supportive of the work of the school and beginning to offer greater challenge.
- The role of middle managers is developing slowly but the quality of monitoring and evaluation procedures at this level is inconsistent.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and a strength of the school.

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- Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement in mathematics, particularly for girls, by July 2013 by:
 - improving monitoring and evaluation procedures so all staff are clear about the proportion of pupils who are expected to make satisfactory or better progress each term
 - involving pupils more effectively to develop their understanding of where they are with their work, what they need to do next and how to proceed.
- Raise 80% of teaching to good or better by July 2013 by:
 - increasing the pace and challenge in lessons
 - evaluating pupil success against specific learning objectives
 - sharing best practice identified within the school.
- Ensure that leaders and managers at all levels, including members of the governing body and middle managers, drive improvement forward more rapidly by:
 - working to clear timelines and measurable targets in the school development plan against which all can be held to account
 - improving the partnership with parents and carers so that pupils are able to increase their rate of progress.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Attainment is broadly average. Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with knowledge and skills in line with expectations for their age. A focus on literacy and phonic skills, careful use of the indoor and outdoor areas, and a single entry time have contributed to their increased, but still satisfactory, progress. Better use of data has sharpened the planning of activities across the areas of learning. Similar procedures have also quickened the rate of pupils' development at Key Stage 1. Interventions begin early and ensure that pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs make progress similar to other groups. Current data indicates that pupils make satisfactory progress in reading and writing. Reading skills observed show the positive impact of phonics in improving pupils reading, but also indicate quite a wide ability range. Pupils confidently discuss what they have read and reading skills are secure by the end of Key Stage 1. Improvement continues in Key Stage 2 so that, by the time they leave the school, pupils read well and show good comprehension. Opportunities for extended writing occur, especially in project work. Last year's focus on writing has increased boys' attainment. The school is currently

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looking at ways to accelerate mathematics progress and a closer match of work to pupils' abilities and interests. Key Stage 2 setting has been in place for some years. Achievement in mathematics is beginning to rise, but the attainment of girls is below that of boys.

Learning in lessons is satisfactory. Pupils enjoy school and are engaged in learning, but independent work opportunities are sometimes limited by teacher-dominated lessons. Pupils have frequent opportunities to use information and communication technology, including for projects. Project work is not always closely linked to mainstream objectives in literacy and numeracy to reinforce these. Pupils know what they are good at, but are not always clear about targets and next steps to improve their work and raise progress rates. The very large majority of parents and carers believe their children are making good progress, but a few would welcome further communication about how best to support learning. Homework is set but parents are not sure how to help their children and pupils are not sufficiently clear about their teachers' expectations of them. These factors are impeding pupils' more rapid progress.

Quality of teaching

The very large majority of parents and carers feel their children are taught well, and pupils are excited and engaged by the variety of project work undertaken. Teaching is satisfactory, although an increasing proportion of good teaching is evident. This is often characterised by opportunities for pupils to develop speaking skills as a lead into better writing. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and make adequate use of new technology to deliver the curriculum. Relationships between adults and pupils are good. Pupils benefit from the work of learning support assistants, who are used flexibly across the school. Effective use of talk partners encourages good work and reinforces good spiritual, moral, social and cultural skills. A sense of wonder was evident in a Year 1 and 2 English lesson which engaged pupils by the gradual revelation of sentences on the whiteboard. Planning is satisfactory, but insufficiently precise in matching activities to pupils' interests and abilities. As a result, the pace and challenge in lessons do not always enable pupils to make the maximum progress possible. Pupils with disabilities and/or special educational needs make similar progress to other groups because adults are always ready and prepared to support them in their work. In a good Year 3 and 4 religious education lesson, focused questions and challenge about the reason for the answer led to a high-quality discussion. Although teachers' explanations of concepts are effective, they are often lengthy and the time available for pupils to work independently and complete tasks to the best possible level sometimes becomes limited. Pupils have regular opportunities to develop mental mathematical skills, but contribution rates vary and the opportunity to reinforce skills is sometimes lost.

Assessment procedures are a whole-school focus area. Marking is thorough with many encouraging comments, but does not always provide pupils with enough information about how to progress. As a result, progress rates slow down. Pupils are clearer about what they need to do next in their project work, which is being used to

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expand curriculum provision, because they help to set out the direction of those projects.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils are well behaved. The school is an inclusive community and parents and carers speak highly of its efforts over time to assist pupils who have behavioural difficulties. The very large majority of parents and carers feel behaviour is good and that poor behaviour does not disrupt lessons. They are similarly happy about the school's response to bullying. Pupils have positive attitudes, and are always prepared to work closely with each other and to listen to what others say. Relationships with fellow pupils and adults are good, as is conduct when pupils move between classes. Pupils are keen to be ambassadors for the school and express willingness to help in any way they can. Although they have differing perspectives on what constitutes poor behaviour according to age levels, pupils report that incidents of bullying are extremely rare and that any issues are quickly dealt with. Pupils affirm that there is always an adult to whom one can turn and who will help to sort out any problems. Older pupils help younger ones as playground buddies. Teachers manage behaviour well. Attendance is high. Pupils arrive punctually at school and to lessons; staff are aware of those who may be latecomers. The importance of good behaviour is clearly understood. Management of behaviour is systematic so all pupils have an equal opportunity to learn and thrive.

Parents and carers almost unanimously agree that pupils feel safe. Pupils understand how to stay safe through healthy eating and sporting activities and how to use the internet safely. Systems and procedures are clearly understood by pupils, and the curriculum regularly includes learning about safety and safeguarding issues. Pupils whose circumstances make them potentially vulnerable benefit from the good arrangements in place to meet their needs.

Leadership and management

The headteacher and her senior colleagues have a clear school vision based on valuing individuals and driving forward achievement. The school improvement plan, shared with all staff, has recently formulated the motto: 'Everyone a learner. Believe and achieve.' The emphasis on progressing beyond satisfactory, especially through improved assessment procedures, focused on writing last year and is now tackling mathematics. The school has refined monitoring and evaluation procedures and developed pupil progress meetings. Responsibility for data collection and analysis, together with increased staff accountability, is contributing to the development of the role of middle managers. However, there are inconsistencies in the impact of their work between subjects. Raising achievement has been slower than expected but the rate is increasing with the emphasis on clearer objectives and timelines in lessons. The school's capacity to improve further is satisfactory because targets are now more focused with greater expectations of staff. Safeguarding procedures are good. The recently reconstituted governing body brings a range of skills to the support it offers.

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Its level of challenge is less well-developed but improved understanding of data, training and availability of information have increased awareness. Policies have been reviewed, governors are trained in safeguarding and safer recruitment, and links with parents and carers are improving. The emphasis is now on faster change and development.

The school provides a broad, balanced curriculum. The curriculum is satisfactory, mainly because inconsistent pace and challenge sometimes limit delivery. Topics engage both boys and girls and help to ensure that all pupils, including those with disabilities and/or special educational needs, have equal access to all curriculum areas and opportunities. A range of partnerships, including with local secondary schools and music services, augment curriculum provision. Good provision is made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Project work affords good opportunities for pupils to develop their sense of wonder through in-depth exploration of the focus topics. Consideration of spiritual and moral issues is also threaded through assemblies and extra-curricular clubs. The variety of cultural opportunities available to pupils in the school and through partnerships is typified by the music day held during the inspection. A major national orchestra worked with pupils and adults to put together an end-of-day performance for parents and carers and each other.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and 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 governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



16 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Down Hall Primary School, Rayleigh SS6 9LW

I am writing to thank you for the warm, friendly way you greeted us on our recent visit and to tell you the outcome of your school's inspection. I also want to thank those of you who talked to us about your school or who completed questionnaires.

Down Hall Primary School provides you with a satisfactory education. Here are some of the things your school does well.

- Attendance is high and you enjoy learning, especially through project work.
- Your behaviour is good and your teachers expect you to work hard.
- You respect each other's views and are keen to help your school.
- You feel safe in your school. Bullying of any sort is rare and you are confident the school will quickly sort out any issues.

The headteacher, the staff and the governing body share your wish to do as well as possible. These are our recommendations.

- Help you make faster progress in mathematics by ensuring that you know exactly where you are with your work, what you need to do next to improve and how to get there.
- Make all teaching better by ensuring that teachers share their best methods to challenge you more in lessons and increase the pace at which you learn.
- Ensure that all adults who look after learning set clear targets and time limits for further improvement and work closely in partnership with your parents and carers so that everyone helps you to move forward.

The inspectors believe that your good behaviour and positive attitudes will help the school improve. You can all help by telling teachers when work is too easy or too hard.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sutherland-Harper
Lead inspector

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