

Downs Barn School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	110372
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	378089
Inspection dates	16–17 January 2012
Lead inspector	Mike Capper

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	130
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dawn Reid
Headteacher	Bryan Schram
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 June 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Mike Capper

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed 13 lessons taught by five teachers. Meetings were held with parents and carers at the start and end of the school day, and with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. The inspector took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection, observed the school's work and looked at school documentation, including teachers' planning, assessment information, safeguarding policies and samples of pupils' work. Inspectors analysed 38 questionnaires from parents and carers, 16 from staff and 17 from pupils in Year 2.

Information about the school

Most pupils come to this small infant school from the local community. The school takes pupils from many different backgrounds and nearly a half of pupils are from minority ethnic groups, including Black African, Tamil, Polish and Lithuanian. About a quarter of pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. A high number of pupils join and leave the school each year. The proportion of pupils identified as being disabled or having special educational needs is also above average. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in a Nursery and in a Reception class.

The school is federated with Southwood Junior School as part of the Boulevard Primary Partnership. There is one headteacher for the two schools and some other leadership roles are shared. Until this year, owing to circumstances beyond the school's control, there has been a high turnover of teaching staff in Key Stage 1.

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

- This is a satisfactory school. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Leaders have responded decisively to a fall in attainment in 2011 at the end of Year 2 and pupils' progress is improving quickly across the school.
- Children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where they are taught well. The rising attainment by the end of the Reception year is now beginning to filter through to the rest of the school and attainment is broadly average by the end of Year 2.
- Phonics (letter sounds) are taught well in Key Stage 1 and teachers make learning exciting. Good use is made of additional support outside lessons to help pupils who are in danger of falling behind. There are occasions in Key Stage 1 when teaching does not meet differing needs well enough and questioning does not move learning on quickly.
- In Key Stage 1, the curriculum does not include enough opportunities for pupils to use basic skills in different subjects.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are good. Pupils are very happy at school and behave well. The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. Pupils develop good social skills and grow greatly in confidence and self-esteem.
- Leadership and management are satisfactory. Although the pace of change has been affected by staff turnover in Key Stage 1, there has been a concerted focus on improvement that is helping to raise attainment. School improvement planning, at times, identifies too many areas to be tackled. However, the federation is a positive feature of leadership as it means that skills and good practice are shared between the two schools. Middle managers make good use of data to check pupils' progress, but do not have enough opportunity to visit lessons so that they can play a full part in improving teaching.

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?

- Improve progress in Key Stage 1 by December 2012 to the same good levels found in the Early Years Foundation Stage by ensuring that teachers always pitch work at the right level for all pupils and use questioning more sharply to move learning on, especially in whole-class sessions at the start of lessons.
- Ensure that the curriculum in Key Stage 1 includes more opportunity for pupils to use their numeracy, literacy and computing skills in different subjects, by July 2012.
- Strengthen leadership and management by April 2012 by:
 - ensuring that development planning sets a manageable number of targets that are specific to the needs of the school
 - giving middle managers more opportunities to visit lessons so that they can play a greater part in improving teaching and learning.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' achievement is satisfactory and their attainment is average by the end of Year 2. The vast majority of parents and carers feel that their children make good progress. However, leaders have rightly identified that pupils' progress is satisfactory overall. It is, however, improving as a result of improvements in the quality of teaching; children make the best progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and attainment by the end of the Reception year has been rising. It reached its best-ever levels in 2011, when it was above average. In both the Nursery and Reception classes, children learn quickly in lessons. For example, they were guided well by the teacher and quickly improved their knowledge when sorting and counting fruit in small groups.

In Years 1 and 2, progress is always at least satisfactory in lessons and it is sometimes good. In a numeracy lesson, pupils made quick progress as they identified key words in number problems because they were encouraged to think like mathematicians. More typically, in a satisfactory numeracy lesson, all pupils did similar work, looking at the properties of squares and rectangles. There was sometimes insufficient challenge for more-able pupils and the less able were occasionally over-reliant on adult support to complete the task. In phonics lessons in Years 1 and 2, pupils make good progress and this is having a positive impact on pupils' reading skills. Consequently, attainment in reading is rising. It is now broadly average in Year 2, with pupils developing positive attitudes towards reading.

Pupils with disabilities and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress and make the best progress when being supported in small groups outside

lessons. In sessions such as the 'Better Reading' group, they learn new skills quickly. In lessons, work does not always build well enough on their prior learning.

Pupils with English as an additional language are integrated well into lessons and in the Nursery and Reception classes, in particular, planning takes good account of their needs, ensuring that they improve their speaking skills quickly. This means that there is no significant difference in the attainment and progress of different groups by the end of Year 2.

Quality of teaching

Most parents and carers feel that the quality of teaching is good. The inspection found that although teaching is usually good in the Nursery and Reception classes, most teaching in Years 1 and 2 is satisfactory, resulting in pupils currently in the school making progress that is broadly in line with that made nationally.

In the Nursery and Reception classes, teachers and adults work together extremely effectively to plan exciting activities that are matched to differing needs well. All staff are involved in planning work and assessing learning and this means that they are confident about intervening at just the right time to move learning on. Adults give children good opportunities to select for themselves where they are going to work.

In Years 1 and 2, teachers manage pupils' behaviour well and, in the best lessons, the pupils learn quickly and respond enthusiastically because new skills are introduced systematically. This is most noticeable in phonics lessons, when the effective use of small groups ensures that work is matched to need well. At other times, teachers assess learning thoroughly, but do not always use this information well enough to ensure that the pitch of work is right for all pupils. Teachers' questioning does not always move learning on quickly enough, especially when working with whole classes at the start of lessons. These are the main reasons why teaching is satisfactory overall, rather than good.

Curriculum planning ensures that basic skills develop systematically. There is a good focus on developing speaking skills for children who have English as an additional language. There are some opportunities for pupils to apply literacy, numeracy and computing skills in different subjects, but this is currently stronger in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where topics are linked together more successfully than in Years 1 and 2. For older pupils, an occasional over-use of worksheets means that opportunities are missed for practising and improving skills by using them purposefully in subjects such as science, history and geography.

Throughout the school, teaching promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development successfully. Teachers encourage pupils to cooperate and the pupils develop a strong knowledge of different faiths and traditions through the good use of music and stories from different countries. For example, pupils in Year 2 are learning about Inuit culture through story-writing.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils enjoy school thoroughly and, in discussions, can think of nothing they would like to improve. As one said, 'Everything is perfect!' There is a very happy learning atmosphere in lessons and pupils work hard most of the time. Pupils support each other well and there is good racial harmony. Newly arrived pupils from different countries settle quickly because of the welcome they are given and the kindness shown by their new friends.

Parents and carers are rightly pleased with pupils' behaviour. Pupils, also, say that behaviour is 'nearly always good', with one summing this up by saying, 'If we behave well, then we learn more quickly.' This reflects the school's good systems for promoting good behaviour. Consequently, pupils behave well in lessons and are polite and courteous. They work hard most of the time, although they lose concentration sometimes when expected to sit for too long at the start of lessons. Skilled staff in the Learning and Achievement Base (LAB) guide pupils with identified behavioural difficulties sensitively and help them to improve their social skills and interactions with others.

Pupils feel, correctly, that the school keeps them safe. They say that bullying occurs in school very rarely and that, when they do 'fall out', there is always someone to help. Pupils develop a good awareness of the dangers of the internet, including cyber-bullying, and talk confidently about how to stay safe in the local environment.

Leadership and management

Leaders are doing the right thing to improve the school more quickly and there is a rapidly improving picture across the school. Teamwork is strong and leaders, including the governing body, are tackling the remaining small pockets of underachievement. As a result, they are rapidly being eradicated. The school has successfully demonstrated that it has the capacity to improve. Attainment is broadly similar to that found at the time of the previous inspection and the school has improved pupils' behaviour and safety, with the number of exclusions reduced to very low levels. There has been a sharp and effective focus on improving provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the results of this are now beginning to filter through to Years 1 and 2. The school acknowledges that the pace of improvement has been slower in Years 1 and 2 because of staff turnover. Nonetheless, leaders have now eradicated inadequate teaching from Years 1 and 2 and more is now good. This is a key factor in the improved progress currently being made in Years 1 and 2.

The sharing of expertise between the two federated schools is having a positive impact on school improvement. There are well-considered opportunities for professional development which have helped to improve practice quickly in areas such as phonics teaching. Currently, the two schools have a shared development plan. While this is identifying the right priorities for Downs Barn, there are too many targets and it is not always clear which apply to which school. This makes it difficult for the governing body to monitor progress towards meeting targets.

Leaders at all levels, including the governing body, focus strongly on promoting equality of opportunity, welcoming pupils with a wide range of social and emotional needs and so there is no evidence of discrimination. They know that there are still some things that they do not do well enough to ensure evenness of progress across

the school. There have been some opportunities for middle managers to visit lessons, but these have not been extensive, limiting the part they can play in improving further the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good or better. However, their use of data is especially sharp and this is helping to ensure that additional support in intervention groups is targeted at the pupils who need it most. This is helping to close the gap in achievement for potentially underachieving pupils.

The curriculum is satisfactory and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy school because the curriculum is broad and balanced and is enriched well by visits. The curriculum promotes basic skills soundly, but, in Years 1 and 2, does not include enough links between different subjects. The curriculum has a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. Consequently, pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong and develop highly positive attitudes towards learning. Leaders focus strongly on keeping pupils safe, ensuring that safeguarding arrangements meet statutory requirements.

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.

18 January 2012

Dear Pupils



Inspection of Downs Barn School, Milton Keynes MK14 7NA

Thank you for being so welcoming and helpful when I visited your school. I enjoyed talking to you about your work and hearing some of you read. I found that your school is providing a satisfactory education. This means that it does some things well, but there are also some areas for improvement.

Here are some of the things I liked most

- When I talked to you I could see that you enjoy school thoroughly and it is good that there is nothing you would like to improve.
- You feel, rightly, that behaviour is good most of the time and you take responsibility keenly. The Year 2 school councillors I spoke to are helping the school to improve.
- You feel, rightly, you are kept safe and I could see that you take good care of each other. I like the way that you are so welcoming to new pupils.
- All adults in school are caring and they give you suitable help when you have problems with your work.

The school's leaders are doing the right things to improve and are clear about what is not yet good enough. They know that you make good progress in the Nursery and Reception classes and that there is not enough good teaching in Years 1 and 2, and so your progress is not yet better than satisfactory. You can help leaders to improve this by continuing to work hard all of the time.

What I have asked your school to do now

- Make sure that teachers in Years 1 and 2 always pitch work at the right level for all of you and use questioning so that you are always being challenged.
- Give you more opportunities to write, read, count and use computers in different subjects.
- Make sure that plans for development are clear and do not set too many targets and give staff more time to visit lessons to identify what needs improving.

Yours sincerely
Mike Capper
Lead inspector

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