

# Derwent Lower School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	109457
<b>Local Authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	356549
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 February 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Michael Sheridan HMI

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>	Foundation
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–9
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	136
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Keith Steele
<b>Headteacher</b>	Caroline Howell
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	Hitchin Road Henlow SG16 6BA
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed teaching in eight lessons taught by six teachers. Inspectors spent further time in classrooms scrutinising work and talking to pupils about their learning. Meetings were held with pupils, teachers, governors and a representative from the local authority. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at school improvement planning, policy documents, records of accidents and incidents, the school's data relating to pupils' performance, work in pupils' books and notes from local authority visits. The views of pupils, staff and 45 parents and carers were received through questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas:

- Has the school been effective in eradicating previous inadequacies?
- How effectively do policies and guidelines influence practice so that pupils are well cared for?
- How effectively does the school cater for the particular needs of pupils from service families, including the challenges of high mobility?
- Is the school being effective in overcoming the dip in attainment in 2010?

## Information about the school

This is a smaller-than-average school that is part of a trust with five other local schools, known as the Bedfordshire East Schools Trust (BEST). The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is low, as is the proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Very few pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school is situated on the edge of the RAF base in Henlow. Consequently, around 75% of pupils are from families serving in the RAF. The Early Years Foundation stage consists of a Nursery and a Reception class. Children start in Nursery at the beginning of the term following their fourth birthday. The school has recently received Healthy Schools status.

This inspection follows an inspection in November 2009 when the school was given a notice to improve.

**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: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**3**

## Main findings

In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that this school no longer requires significant improvement. Previous inadequacies have been addressed well. Safeguarding procedures are secure and members of staff have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities for keeping pupils safe. Consequently, pupils are now well cared for. The governing body has been proactive in ensuring its effectiveness is much improved. Individual governors bring a wealth of experience and expertise from their lives outside school. Collectively, they represent well the communities the school serves, including representation from members of the Royal Air Force. Most outcomes for pupils are now good. Children enter the school with the skills expected for their age and leave with above-average standards of attainment at the end of Year 4.

While inadequacies have been tackled decisively, other areas for improvement have been slower. Despite significant support from the local authority, senior leaders have been stretched by the work needed to ensure all areas are at least satisfactory. Middle leadership remains underdeveloped, with some subject leaders being unclear about the expectations of the role. The school's self-evaluation is broadly accurate, but not sufficiently sharp enough to enable the school to plan tightly focused, whole-school improvement. School improvement plans are comprehensive, but lack measurable objectives. Consequently, leaders at all levels are unclear about the intended impact of their actions and this limits their ability to evaluate their effectiveness. Nevertheless, the school has moved forward on important issues since the last inspection and through this has demonstrated a satisfactory capacity to improve further.

Teaching is good overall, but some variability remains. An effective marking policy is in place, but teachers are using this inconsistently. In good lessons, pupils are highly enthused by their interesting work and make progress at a rapid pace. However, in a minority of lessons, learning is less rapid because work is not as well matched to pupils' individual needs. The pace of some lessons is slower, so pupils do not maintain their interest to the same high level. In a small number of lessons, the link between what the teacher wants pupils to learn and the tasks given is not clearly identifiable. The Early Years Foundation Stage gives children a satisfactory start to their schooling. Children enjoy many of the activities on offer, although some of the resources for independent play are fairly tired and largely ignored. Adult-led activities are satisfactory overall and sometimes good. However, their impact over time is limited because different teachers are using different strategies for teaching, for example, letter sounds.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so it is more consistently good in every class by:

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- ensuring all teachers follow agreed policies and procedures for teaching
- monitoring the effectiveness of teaching rigorously so that clear expectations are established
- developing teachers' understanding of the purposes behind learning objectives and marking.
- Increase the capacity of leadership by:
  - ensuring that monitoring holds individuals to account and accurately informs the school's self-evaluation
  - ensuring whole-school self-evaluation is accurate and concise so that it leads to focused school improvement planning that is owned by all and measurable by the impact it has
  - developing the role of middle leaders by ensuring they have a clear understanding of their leadership responsibilities
  - developing further the ways that the school consults with and communicates to stakeholders.
- Improve the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage by:
  - ensuring that activities and resources for independent and adult-supported play capture children's imagination
  - developing unambiguous expectations and policies for teaching and learning so that all adults understand the methods and strategies to be used during adult-led sessions and when working with children who are learning independently
  - ensuring that monitoring is rigorous and leads to appropriate professional development.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

After a dip in standards of attainment in 2010, work in pupils' books confirms that these are now rising again for all groups of pupils. Pupils who arrive at the school mid-year settle quickly and make progress in line with their peers. Pupils in Year 4 are on target to reach above-average standards of attainment and this represents good achievement from their broadly average starting points. In the majority of lessons, where teaching is good or better, pupils are captivated by the interesting work their teachers prepare for them. Pupils answer well-placed questions enthusiastically and with maturity. In the best lessons, relationships between the adults and pupils are relaxed and purposeful. Pupils are well motivated and willing to learn. In satisfactory lessons, pupils' initial enthusiasm, occasionally, turns to silliness when the pace of the learning is not maintained. However, this behaviour is well managed and behaviour overall is good, both inside and on the playground. Pupils say that they feel safe in school and are confident that adults will help them if they ever feel unsafe. Pupils are confident that behaviour has improved on the playground and mid-day supervisors confirm that this is also their view. Pupils are able to talk accurately about what they should do to avoid unsafe situations. Pupils develop positive attitudes to healthy lifestyles and talk enthusiastically about what they had to do to achieve Healthy Schools status.

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Pupils talk about complex issues and intangible truths sensibly and often with a maturity beyond their years. They enjoy learning about different cultures, but some of their views are rather stereotypical because much of their experience of wider cultures is through the celebration of different festivals.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

**How effective is the provision?**

The quality of teaching ranges from outstanding to satisfactory. In the majority of lessons, teaching inspires pupils because teachers think carefully about the content of their lessons. Pupils respond well to well-established routines and work hard because they know that expectations are high. In some lessons, marking is highly effective. In these lessons, pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work and, as a result, their progress is rapid, particularly in writing. However, the quality of marking and feedback is too variable, with some providing ineffective guidance to help pupils improve. Where this is the case, marking does not consistently follow the procedures set out and comments do not give specific enough information to help pupils improve their work.

The curriculum is broad and balanced. A good range of enrichment activities is available, including a yearly residential trip to France and a good range of extra-curricular and sporting opportunities. The school has thought carefully about how to organise the curriculum so different subjects can be taught together when appropriate. Cross-curricular

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links are good. Opportunities for developing information and communication technology skills and writing skills are well embedded in most classes.

While the grade for care guidance and support has improved from inadequate to good, this is because the previous inadequacies in safeguarding limited this judgement. Well-established systems are in place to support all pupils, including those who come from service families. The school caters well for pupils when they transfer schools, although issues around parental/carer communication remain which mean that parents and carers of new pupils do not always feel well informed. The school works effectively with a range of agencies to support pupils who are potentially vulnerable. Even though attendance is already high, the school continues to work effectively with individuals and families when attendance becomes an issue.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective are leadership and management?**

The last year has been very difficult for leaders in the school. With the support of the local authority, they have ensured that inadequacies have been eradicated and standards of attainment improved after a dip in 2010. There have been clear improvements in the school over the last 12 months. However, several factors are limiting the capacity of the school to improve further. Some middle leadership is under-developed. Several leaders have made determined efforts to improve provision in their areas, but the school lacks a strategic overview to ensure school improvement is focused sharply on the appropriate areas. Strategies for monitoring the school's effectiveness are developing, but these are not yet robust enough to inform self-evaluation and planning for school improvement helpfully. When issues become apparent, leaders move with determination to remedy weaknesses and maintain generally good provision. However, leaders find themselves over-stretched as this approach leaves their resources spread thinly. To move on to the next stage of development, leaders acknowledge that they need to become more focused and proactive so that issues do not arise with the same frequency and the actions that they plan are effective in moving the school on further, rather than maintaining the status quo.

Much has been done to involve parents and carers more closely in the life of the school. Several events have been held for parents and carers, with varying success, to enable the school to explain their plans and methods for different aspects of their work. Some parents and carers have expressed a frustration at the quality of communication from the school and mixed messages coming from teachers and leaders. The leaders and governing

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body recognise that there is still a way to go in securing the trust of all parents and carers and that accuracy, clarity and frequency of communication will be key to securing this.

The effectiveness of the governing body is good. The range of skills and experiences they bring are highly relevant in supporting the school. They meet their statutory duties effectively and have robust strategies in place to ensure that policies, such as those for safeguarding and equality of opportunity, are effective. The governing body has a clear vision for the future. It recognises the potential strength of partnership working within the trust of local schools. The governing body is developing strategies to improve further the good links with, amongst others, these partner schools and the RAF. Systems and monitoring for safeguarding are now robust and rigorously applied.

The school promotes equality of opportunity well. Different groups of pupils perform equally well and effective strategies exist to support pupils when facing challenging circumstances. Incidents born out of prejudice are exceptionally rare. Pupils' progress is monitored and robust action is taken to ensure no groups or individuals fall behind. Community cohesion within the school is strong and pupils get on well with each other and their teachers. Leaders recognise that their work to build links beyond the immediate community is at an early stage.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

**Early Years Foundation Stage**

The quality of provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Relationships between adults and children are positive, with children feeling safe and secure. All areas of learning are catered for and pupils make satisfactory progress so they enter Year 1 with the skills expected for their age. Children enjoy working with adults on different tasks, but the impact of these tasks is limited by the fact that there is no common approach to teaching, for example, letter sounds and reading.



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During inspection, inspectors observed children being highly motivated when taking part in an exciting treasure hunt. This activity involved children finding and collecting different clues around the room. In this session, children developed a range of skills and enjoyed their learning a great deal. However, some other activities lacked the same level of challenge and, as a result, some children wandered from task to task, finding little to hold their attention.

Leaders are aware that the provision for Early Years Foundation Stage is not as stimulating as it once was. They have a clear view of what they want to achieve. Local authority reports support the school's view that this provision is improving.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>3</b>
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	3

## Views of parents and carers

Most parents and carers who returned a questionnaire are happy with their children's experiences at this school. A small minority of parents and carers expressed some concerns. Most of the negative written comments related to individual incidents and inspectors are unable to make any judgement about these concerns. However, an underlying trend in a few of these suggested that parents and carers are frustrated by a lack of communication and mixed messages coming from school. Inspectors found that the school has improved its attempts to engage parents and carers more openly and communication is improving. The concerns of this small number of parents and carers would suggest that there is still some way to go in this endeavour. Amongst the majority of positive responses, several parents and carers commented favourably about the improvements seen across the school and the good-quality teaching their children receive. Inspection findings would endorse these comments.

## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Derwent Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 45 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 136 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	26	59	15	34	3	7	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	18	41	23	52	3	7	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	8	18	26	59	6	14	2	5
My child is making enough progress at this school	17	39	21	48	2	5	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	16	36	21	48	5	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	10	23	30	68	3	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	18	41	25	57	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	13	30	23	52	2	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	13	30	26	59	3	7	1	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	12	27	25	57	5	11	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	10	23	29	66	3	7	2	5
The school is led and managed effectively	12	27	22	50	5	11	3	7
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	16	36	23	52	3	7	2	5

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## 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	59	35	3	3
Primary schools	9	44	39	7
Secondary schools	13	36	41	11
Sixth forms	15	39	43	3
Special schools	35	43	17	5
Pupil referral units	21	42	29	9
All schools	13	43	37	8

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 August 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2009/10 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

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

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on 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 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:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.

**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.**



10 February 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of Derwent Lower School, Henlow, SG16 6BA**

You may remember that we came to inspect your school recently. This letter is to let you know what we found out.

We found that you do well in your school. You become well-rounded individuals and do well in your lessons. We enjoyed hearing about how behaviour at lunch times is improving. Your school has improved the systems for making sure you stay safe. Last time we came, these were not good enough. This time we have found them to be good. We have asked your teachers to work on a few things to make your school even better.

We have asked that teachers work hard to make all your lessons as good as the best ones. It was interesting to watch how in some lessons you do less well because you get a little bored sitting on the carpet for too long or because you do not always understand what you need to do to improve your work. Perhaps you could talk to your school councillors about how you like to learn and what makes marking useful to you.

We have also asked your headteacher and other leaders in the school to make sure they are not trying to do too many things at once. It is important that they concentrate on the things that will make the biggest difference to you. To do this they need to be very clear about what works well and what could be done better.

Finally, we have asked your school to make sure the activities in Hedgehogs are really exciting so that the youngest children in your school get off to a flying start.

Thank you all for making us so welcome when we visited your school. It was lovely to meet and talk to you about your school. You have our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Michael Sheridan

Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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