

Downs Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114366
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	357525
Inspection dates	15–16 March 2011
Reporting inspector	Andrew Saunders

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	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	508
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Martin Cross
Headteacher	John Vousden
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 22 lessons taught by 18 teachers. They held meetings with senior leaders, groups of pupils, staff and members of the governing body, and spoke to pupils and parents and carers informally. They looked at pupils' work, the school's tracking of pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, school leaders' monitoring of teaching and learning, minutes from meetings and the questionnaires received from 188 parents and carers, as well as responses from staff and pupils.

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

- The progress of pupils, particularly less-able girls, and whether this shows that the rise in attainment has been sustained.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and whether this enables them to make better than average progress.
- The effectiveness of the school's strategies to address the recent decline in attendance.
- The effectiveness of leaders at all levels in bringing about improvements to increase progress further.

Information about the school

Downs Junior School is a larger than average primary school. There are more girls than boys. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The percentage of pupils from minority-ethnic heritages is below average; very few pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average. These pupils include those with: specific, moderate and severe learning difficulties; behavioural, emotional and social difficulties; speech, language and communication difficulties; and autistic spectrum disorder. Among the many awards the school has gained, it has been recognised for its work in the arts by the Arts Mark gold award, and has gained the Basic Skills award. There is a breakfast and after-school club on the site, which is run by a different organisation; this was subject to a separate inspection.

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?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is an outstanding school. The senior leadership team has ensured that an impressive curriculum and good teaching continue to raise attainment. Adults in the school are highly dedicated to ensuring that the pupils receive the best possible care, guidance and support. As a result, pupils develop into mature, confident young people, well prepared for the next stage of their learning.

- By the end of Year 6, attainment is high and, from pupils' above average starting points, this represents good progress.
- The curriculum is well thought out to meet the needs of pupils and provides exciting and innovative opportunities for learning. For example the 'mantle of the expert' approach is used for a range of topics, where staff, pupils or visitors take on the role of an expert within an area of learning. Staff work hard to make all the learning realistic and purposeful. Pupils particularly enjoy the themed weeks, for example each class looking at a particular country.
- Alongside the good teaching, this means that pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning. In most lessons seen, pupils made good progress. Occasionally, progress slowed when teaching was not as strong as usual, or when pupils were unsure of what they need to do to reach the next level of their learning. In the best practice, older pupils regularly reviewed their work and evaluated their progress towards appropriate targets, but this is not always as evident for younger pupils.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive support, which is carefully adapted to their needs, through a wide range of strategies, including through highly effective partnerships which the school has developed. The effectiveness of these strategies is accurately monitored and evaluated. As a result, these pupils make good progress.
- The headteacher ensures that the care, guidance and support for pupils are given the highest priority, and that adults are well informed about the individual circumstances of pupils.
- The wide range of opportunities to take on responsibilities and the impressive impact they have had mean that the pupils' contribution to the community is outstanding. They are proud to be part of their school and their enthusiastic contribution makes it a vibrant learning community.
- Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils get along harmoniously across ages and wide-ranging backgrounds. As a pupil said, 'There are lots of friends and everyone is kind.' Pupils feel particularly safe, and know how to keep themselves safe, for example on the internet.

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- Parents and carers recognise the excellent care, guidance and support the staff give to pupils. As one parent indicated, 'All of the teachers are very caring and committed; they work very hard for our children.' Another parent said, 'Being at this school has boosted my child's confidence immeasurably.'
- The accurate view of senior leaders about the school's work, improvements brought about since the last inspection, including the rise in attainment and increased attendance, mean that the school has good capacity to bring about further improvements.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the rate of progress for pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5, so that they can reach even higher attainment by the end of Year 6, by:
 - increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching
 - ensuring all pupils receive clear indications of the precise steps they need to take to reach the next level of learning
 - involving pupils more in reviewing their progress towards their targets.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Pupils are enthusiastic and confident learners because the teachers make lessons interesting and the tasks pupils are given to do are realistic and well matched to their skills and abilities. For example, Year 5 pupils enjoyed the challenge of working out the areas of complex shapes while designing an Olympic stadium. Pupils are encouraged to develop their independence, and this helps them make good progress in lessons, so that by the end of Year 6, their attainment is high. Overall, from above average starting points, pupils make good progress and their achievement is outstanding. Boys and girls of all abilities made similar progress.

Pupils enjoy being at school because there are many activities to participate in and, as a result, attendance has improved and is now high. Those who are particularly talented in various areas are identified and given additional challenge and opportunities to ensure they make good progress. For example, in Year 6 more able pupils played the role of the 'experts' in a murder mystery, supporting their team in deciphering mathematical problems to solve the crime. Support for those with speech, language and communication difficulties is underpinned by well-trained staff and outside partners, so that these pupils are helped to overcome their difficulties and make good progress. Pupils who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties are particularly well supported through a range of strong partnerships and impressive arrangements within the school. For example, they can chat to a counsellor or the learning mentor. The 'yellow coats' or peer mediators play a very positive role in helping pupils to get along so well. ♦ As a result, they almost always behave well, and respond readily to reminders about what is expected of them. Pupils say that any incidents are dealt with quickly and that they feel very safe at school, because they know that adults care a great deal for them. Along with the 'blue and yellow coats', the eco-club, school council and opting to learn sign language, pupils make a strongly felt contribution to the school and local community.

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Through the work associated with the national awards, the development of strong basic literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum, pupils develop excellent skills in information and communication technology. This work is carefully planned and impressive resources are well used. For example, pupils enjoyed learning how to control robots, and filmed and edited an impressive video for their assembly. Pupils particularly like participating in enterprise opportunities, such as the Year 6 businesses that are set up at the end of the year, which develop teamwork and are a powerful culmination of all their other skills. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their moral and social understanding, for example considering and expressing views about moral issues. The breadth of musical and artistic opportunities enables them to develop in cultural areas. The specialist music provision and instrumental tuition engages pupils and enables some to excel. Through its promotion of high quality artistic experiences, the school has gained the Arts Mark gold award. Pupils learn about a range of religions, for example in an assembly about Islam, delivered by a parent, although there are missed opportunities to reflect more deeply and personally about spiritual matters, and to develop their understanding of their own heritage.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	1
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
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils' behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

¹ 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?

Pupils are enthusiastic and confident learners because the teachers make lessons interesting and the tasks pupils are given to do are realistic and well matched to their skills

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These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers have an accurate view of the strengths and areas for development within the school. Together, they have ensured that improvements have continued since the last inspection, and that ambitious targets for pupils' attainment have been met. As a result, adults are united in their high expectations and there is good capacity for sustaining further improvement. Systems to track the progress of pupils are well embedded and used to identify any pupils who might not be doing as well as they should. This leads to appropriate support so that pupils make good progress. This support is strengthened by the excellent partnerships the school has actively cultivated, which are highly effective in making sure pupils' well-being is nurtured, particularly for pupils who are vulnerable. Partnerships enhance pupils' learning beyond the school. For example, strong links with local secondary schools have helped to overcome the limitations of the school site, particularly in physical education, by allowing opportunities for outdoor exercise. The school ensures that every pupil has an equal chance to learn. They rigorously tackle any discrimination. Senior and middle leaders guide staff so that equality of opportunity and inclusion are effective.

Parents and carers regularly receive helpful information about how well their children are doing, although a few indicated that they would like more information. Safeguarding routines are robust and the required policies and procedures are in place. At the time of the inspection, these met government requirements. Training is kept up to date so that staff are well informed. Members of the governing body are knowledgeable and bring considerable expertise and support to the school. They challenge the school where appropriate and ensure that the school provides excellent value for money. They fulfil their statutory duties well. The school promotes good community links, for example through the recent Remembrance Day event. Links with various schools around the world are highly effective and those with schools within the United Kingdom are developing along similar lines so that pupils have a wide appreciation of the range of cultures and beliefs of those who are different to themselves.

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These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

About 40% of parents and carers returned questionnaires. Almost all parents and carers agreed that the school keeps their children safe. The very large majority of parents and carers agreed with all the other statements. A very small minority were not as confident about some of the aspects in the questionnaire, notably whether their children's particular needs are met. Inspectors found that the care for pupils overall is outstanding and that pupils' needs are usually accurately known and well met. A very few parents and carers commented about the lack of communication with the school. Inspectors found that the school has established a good range of ways that parents and carers can communicate with the school but are considering ways of extending this further.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

The inspection team received 188 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 508 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	93	49	81	43	9	5	3	2
The school keeps my child safe	103	55	81	43	1	1	0	0
My school informs me about my child's progress	55	29	111	59	16	9	5	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	62	33	101	54	19	10	3	2
The teaching is good at this school	71	38	107	57	9	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	59	31	107	57	16	9	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	60	32	115	61	10	5	1	1
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)	66	35	97	52	12	6	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	55	29	102	54	26	14	4	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	48	26	114	61	11	6	5	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	44	23	111	59	19	10	2	1
The school is led and managed effectively	72	38	92	49	18	10	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	83	44	90	48	11	6	0	0

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).

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">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
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.



17 March 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downs Junior School, Brighton BN1 6ED

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and for talking to us so confidently. We enjoyed hearing about your work and were impressed with your enthusiasm for learning. We looked at many things in your school and have judged that it is outstanding.

These are some of the things we were particularly impressed with.

- By the end of Year 6 your attainment is high. This is because the curriculum includes interesting topics and experiences which you enjoy, and the teaching is almost always good. As a result, you make good progress and develop important skills in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The headteacher has ensured that the adults care a great deal for you and that there is someone to talk to if you are worried. You said you feel very safe.
- Those of you who find learning difficult, or have difficult things to overcome in your lives, receive helpful support so that you make good progress.
- You get plenty of chances to take on responsibilities, and enjoy making your school a better place, for example by helping each other to play well, or by giving other pupils the chance to work things out when they disagree.
- You have the chance to learn about pupils in other parts of the world, for example using your strong computer skills to email or speak to them by video.
- The behaviour of almost all of you is fantastic, because you know what is expected of you and you remind each other about this.

Even though you attend an outstanding school, we know that the headteacher and all staff are determined to make it even better. We have asked the school to help you make even more progress, particularly in Years 3, 4 and 5. They need to do this by:

- making teaching even better
- giving you more information about exactly what you need to do to reach the next level of your learning
- giving you opportunities to think about your progress towards your targets.

Most importantly, you can be very proud of the part you play in making your school such an exciting, friendly place to learn. We wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Saunders

Lead inspector

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