

The Downs Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118684
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	379659
Inspection dates	5–6 October 2011
Reporting inspector	Sheila Browning

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	375
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jack Roberts
Headteacher	Catherine Karunaratna
Date of previous school inspection	30 June–1 July 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. They observed a total of 17 lessons taught by 15 teachers. They analysed the school's work including samples of pupils' work, documents such as the school improvement plan, curriculum and lesson planning, and the tracking of pupils' progress. They analysed the responses from 48 questionnaires returned by parents and carers as well as those from staff and pupils. Inspectors met with parents and carers, members of the governing body and staff. In addition to informal conversations in lessons, they held meetings with groups of pupils from Years 2 and 6.

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

- The progress all groups of pupils make and especially boys' progress in writing.
- The quality and consistency of teaching and assessment.
- The effectiveness of leaders and managers at all levels including the members of the governing body.
- The impact of strategies to improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Information about the school

The school is larger than the average-sized primary school. Most pupils are of White British heritage. The numbers from other heritages, although rising, remain below the national average. Many of these pupils speak more than one language, and few are at the early stages of learning to speak English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is broadly average, as is the proportion with a statement of special educational needs. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in two adjoining Reception classes. In 2009, local school closures led to a higher than usual number of children joining the school in different year groups. In September 2011 the school federated with another local primary school. A new governing body was formed which included many members of the school's existing governing body. A breakfast club managed by the governing body runs each morning. The school has achieved a number of awards reflecting its commitment in promoting pupils' healthy living and environmental awareness.

An independent provider runs a children's centre on site, therefore this provision did not form part of this 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?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

This is a good school. It has several outstanding features, including the high quality care, guidance and support which target the needs of the pupils whose circumstances have made them particularly vulnerable extremely well. As a result, pupils say they feel very safe, secure and well cared for and they show an outstanding understanding of healthy lifestyles. The result is happy, confident and extremely well-behaved pupils. Parents and carers are supportive of the school and one view was typical of many: 'My daughter says, "I love school, I want to go every day"'.

The determination of the headteacher, aided by strengths in collective leadership, is a key factor in driving improvement. The federation is having a positive influence on several fronts, namely in developing teachers' skills, in strengthening systems such as assessment, and in the monitoring and evaluation of performance and provision to secure greater consistency across both schools.

Significant improvements in transition arrangements, provision and partnerships ensure that the youngest children get off to a good start. Teaching is typically good and pupils make good progress overall. Occasionally this dips when teaching does not challenge or sufficiently engage pupils. In literacy, for example, pupils do not always have opportunities to transfer their writing skills to other subjects, write at length or write using real-life contexts. School data indicate that pupils' writing skills, and especially boys', show improvement but they are not yet at the level of their reading skills. Pupils know their literacy and numeracy targets but the use of 'next steps' in marking is not consistent across all classes. Regular checks on pupils' progress and subsequent interventions for those at risk of underachieving ensure that pupils of all abilities make good progress, especially in mathematics and science.

The most recent as yet unvalidated national test results, while average, fell slightly this year. However, pupils' current work and the school's information on pupils' progress show they are back on track to reach challenging targets. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2 is rising, as it is in reading, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6. Good self-evaluation procedures, and sharp analysis of performance information have effectively pinpointed the reasons for the disappointing English results and these are starting to be remedied.

Effective engagement with parents and carers and the work of the family liaison officer has resulted in improved pupils' attendance. The drive to lift achievement is

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supported well by a creative and more exciting curriculum, and includes fun topics like 'Raiders of the lost Ark' and 'Around the World in 80 days'. Pupils say they really enjoy these and take seriously their responsibilities as peer mediators or pupil forum members where they have influenced decisions about resources and the curriculum.

Leaders have consolidated and improved the school's previously good performance since the previous inspection. Given this and the many improvements made in transition arrangements, the Early Years Foundation Stage provision, robust pupil progress checks and the school's commitment to raise attainment, it has a good capacity to improve further.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' attainment and improve pupils' progress in writing especially that of boys by:
 - providing opportunities to further challenge and engage pupils in improving their writing skills
 - extending opportunities for writing across the curriculum in real-life contexts and at length.

- Increase the proportion of good or better teaching through raising teachers' expectations and consistently showing pupils how they need to improve.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

On joining Reception, children's knowledge, skills, and social and language development are well below the levels expected for their age. By the time they leave Year 6, pupils' attainment is average, which represents good achievement. Staff are working hard to reduce gaps in pupils' learning, and inspection evidence shows that a small minority make outstanding progress. Pupils' pride in their work is evident in their books and in the good quality displays that celebrate their achievements. Year 2 pupils made excellent progress when as detectives they searched the school grounds for three dimensional shapes, and on return they could name different shapes pulled out of a bag and explain terms such as properties, vertices and faces. Pupils' learning is strengthened by their levels of independence, for example in Year 4, pupils prepared newspaper articles about Philius Fogg and created catchy headlines such as, 'Famous inventor chased in Paris', after watching a video clip and acting out scenes from the film *Around the World in 80 Days*. They quickly organised who would be in charge of writing, photographs and captions. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those from minority ethnic heritages make equally good progress because they are fully included in activities tailored to their needs and adults meet their needs effectively.

Progress in mathematics and science is better than in English because pupils' writing,

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especially that of boys, is a relative weakness. Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunity to write at length or in real-life contexts across the curriculum, and on occasion boys are reluctant to write. Nonetheless, pupils really enjoy school and achieve well in their academic work and in their personal development. They are interested and keen to do well as evidenced in their improved attendance. Pupils participate widely in physical activities, including ‘Walk on Wednesdays’, and most respond positively to the school’s health promotion strategies recognised in its award. Buddies organise outdoor activities, mediators resolve any rare conflicts and the school forum is very active. Pupils told inspectors, ‘The smart boards, laptops, and digital equipment make learning much more interesting and fun.’ The youngest pupils’ performance to over 130 parents and carers showed a growing awareness of the world around them as well as celebrating harvest. Pupils’ cultural development is enhanced through art, music, drama and visits. These factors and pupils’ enterprise skills, selling items made during a factory day in Victorian Week, ensure pupils are well prepared for secondary school.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
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	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Strong relationships contribute to strengths in teaching. Clear explanations, good use of new technologies and well-tried teaching methods keep pupils’ attention effectively. Questioning is used well to check for understanding. In a Year 6 mathematics lesson the teachers’ excellent subject knowledge and probing questioning skilfully extended pupils’ thinking at a quick pace when matching pairs of equivalent fractions and finding the highest common factor, numerator and

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

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denominator. Teachers use and display key words in mathematics and science and 'working walls' help prompt children when writing. One pupil said, 'The why, what, when and how really helps me when I am writing.' Pupils' basic skills are enriched further through the use of technology and an inviting well-stocked library. Pupils are encouraged to explain what they are doing and what they have found out, use 'thumbs up' to indicate their level of understanding and know their targets. These contribute significantly to pupils' communication skills and self-esteem. On occasion the pace of learning slows down when teachers spend too long on whole class introductions. This results in opportunities being missed for pupils to be challenged, more engaged and to develop their independent learning skills.

Parents and carers recognise the excellent support for pupils' personal development and pastoral care. One comment summed up the views of many: 'My child settled so quickly and is so happy.' Attention to pupils' well-being is seen in the outstanding transition arrangements, ranging from home and nursery visits, to outreach work with the newly built children's centre and the appointment of a family liaison officer to support families. These have proved to be highly effective in supporting pupils whose circumstances make them vulnerable. Teaching assistants not only work effectively to support pupils in lessons but also are included in pupils' progress meetings to give a full picture of each child's progress.

The key skills in literacy and numeracy are focused on at the start of every term or project for the first two weeks. This, and teachers' short sharp reading and writing sessions, help to boost pupils' skills. The creative curriculum, with whole school themes and topics, captures their imagination. Gifted and talented scientists for example, have enjoyed 'bath bomb' experiments at the local secondary school and the eco committee has negotiated with the caretaker to ensure a more eco friendly school. Breakfast club and after-school clubs from gardening to library are popular, with more than half of the pupils attending at least one club. Though working hard to raise the quality of writing, this has not yet resulted in pupils being confident writers.

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	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Leaders and managers at all levels have embedded ambition and are driving improvement. Systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning ensure most weaknesses are tackled effectively. Staff are well supported and challenged, for example, through training and external courses but this has yet to bring up all

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teaching to the level of the best. Redeployment of teaching assistants has ensured the right support is deployed effectively. The federation has provided opportunities for good practice to be shared, staff responsibilities extended and new ideas explored. Leaders have ensured that strategies to raise pupils’ attainment are back on course while undergoing major building improvements, federation with a local school and the opening of the on-site children’s centre all in the space of two years. The promotion of equality and approaches to tackling any form of discrimination are good, and information on pupils’ progress is used well to investigate any underachievement and to identify individual needs at an early stage, so that all groups make good progress.

Members of the governing body understand clearly where the school’s strong features lie. Although newly formed in terms of the federation, governors bring much expertise and a track record of being proactive. They visit classes, conduct surveys to gain parental views, and challenge school performance. Good procedures are in place for safeguarding. The school is proactive in working with partners and agencies to minimise any risk. Its excellent website, regular newsletters, and parents’ and carers’ workshops mean that they are more engaged in their children’s learning. Strong partnerships with a range of professionals are established and are beneficial to pupils’ well-being. The school demonstrates a very good understanding of its local community, and has links with a school in Calais, although pupils’ understanding of diversity in the United Kingdom today is not as well developed.

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	2
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	2

Early Years Foundation Stage

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

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Leaders have responded effectively to the decline in children’s starting points on entry to the school over the past three years. The school has established its own on entry checks and shares the ‘Unique Story’ – a profile of children’s development – with pre-school settings, parents and carers. These show children’s knowledge, skills, and social and language development to be well below the levels expected for their age. By the start of Year 1, they have made good gains in their learning. Right from the start leaders work with pre-school settings, parents and carers to support and inform them about how they can challenge and extend their child’s learning at home, whether through ‘play and stay’ music sessions, sharing story sacks or workshops on ‘How young children learn’. These ensure a smooth transition into Reception.

The good practice of encouraging children to become independent learners are successfully extended into Year 1, so that children continue to build on the good foundations laid in Reception. Leaders ensure that the Early Years Foundation Stage is well managed. Teaching and learning focus on developing children’s social skills so that they are ready to learn, hand in hand with individual targeted outcomes, rigorous routines and continual assessments. Children thoroughly enjoy their learning and take part enthusiastically in all the activities on offer in this lively welcoming environment. For example, the creative curriculum is beginning to have a huge impact. Children made and had their passports stamped before boarding an imaginary boat in the hall to take them to France and learnt to say, ‘bonjour’! They wrote postcards home and ate food in the class Skyline Café.

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) engages children, especially boys, and so supports their creative writing skills but work to tackle children’s low-level reading and writing skills is ongoing. Attention to the welfare and safety of children is well planned. The good balance between teacher-directed and self-chosen activities means children confidently learn in either class or outside, climbing on the wobbly bridge or riding trikes. Children know the importance of eating fruit, ‘to stay healthy’ said one. All adults ensure that children plan and choose their own learning activities even at this early start of the term. They already know the routines and where the resources are. They use animal puppets Tony and Tina to teach children the ee sound, and to recognise numbers 1 to 10 and put them in the right order. Assessments and data are used most effectively to plan future learning.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2

Views of parents and carers

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A below average proportion of the school's parents and carers returned the Ofsted questionnaires. All but a very few expressed positive views about the school's work. A number made written comments and the large majority of these expressed considerable satisfaction with the school. These included complimentary remarks about how welcoming, caring and supportive the school is, the quality of the staff, and the broad range of learning experiences. However, a few recorded concerns over a small number of issues. These included how well the school helped them to support their child's learning and not dealing effectively with behaviour. The inspection team looked at these areas and judged that the school offered good opportunities for parents and carers to support their child's learning and had the normal range of procedures to address any misbehaviour.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Downs Church of England Primary 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 48 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 375 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	35	73	13	27	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	36	75	12	25	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	25	52	18	38	3	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	32	67	13	27	1	2	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	34	71	12	25	1	2	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	30	63	15	31	2	4	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	32	67	14	29	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)	25	52	15	31	0	0	1	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	30	63	14	29	1	2	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	22	46	14	29	2	4	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	40	25	52	1	2	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	30	63	13	27	1	2	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	38	79	7	15	1	2	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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 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 2010/11 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.



7 October 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Downs Church of England Primary School, Deal CT14 7TL

Thank you for being so welcoming to us when we inspected your school. It was a pleasure to meet you all and to see you all getting on so well together. We think yours is a good school, and you do much to make it so. Your behaviour is excellent and you show an excellent understanding of staying safe and of the importance of keeping healthy. You told us how much you enjoyed 'just everything' as one of you said. We think you are taught well and are making good progress. The people who lead your school are working hard to make it even better than it is.

The school wants to improve even further. We have said it should help you all, and especially the boys to improve their writing skills, and to work on making teaching even better by doing the things below.

- Give you all more opportunities to challenge and interest you to write, at length and in different subjects and in real-life contexts, and to point out what you need to do to improve your writing.
- Make sure that teachers are helped to make more lessons at least good and better.

The adults are aiming to make this school not just good but outstanding. Together you can help make it happen!

Yours sincerely

Sheila Browning
Lead inspector

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