

# The Downs Primary School and Nursery

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	115016
<b>Local Authority</b>	Essex
<b>Inspection number</b>	378983
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13–14 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Nick Butt

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>	3–11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	232
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Geoff Penketh
<b>Headteacher</b>	Linda Chesworth (Interim headteacher)
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 February 2009
<b>School address</b>	The Hides Harlow Essex CM20 3RB
<b>Telephone number</b>	01279 445538
<b>Fax number</b>	01279 438482
<b>Email address</b>	admin@downs.essex.sch.uk

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<b>Age group</b>	3–11
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors. The inspection team visited 14 lessons or part lessons taught by nine teachers. Inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils, and spoke informally to parents and carers. They observed the school's work and looked at a selection of documentation including planning, evidence of monitoring such as lesson observations, and analyses of pupils' work and other assessment information. The inspection team scrutinised inspection questionnaires returned by 36 parents and carers, as well as those 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.

- To what extent are pupils developing their writing skills through research projects and extended pieces of work?
- How consistent is marking in showing pupils what they have to do to improve?
- What has been the impact of improvement measures introduced by the interim headteacher?

## Information about the school

The Downs Primary and Nursery is similar in size to the average primary school. The proportion of pupils from different minority ethnic groups is below average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average, including those with a statement of special educational needs. There have been changes to the school's leadership team since the last inspection including the appointment of an interim headteacher from April 2011 and an assistant headteacher. A second assistant headteacher returned from secondment in September 2011. The school has Eco School Bronze and Healthy Schools status. The school runs a breakfast club each day.

During the inspection, Year 6 and several members of staff were away on a residential journey.

**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?****3****The school's capacity for sustained improvement****3**

## Main findings

This is a satisfactory school. It is improving under the good leadership of the interim headteacher whose openness and collaborative style of working have won the respect of staff, the governing body, parents and carers. A parent, reflecting the views of many, said, 'There has already been a huge improvement across the school and I strongly believe that, given time, the interim headteacher will make The Downs the success it should be.'

Standards are broadly average, but have been rising faster in mathematics than in English because of improvements introduced by the assistant headteacher. A focus on mental mathematics has enabled pupils to grow in confidence as they use and apply their skills and knowledge in real-life situations. Pupils do not always have sufficient opportunities to write at length in a range of different subjects, and the quality of their handwriting varies considerably. The school's library is set apart from the school building and not easily accessible. Consequently, pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to write research projects and develop their independence in learning. Children in the Nursery and Reception get off to a good start because of the exciting activities they enjoy both inside and outside the classroom, and the emphasis on developing early basic skills.

Pupils say they feel safe at school and have a good understanding of managing risk. Parents and carers strongly agree that their children are kept safe. Since the school started cooking its own meals, more pupils have started having school lunches and say they enjoy the salad bar and other healthy choices. Their behaviour is satisfactory. Most pupils behave well, although occasionally their concentration drifts if the pace of learning in lessons slows. Where pupils have particular difficulties in behaving acceptably, good systems help them to exercise self-control. Pupils make a positive contribution to their local community through the choir taking part in the Remembrance Day service and through putting forward their ideas for improving the local environment.

Teaching is satisfactory, although more of it is now good as a result of work by senior leaders to develop staff and tackle inconsistencies in the provision. Teachers use questioning well to extend pupils' learning and to assess their understanding. They are clear about what they want pupils to learn and share with them how they can succeed in lessons. Occasionally, pupils are not actively involved enough or take too long to settle to tasks. Teachers use assessment information to plan activities that suit pupils' abilities, but do not always pitch this at just the right level, meaning

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that work is sometimes not challenging enough. Much of the marking is good and follows the school's policy closely. However, there are a few inconsistencies in how well teachers convey to pupils what they need to do to improve their work.

The interim headteacher has forged a shared vision with staff, ensured that morale is high and that all staff work as a team to bring about rapid improvement. Monitoring is systematic and increasingly rigorous, especially in the core subjects of English and mathematics. This gives leaders and managers an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas to develop further. Monitoring of other non-core subjects is less well developed. The governing body supports the school well. Its members have reviewed its activity to improve their efficiency and to hold leaders to account. Members of the governing body are beginning to align themselves to strategic priorities for improvement so that they can evaluate the school's work effectively. The school has a satisfactory capacity for further improvement, based on its progress since the last inspection and the fact that many of the recent measures to improve have not had long enough to show their full impact.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

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

- Raise standards in writing and develop pupils' study skills by:
  - giving pupils plenty of opportunities to write at length in different subjects
  - improving the quality of pupils' handwriting
  - promoting pupils' research skills and independence through making reference books more accessible.
- Improve teaching and assessment to a good standard by:
  - using assessment information to plan work that always matches pupils' abilities
  - ensuring that all lessons run at a brisk pace
  - improving the consistency of marking so that pupils know what they have to do to improve and have time to respond to teachers' comments.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
  - developing the monitoring role of non-core subject leaders
  - involving the governing body more in evaluating the impact of the school's strategic priorities for improvement.

## Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

**3**

Children join the school with skills and abilities well below those usually expected, especially in language and communication. They make good progress in the Early

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Years Foundation Stage, but still enter Year 1 with standards a little below average. Progress is satisfactory in Key Stages 1 and 2 and attainment is broadly average, but a little below in writing. In lessons pupils show an enthusiasm for learning, especially when actively involved. For example, Year 1 pupils took great care in drawing creatures with two, four, six and eight legs on the computers and spoke animatedly about what they were doing. Pupils in Year 5 could use specific vocabulary as they compared three contrasting poems. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve satisfactorily because they receive appropriate support, and teaching assistants are trained well to lead interventions. These pupils are included in all lessons and teachers adapt their planning to ensure that they can access the learning. There are no differences in the performance of different groups of pupils, with all making satisfactory progress.

Pupils take plenty of exercise and participate in a range of sports clubs. They enjoyed taking part in a 'bike-it' family day, when they were joined by cycling siblings, parents and carers. Year 6 pupils have written letters of application to take on responsibilities within the school, such as school councillors and monitors. They raise money for charities at home and abroad. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They learn about a new language each month and have a good understanding of the range of cultures represented in the school and beyond, taking part in French and Spanish days and enjoying workshops of African drumming and Indian dancing. They have a good sense of right and wrong and get on well together.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

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

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## How effective is the provision?

In the best lessons, teachers work at a brisk pace and inspire pupils through actively involving them in learning. Their good subject knowledge enables them to approach a topic in a variety of ways to help pupils to understand, for example, calculating numbers. The pace of learning slows when resources are not immediately available for pupils and they have to wait to start work, or when the task they are given does not sufficiently challenge them. Teachers often make regular comments in pupils' books about how they can improve, but do not always give them time to read these or respond to them. An audit of the curriculum by leaders revealed gaps in what was being covered, so this has been tightened up, and there are more opportunities for pupils to practise their basic skills in different subjects. However, pupils infrequently write at length, or research extensively to produce special projects. There is a good range of enrichment through visitors, such as grandparents who remember the Second World War, and trips to places of interest.

Pastoral care is good, and the school caters well for pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable. New measures to promote attendance, such as a weekly class competition, have been successful in reducing absence to average levels. The school works well with a range of outside agencies that offer additional support and guidance, and manages transition points well, both when children join the Nursery and when pupils move on to secondary school. The breakfast club provides good care for pupils, giving them interesting opportunities to share activities and eat healthily.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>3</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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The interim headteacher and assistant headteachers work well together and have increased the pace of change, introducing effective systems to track pupils' progress, monitor teaching and hold staff to account. The interim headteacher has had a considerable impact on the school community, who welcome her energy, ambition and approachable manner. Teachers value the educational expertise of senior leaders and the support and guidance that is always available. Consequently, teaching is improving, standards are rising and progress is increasing. Governance is satisfactory. The governing body has restructured the way it works to become more effective. Minutes of meetings have improved and give a clear view of the discussions that have taken place. Governors have not always focused sufficiently on

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the school's key priorities for improvement, but are now taking steps to evaluate closely how well the school is performing.

The school engages parents and carers well, communicating effectively with them through a weekly newsletter and regular updates on their children's progress. There are good partnerships with a range of organisations, including the secondary school and a local community charity. The school is able to access expertise for pupils and their families that is not otherwise available, and this has had a positive impact in helping overcome barriers to learning. Equality of opportunity is satisfactory, with all pupils included and any inconsistencies in provision being tackled robustly.

Safeguarding arrangements are good. The school keeps careful records and works successfully with families facing difficulties. Its vigilance in securing the site and careful planning for trips gives pupils, together with their parents and carers, a high degree of confidence in their safety. The school promotes community cohesion satisfactorily, knowing its local community well, and ensuring all families feel welcome and valued. It is developing wider links within the United Kingdom and abroad.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>2</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>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</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>3</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>3</b>

## Early Years Foundation Stage

Children settle quickly in the Nursery and Reception because staff know them well as individuals and provide a richly stimulating environment that gives them a thirst for learning. Children's ideas are incorporated into plans and staff organise purposeful and enjoyable experiences for them. Children loved scooping up large quantities of autumn leaves in the outdoor play area. They have access to a wealth of resources, and are used to making choices about their learning. A child in Reception was



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engrossed in a game of 'listening lotto', identifying the sounds farmyard animals make. There is a good mix of activities led by adults and those chosen by the children themselves. The good teaching ensures children develop their early basic literacy and numeracy skills rapidly from low starting points. Staff keep careful records of the progress children make, and present these in attractive ways that are accessible to the children and their parents and carers. The leadership is good, with a strong staff team who understand how young children learn. There is some variability between planning in Nursery and the more detailed Reception planning that clearly shows how all areas of learning are being used.

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

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>2</b>
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

The proportion of questionnaires returned by parents and carers was low. Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors in the playground and those who returned questionnaires said how pleased they were by the changes the interim headteacher has introduced, and how welcome they felt at the school. They agreed that their children were happy at school and all felt the school kept their children safe and healthy. A few parents and carers raised individual matters that were followed-up in general terms confidentially by inspectors.

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

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at The Downs Primary School and Nursery 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 36 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 232 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	21	58	14	39	1	3	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	24	67	12	33	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	14	39	20	56	1	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	13	36	19	53	3	8	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	17	47	18	50	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	11	31	23	64	2	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	16	44	20	56	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)	12	33	21	58	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	16	44	16	44	2	6	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	18	50	16	44	2	6	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	22	61	12	33	0	0	1	3
The school is led and managed effectively	21	58	13	36	1	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	22	61	14	39	0	0	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](http://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"> <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.**



17 October 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of The Downs Primary School and Nursery, Harlow, CM20 3RB**

Thank you for welcoming us to your school and sharing your views with us both when you spoke to us and in the questionnaires some of you filled in. You told us you feel your school is improving and we agree. It provides you with a satisfactory education. Here are some of its strengths.

- Children get off to a good start in Nursery and Reception.
- You keep safe and know how to stay healthy.
- You are keen to help around the school and make a contribution to your local community.
- You have a good understanding of other faiths and cultures.
- The school cares for you well, especially if anything is worrying you.
- The headteacher's approach has been welcomed by the staff and your parents and carers.
- The school makes sure you are safe.

There are still some things that will make the school even better. We have asked the school's leaders and your teachers to:

- help your writing to improve by making sure you write neatly and at length
- give you the chance to research topics by making more use of the reference books from the library
- make sure they give you work that challenges you
- keep lessons moving at a brisk pace
- give you time to read and act upon comments in your books
- make sure they check how well you are doing in all subjects.

You all can help by trying your best and telling your teacher what you would like to find out about. With all good wishes for the future

Yours sincerely

Nick Butt  
Lead inspector

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