

Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	115119
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	379008
Inspection dates	28–29 June 2012
Lead inspector	Selwyn Ward

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	267
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Janice Josiah
Headteacher	Helen Craig & Sue Wilson (co-headteachers)
Date of previous school inspection	6 May 2008
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

Inspection team

Selwyn Ward

Additional Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

Diana Songer-Hudgell

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 20 lessons taught by 11 teachers, with a particular focus on the progress of boys and girls of different abilities in reading, writing and mathematics. Inspectors listened to pupils read, and spoke with parents and carers, groups of pupils, staff, and members of the governing body. Inspectors observed the school's work. They looked at pupils' books, school development planning, school self-evaluation, leaders' monitoring of teaching and the questionnaire responses of 150 pupils, 33 staff and 109 parents and carers.

Information about the school

This is an average-sized school. Almost all of the pupils are White British. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils who are supported at school action plus or have a statement of special educational needs is below average. The majority of these pupils have moderate learning difficulties. The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. Downham has Investors In People and Activemark awards, and has Healthy Schools status. The co-headteachers were appointed in January 2010. They each work part time, sharing the leadership role.

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	3
Achievement of pupils	3
Quality of teaching	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Downham provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The school is not yet good because teaching and teachers' marking do not ensure that pupils all make consistently good progress in lessons and over their time at the school. Schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.
- Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 6 is broadly average. In the past, pupils have done better in mathematics than English, but attainment in English is rising as a result of initiatives to boost the quality and quantity of written work.
- Teachers know their pupils well but do not make enough use of assessment information to plan work that matches the wide range of ability in each class. That means that teachers do not always make the best use of the teaching time available and they do not all expect enough of pupils, especially the more able. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs often benefit from well-tailored support in lessons, but teaching assistants sometimes do too much for these pupils. Where this happens, it slows progress. There are examples of good marking that moves pupils' learning on, but this is not consistent across every subject.
- Pupils and their parents and carers confirm that they feel safe in school and they learn how to keep safe. Behaviour is good and pupils show they are eager to learn. Pupils' attention only begins to wane on those occasions when teachers' lesson introductions go on for too long.
- School leaders are thorough in monitoring the school's performance and in analysing where further interventions are needed to prevent individual pupils from falling behind. Their monitoring of lessons has given leaders an accurate picture of the overall strengths and weaknesses of teaching. The success of initiatives to raise attainment, particularly in writing, show that the school is well placed to make further improvements.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- By the end of the spring term 2013, accelerate pupils' progress in lessons so it is consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - all teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do
 - the learning objectives, set out at the start of each lesson, identify what pupils are expected to learn and not just the activities to be carried out
 - full use is made of assessment information always to match work to pupils' different capabilities, and especially to challenge the more able
 - activities are varied and pupils are not expected to listen to overly long introductions
 - all pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, are helped to develop independent learning skills from the Early Years Foundation Stage and throughout their time in Key Stages 1 and 2
 - sufficient time is allowed at the end of each lesson for the teacher to summarise with the pupils what it is they have learned.

- By the end of the autumn term 2012, ensure that marking and assessment are consistently effective by:
 - bringing the timing of assessments of children's starting points in the Early Years Foundation Stage into line with the practice in other schools
 - consistently giving all pupils clear guidance in every subject that shows them what they need to do to improve their work
 - routinely giving pupils time to read, reflect on and respond to the comments teachers make when they mark their work
 - extending opportunities for pupils to check their own and each other's work, including to identify errors in spelling and punctuation.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

The school's assessments of children's skills and capabilities when they join the Reception Year do not give a robust picture of children's starting points. Assessments show lower starting points than expected, but this is because these assessments are conducted within a fortnight of children starting school, which is much sooner than in most other schools. Outcomes at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage have varied. They are above average for children currently in Reception, but they were only average in each of the previous two years. Children's social development is especially strong, with children prepared well for learning in Key Stage 1.

Attainment at the end of Year 2 has mostly been the equivalent of around six months ahead of the national average. It has been weakest in reading, which has been only

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average in each of the last two years. An increased emphasis on teaching children letters and the sounds they make (phonics) in Reception and Key Stage 1 has improved progress in reading this year. In Key Stage 2, it is writing that has traditionally depressed performance in English at this school. The initiative to promote 'Big Writing' this year has begun to turn this around and raise attainment in writing. Attainment in reading and writing at the end of Year 6 is around a term ahead of the national average. This represents an improvement on the previous two years. 'Big Writing' is now well established in every class, including in the Reception Year, so that every child is given at least a fortnightly opportunity to write for a sustained period. In lessons seen during the inspection, pupils worked during these sessions with focused concentration, routinely referring to prompts reminding them of the extended vocabulary and punctuation which they were expected to incorporate. In the lessons where progress is satisfactory rather than good, it is because there is not enough new learning. Pupils, especially the more able, are not all stretched. The progress of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is limited when staff complete work for them rather than supporting them to complete work for themselves.

The very large majority of parents and carers are very satisfied with the progress their children make, but inspectors' findings confirm the views of the small minority who say, 'Learning could be more challenging.'

Quality of teaching

Relationships throughout the school are good, and teachers succeed in motivating pupils so that they work hard. Pupils, parents and carers comment positively about how teachers make lessons interesting and fun. Well-designed cross-curricular themes enliven learning by bringing different subjects together. During the inspection, teachers devised imaginative activities linked to the Olympics. For example, pupils in the Year 3/4 class wrote diaries from the point of view of gold medallists they had studied, and the pie charts that pupils in Years 5 and 6 were interpreting in mathematics were linked to Olympic events. The opportunities that pupils have to develop their speaking and listening skills help them to grow in confidence and so contribute to their personal development. Pupils' reading skills have been strengthened through the systematic teaching of phonics, particularly in Reception and Key Stage 1.

Although there are many good features of teaching, lessons often result in satisfactory rather than better learning because teachers do not always expect enough of the pupils. Work is not always matched closely enough to pupils' different learning needs. When all pupils are given similar activities to complete, regardless of their ability or prior attainment, the work is often too easy for the more-able pupils and can be too difficult for the less able and for some of those with moderate learning difficulties. The support provided for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs sometimes inhibits learning and independence when staff do too much for the pupils. On occasion, staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage also miss opportunities to strengthen children's independence. Teaching time is not

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used well when lesson introductions go on for too long or when more-able pupils, in particular, are given repetitive tasks to complete before they move on to the 'extension' activities designed to stretch them.

Most lessons are structured so that they start with the teacher setting out learning objectives and with a plenary session planned for the end to pull together what has been learnt. However, not all of the learning objectives are sharply focused. Where these simply set out the tasks to be completed or are too broad, such as 'to use punctuation', they do not help pupils to assess for themselves whether or not they are making progress. Opportunities are missed to consolidate pupils' learning on those occasions when the end-of-lesson plenary is curtailed for lack of time or is dominated by the teacher telling the pupils what they have learnt rather than involving them in evaluating this for themselves.

Some good marking, particularly of writing, helps pupils to improve their work but this is not consistent across all subjects and in every class. It is best in upper Key Stage 2. Sometimes teachers write comments or pose questions in their marking that go unanswered because time is not routinely set aside for pupils to read them and respond. Similarly, pupils are not always given time to check their own or each other's work for errors in spelling or punctuation.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

The Downham school code is 'Caring, Consideration and Courtesy'. It is a notable feature of this school that the code is closely adhered to by all pupils. Behaviour is good around the school and in the great majority of lessons. Pupils are polite and helpful, and they treat each other with kindness and respect. This is a view confirmed by pupils and endorsed by the large majority of their parents and carers. Pupils have positive attitudes to learning and the great majority listen well in lessons and show they are keen to learn. It is only in those lessons where work is repetitive, or where long introductions delay opportunities for practical activities, that pupils' attention drifts.

Pupils insist that bullying incidents are rare, and they have a good awareness of the different forms that bullying can take. During the inspection, a Year 2 boy made a comment to another to which he mistakenly took offence. The first boy was mortified and was at pains to reassure his friend that 'I'm not making fun of you.' Pupils explain that if any bullying incidents or acts of unkindness occur, they need only raise them with staff to be sure that they will be dealt with.

Almost all parents and carers confirm their children's view that the school keeps them safe, and pupils know a great deal about how to keep safe, including when using the internet. Attendance at Downham has been consistently above average.

Leadership and management

Parents and carers describe Downham as a 'well run school' and inspectors agree.

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The co-headteachers work very effectively together. Parents and carers confirm that the liaison between them is exceedingly good so that, as a parent explained, 'If you raise something with one, the other always knows.' Along with the deputy headteacher, they have built an accurate picture of those aspects of teaching that are most effective and those that are not. A detailed analysis published in May has already had an impact in improving classroom practice, for example by sharpening the challenge in some lessons for more-able pupils. Performance management arrangements are thorough and have been incorporated into initiatives introduced to raise attainment. For example, leaders ensured that the introduction this year of 'Big Writing' was accompanied by appropriate staff training and ongoing evaluation in staff meetings. Each teacher has a target related to pupils' writing incorporated into their individual performance management priorities.

The governing body keeps itself well informed. It is not just dependent on leaders and staff for knowing what goes on in school but the Chair and other members visit regularly, with a specific focus, to sample first hand aspects of provision. The governing body monitors performance with rigour, particularly through its teaching and learning committee, although it has not set such sharply measurable targets in the annual school development plan. The governing body ensures that arrangements for safeguarding fully meet regulatory requirements.

A notable strength of the school is its creative curriculum, linking subjects together to make learning more relevant and fun. For example, pupils' literacy and numeracy in the Year 4/5 class last term were organised around a *Come Dine With Me* theme. This also helped to broaden pupils' horizons as they learnt about Fair Trade food production and foods, recipes and festivals from around the world. The curriculum also contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in encouraging pupils to empathise with others. Activities linked to the Paralympics, for example, have focused pupils' attention on disability and achievement, and have resulted in some thoughtful work on equality and on tackling discrimination.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



2 July 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Billericay, CM11 1NU

Thank you for being so friendly and helpful when we came to visit your school. A particular thank you to those of you who shared your views of the school with us through questionnaires and by talking to the inspectors. Many of you told us how much you enjoy school, and we could see that too in your enthusiasm in lessons. We were pleased to see how well you get on together and how well behaved you are. It was also good to see that your attendance is better than in many other schools.

Downham is well run. Your headteachers have made a number of recent improvements, including to help you to make faster progress in writing. The school provides you with a satisfactory education. Teachers help you to make reasonable progress. As a result, you reach average standards in Year 6. Like your headteachers, we would like to see you do better than this, so we have suggested some ways in which teachers could help you to make faster progress in lessons. We have asked them, for example, to make sure that you are always given work that enables you to build on what you have learnt before. You can help by telling teachers when you are given work to do that seems too hard or too easy.

We have also asked teachers to make all the marking as good as the best. At present, it is mainly in writing that you are shown how to improve your work. Again, you can help to do better by taking care to check your own and each other's work so that you do not let your creative writing down through silly spelling or punctuation errors. We would also like to see you take the time to read and respond to the helpful comments teachers write when they mark your work.

Thank you again for the welcome you gave us, and our very best wishes to all of you for the future, both at this school and, for those of you in your last term here, for your new start next year at your secondary schools.

Yours faithfully

Selwyn Ward
Lead inspector

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