

Downlands Community School

Blandford Camp, Blandford Forum, Dorset, DT11 8BG

Inspection dates 9–10 July 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Outstanding	1
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Pupils achieve well during their time in the school. This is the consequence of the schools' careful tracking of progress, the quality of the teaching and the very positive attitudes of the pupils.
- The approach by the school to the use of information and communication technology is a strength – pupils have their own tablets, and these are particularly relevant to the innovative approach to the teaching of mathematics.
- Pupils benefit from exceptionally positive relationships in lessons, and good teaching helps ensure their above-expected levels of progress.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding. Pupils behave extremely well both in lessons and elsewhere. They are very sociable, polite and relate extremely well to each other and adults. They say they feel very safe and secure.
- Strong leadership by the two co-headteachers has resulted in the development of an effective leadership team, including governors. Given the unique character of the school, the staff invest heavily and effectively in ensuring that pupils feel welcome and settle quickly.
- Links with parents and the local community are outstanding and are particularly aided through the effective use of modern communication technology.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not all teachers consistently use clear success criteria in lessons to help pupils identify what they have to do to succeed, and to encourage them to self-evaluate. Similarly, inconsistencies exist in the degree of challenge for high attainers and the provision of varied resources to meet the pupils' different learning styles.
- In mathematics, there are inconsistencies in the degree to which all aspects of the curriculum are reinforced over time. Not all teachers conduct sufficiently regular checks on pupils' understanding of their work or ensure they record a model of how to solve problems.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning and teaching in 15 lessons, including visits to the Early Years Foundation Stage, along with guided reading, and linking sounds and letters (phonics) sessions.
- Inspectors observed the school’s work and looked at progress and attainment data, the school’s development plan, curriculum plans, governing body documentation, and policies and procedures. Those relating to health and safety and safeguarding of pupils were carefully scrutinised.
- The inspection team listened to a sample of pupils from Years 2 and 3 reading.
- Inspectors took account of 75 responses to Ofsted’s online Parent View survey.
- Questionnaires completed by 29 members of the school staff were also considered.
- Discussions were held with senior and other leaders, teachers, learning support assistants, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors, pupils, parents and a representative from the local authority.

Inspection team

Michael Pye, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Margaret Faull

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-size primary school.
- The school is situated in an armed services camp which specialises in running training courses for members of the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Consequently, service families live in the camp for relatively short periods of time. This results in very high pupil mobility rates. Approximately a third of pupils enter or leave the school throughout the year, in addition to the expected number of pupils entering and leaving in Reception and Year 6.
- Children entering the Early Years Foundation Stage are organised in two Reception classes.
- The government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress, were met by the school in 2012.
- A pre-school operates from the school site. This is not run by the school's governing body and is subject to a separate inspection.
- The high mobility rate means that the characteristics of the school population can change very quickly. The judgements below, about the school population, are for the academic year ending in July 2012.
- The vast majority of pupils are known to be eligible for the pupil premium which provides additional funding for pupils eligible for free school meals, looked after children and pupils from service families. Last year, there were three pupils believed to be entitled to free school meals; currently there are none. There were no looked after children in Year 6 in 2012.
- The majority of pupils come from a predominantly White British background. The next largest minority ethnic group consists of pupils who are of Nepalese heritage, of Gurkha families.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is below average. There is a well above average proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs. The main needs of these pupils relate to speech, language and communication needs.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Eradicate the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching through ensuring that all teachers:
 - consistently use success criteria to ensure that pupils know the expected learning outcomes and that they carry out meaningful self-assessment
 - ensure that high attainers are consistently challenged to do their best
 - ensure that a good range of resources are readily available in lessons to meet the different learning styles of pupils.
- Improve attainment and progress in mathematics by removing the inconsistencies in teaching by ensuring that all teachers:
 - provide more regular opportunities for pupils to reinforce their skills in all strands of the National Curriculum in mathematics
 - ensure that pupils have, and consistently record, a model of the correct methodology for solving problems
 - during lessons, conduct more regular checks about whether pupils have understood the learning.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils, including those not entitled to the pupil premium, achieve well given their starting points.
- Children enter the Early Years Foundation Stage with below the expected levels of skills and knowledge. They make good progress and leave Reception with levels closer to those expected.
- Current work shows and data support the picture of pupils' good progress in English and mathematics. This includes disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. There is evidence that pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds often do better than pupils from a White British background.
- The published national comparison data for the school do not give an accurate picture of how this school contributes to pupil outcomes. This is because of the very high rate of pupil mobility. The data shows that in 2012, pupils' attainment overall was well below average by the end of Year 6 and this was especially so for mathematics. It also suggests that pupils from the end of Year 2 make well below the expected progress overall. The current Year 6 are on track to attain above average levels.
- In 2012, those few pupils believed to be entitled to free school meals progressed less than a term behind their peers in both English and mathematics. Currently there are no such pupils on roll – but this can change quickly!
- In 2012, by the end of Year 2, reading standards, along with mathematics and writing, were average. The phonics screening check at the end of Year 1 was below average. Current indications are that current pupils would now exceed that average.
- The school has developed an accurate method of tracking progress and attainment using pupils' entry points as a benchmark measure. The data shows high attainers, boys, girls, and pupils with English as an additional language progressing in line with their peers. Intervention to support pupils has a positive impact, but the provision map insufficiently shows the start and finish points of pupils' progress.
- Pupils heard reading in Years 2 and 3 are able to separate words into sounds and blend them together to pronounce the word correctly. Good diaries and reading targets help track pupils' progress and inform parents and carers about how they can support their children.

The quality of teaching

is good

- As a consequence of the teachers' skills at building positive relationships, the pupils settle extremely quickly. A recent arrival in Year 5 was observed working well in a small group and was a full participant in discussions.
- In this very positive environment, pupils readily engage with their learning and give their views freely. This was seen in Reception, where children were observed involving themselves enthusiastically in a range of activities: singing, writing letters and sounding out, or riding trikes.
- The deployment and skills of the learning support assistants is a very positive aspect. As examples, in Year 1 and Year 5 mathematics lessons, the learning support assistants were proactive in supporting pupils, used open-questioning and did not lead the pupils.
- There are some good examples in lessons of teachers modelling expected learning. A Year 1 phonics lesson saw the teacher accurately highlight the patterns of sounds and letters as pupils were further challenged to find the appropriate word-card and arrange them in the correct 'ie', 'igh', and 'y' categories.
- There are also examples of high attainers being well challenged. In a Year 3 lesson based around a South African story, the teacher skilfully ensured that they discussed why a book might be banned. This led to a consideration of racism and the nature of apartheid. Not all teachers are so adept at consistently providing such challenge.
- A Year 2 mathematics lesson saw the pupils benefiting from the provision of a range of

resources designed to meet their individual learning needs: worksheets, shapes for sorting and resources for number pattern work. However, not all lessons provide sufficient, varied and accessible resources.

- Learning objectives are made clear. However, opportunities are missed to provide information about what successful learning looks like and to use these criteria to encourage self-assessment.
- The school has introduced a new computerised learning programme for mathematics. This is proving highly effective in personalising pupils' learning and challenges them to tackle a large number of questions. The system provides good assessment data which the teacher can access later and use for future learning. Being new, there are inconsistencies between teachers in how the learning opportunities are maximised.
- Progress is maximised where regular whole-class checks are made of the pupils' understanding. Similarly, not all teachers ensure that pupils record the correct methodology which they can use when stuck on a question; this would help prevent a tendency for pupils to 'guess' the correct answer. Finally, the number work associated with this approach is not always complemented by regular reinforcement of other aspects of the curriculum.
- Marking is regularly carried out, is supportive and usually gives good direction about the next steps in the pupils' learning.
- The very large majority of the parents who completed the online survey believe their child receives good teaching. A small minority believe that the school does not set appropriate homework; the school is investigating this further.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Pupils adopt extremely positive approaches to their learning. They are keen, enthusiastic and want to achieve. They enjoy school. One pupil said, 'It's the best school I've ever been in'.
- Their excellent behaviour and their social adaptability is seen in the way they behave in a similarly very positive way whether in lessons or in whole-school events such as assemblies. The pupils say their lessons are not interrupted by behavioural issues. The school carefully records incidents and governors review the log regularly.
- A very consistent approach is adopted to behaviour management; one of an ethos of encouragement for positive behaviour rather than 'upfront' behaviour management. Pupils know the high expectations.
- Pupils' moral development is reflected by the very high levels of respect shown for adults and their peers. They listen attentively, put hands up to answer questions, and work exceptionally well in groups.
- The ease with which pupils settle and the way they are welcomed and included is obvious in the ethos which pervades the school. There have been no exclusions.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying and that any behavioural incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively.
- The pupils have a good knowledge of what constitutes bullying, including cyber-bullying. The police, visiting to deliver internet danger messages, said they were impressed by the levels of pupils' knowledge and understanding of this subject.
- The school promotes the 'Rights and Respect' agenda; consequently school and eco-councillors are regularly invited to give their views on matters of school life. Pupils enjoy responsibility. Younger pupils eagerly act as register monitors, older pupils act as reading buddies to younger and new pupils have a buddy. These contribute significantly to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development.

The leadership and management are good

- The school's vision is of maximising pupils' potential. The emphasis is on developing more

personalised learning through the extensive use of information and communication technology. The overwhelmingly positive responses to the staff questionnaire demonstrate their commitment to these aims. All adults, including receptionists and the site manager subscribe to the ethos of mutual respect which underpins school life and means that new pupils quickly feel included in school life.

- Leaders check the school's work using a wide variety of methods. Lesson observations, learning walks, work scrutiny and pupil progress meetings take place. The latter helps raise accountability. To enable the tracking of progress, the headteachers introduced a good system of short-term evidence gathering.
- The recent introduction of online portfolios enables pupils' work to be photographed, contextualised and uploaded. Also used to check progress, they promote parental links extremely well. A parent serving abroad can access the work completed by their child on a daily basis. Virtual badges, encrypted with details of why the award has been given, act as rewards.
- Subject leaders contribute well to monitoring and identify relevant development priorities. The literacy coordinator has contributed to the introduction of regular extended writing opportunities and new guided reading approaches. The mathematics coordinator has worked to introduce the new computerised programme and the impact has been seen in improving attainment and progress.
- Regular checks are made of teaching quality. Teachers obtain some good oral and written feedback. However, observations insufficiently focus on the progress of pupil groups other than gender. There is a need to complete a fuller picture of the quality of teaching. Progress data and the findings of work scrutiny need consideration to triangulate the evidence and give a full picture of teaching quality over time.
- Performance management for teachers is well established and links well with school and personal priorities. Professional development is used well to support teachers, and includes leadership training, and conferences for newly qualified staff.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Information and communication technology is increasingly a strength due to the effective support of the Digital Leaders. The pupils' cultural development is well advanced through links with schools in Nepal and Italy.
- Links with parents and the immediate community are outstanding. Pupils share singing presentations with the camp choir and other schools. Parents eagerly praise the school for the support it gives families. A programme of personal and social development for families is particularly mentioned and is welcomed by new parents. There are close links with the local pre-schools and the local network of schools benefit pupils through such things as joint project work.
- The local authority acknowledges the school's unique character and the challenge of high mobility. It delivers 'light touch' support, supporting the creative mathematics curriculum and providing courses for coordinators and learning support assistants.
- Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are secure.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors challenge, and are able to do so through their effective checking of the school's work. They visit regularly, receive subject and the headteachers' reports, and check progress data and other school records. School councillors, commendably, have met governors. Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths of the school and where improvement is required. They have a secure knowledge of the teaching quality. There is a clear understanding of the link between a positive teaching record, salary progression and promotion.
 - Governors set good, challenging performance targets for the school. These quickly become out of date because the school population, on which previous targets have been based, changes.
 - Statutory responsibilities are met, especially with regard to health and safety and safe recruitment. They have a good understanding of which pupils qualify for the pupil premium but they have an insufficient knowledge of the impact of its expenditure.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	113659
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	411865

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	250
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jeremy Osbourne
Headteacher	Alan Frame Susan Whitlock
Date of previous school inspection	3–4 March 2010
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