

The Downs Primary School and Nursery

The Hides, Harlow, CM20 3RB

Inspection dates

23–24 October 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Teaching across the school is not consistently good, especially for younger pupils.
- As a result progress is slower in Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 than in Key Stage 2.
- Marking in books does not always tell pupils their next steps in learning and pupils do not always act on any advice that is given.
- Work set in lessons does not always challenge pupils enough, especially the more able. Some pupils' reading books are too easy.
- Senior leaders and middle leaders do not make the most of accurate information on pupils' achievements in order to evaluate how well pupils are doing or to plan improvements.
- Teachers do not always question pupils well enough to engage their interest and encourage a consistently positive attitude to their learning.
- A few pupils do not always move around the school in a sensible way.
- Good teaching is not modelled and shared enough to help teachers improve.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders are committed to the school's improvement.
- They have raised achievement in Key Stage 2. Pupils' progress and the quality of teaching at Key Stage 2 are both good.
- Pupils who are eligible for the pupil premium achieve well.
- Relationships between adults and pupils are good. Pupils feel safe.
- The way subjects are taught in topics helps to engage pupils and motivate them to learn.
- Pupils are given good opportunities to improve their spiritual and cultural understanding.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out 15 lessons observations across all year groups, of which three were joint lesson observations with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at pupils' work and listened to pupils from Years 1, 2 and 6 read.
- Meetings were held with pupils and school staff, including senior leaders and subject leaders. A meeting took place with a representative from the local authority. A discussion was also held with two members of the governing body. A meeting was held with an external adviser.
- School documents were also looked at, including safeguarding, information on pupils' achievement and school improvement plans.
- Inspectors took account of the views of 16 parents through the online Parent View website. They also spoke with parents as they arrived to bring their children to school. The views of staff were considered through the 38 responses to an inspection questionnaire.

Inspection team

Peter Lacey-Hastings, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Ann Sheppard	Additional Inspector
Heather Housden	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Downs Primary School and Nursery is similar in size to the average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium is higher than average. This is additional funding to support pupils, including those known to be eligible for free school meals and those in local authority care.
- The proportion of pupils from an ethnic minority group is above average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils or those who have special educational needs supported through school action is similar to other schools.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement for special educational needs is higher than average.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of teaching that is good, especially in Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage, by:
 - giving pupils more challenging work so they can achieve what they are capable of, especially the more able
 - ensuring marking is used to help pupils know how to improve their work and making sure they respond to marking
 - using questioning and explanation to encourage pupils to have a positive attitude to learning.
- Improve the way pupils behave when they move around the school by:
 - consistently applying high expectations of pupils' behaviour at all times and all areas of the school
 - directing the current system of rewards and praise to particular behaviours such as lining up and walking in an orderly way.
- Increase the effectiveness of leadership by:
 - collecting, analysing and evaluating information on pupils' achievement more rigorously in order to judge school effectiveness and plan improvements
 - using good practice in the school and beyond to share and model good teaching.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Progress is not as rapid in Key Stage 1 and the Early Years Foundation Stage as it is in Key Stage 2. Pupils join the school with skills levels that are below those expected for their age. This is especially so in their communication and language, and in their personal, emotional and social skills. They do not make rapid enough progress to catch up by the end of Key Stage 1, though they do catch up in Key Stage 2.
- Progress in Key Stage 1 is slower in mathematics than in reading or writing. Progress is quicker in reading than in writing. In 2013 pupils at Year 1 attained better results than other pupils nationally in their reading check.
- In the past, attainment at Key Stage 2 has been average. Comparisons with national results have not yet been published in 2013 but pupils' attainment was higher than the national average for 2012. Attainment at Key Stage 2 is improving.
- Pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium achieve well in Key Stage 1. Their attainment is higher than other pupils in reading, writing and mathematics. They make quicker progress in all subjects.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium also achieve well in Key Stage 2. They make quicker progress in English than other pupils, especially in writing. However, in 2012, the last year for which results are confirmed, Year 6 pupils' attainment remained about half a term behind their classmates in English and a year behind in mathematics.
- Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils. Some younger pupils with special educational needs make slower progress and some older pupils make quicker progress.
- Overall, pupils from an ethnic minority group also make similar progress to other pupils in the school. Their attainment is broadly similar to that of other pupils, though their attainment in the Year 1 reading check last year was higher than that of their classmates.
- Younger children say they enjoy reading. They are able to use phonics (linking letters with sounds) in order to read words and this is mostly accurate. Pupils are very familiar with the books they are given and some spend too long on the same book. This means that they are not always challenged enough to move on to more difficult books.
- Older pupils use a range of strategies to read, including reading ahead and going back to an unfamiliar word. They know what kinds of books they like to read such as adventure, fantasy and thrillers.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Some teaching is good, and it is consistently good at Key Stage 2. All the teaching observed during the inspection at Key Stage 2 was judged to be good.
- Too much teaching requires improvement in order to be good. There is some good teaching at Key Stage 1 but it varies too much. All the teaching observed in the Early Years Foundation

Stage was judged to be requiring improvement. Children were given a range of interesting activities in order that they might learn through play. However, adults did not always use questioning well to intervene and help them learn more rapidly, or to challenge the more able.

- Marking is done regularly and pupils know how well they have done. However, pupils do not know in enough detail what they need to do to improve their work. They do not all respond to guidance they are given, and are not always given the opportunity to do so.
- In better lessons expectations are high regarding what pupils are capable of learning. Questioning, explanation and adjusting work during a lesson helps pupils concentrate and make progress. This means that work challenges pupils and they are encouraged to extend their thinking.
- However, this approach is not used consistently, especially for younger pupils. Sometimes work is too similar for different ability groups. For example, work for more-able pupils is the same as work for middle-ability pupils. This means that progress for the more able is often limited. This is a factor that particularly slows progress in mathematics.
- Teaching assistants and other adults are generally used well to help pupils one-to-one and in small groups. They help to engage and motivate pupils who have learning and behaviour needs. This is done through clear explanations and questioning.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

- Pupils are generally polite and courteous around the school. They show good manners to each other and to adults. Sometimes they do not pay enough attention to guidance and direction, such as when lining up.
- When groups of pupils move from one activity to another they are not consistently well behaved. For example, there is some disruption when pupils move from class to assembly or from the playground back to class, and the school's system of rewards is not routinely used to encourage improvements and demonstrate high expectations of behaviour at these times.
- In class, most pupils concentrate well and are interested and cooperative. Where lessons require improvement a few do not always apply themselves or work as hard as they could. Inspectors occasionally saw this, and pupils confirm that time is sometimes wasted in class because some do not always focus on their work. However, pupils say adults deal with this quickly. They say they like the merit system and this is used well to encourage positive behaviour.
- Pupils say they feel safe around the school and in the playground, and this has been helped by the new fence. They are aware of different forms of bullying. For example, they have recently learnt about the dangers of being on the internet.
- Pupils enjoy being at school and attendance is average. Exclusions, either temporary or permanent, are low.

The leadership and management

requires improvement

- Leaders at all levels are committed to the school and know it well. They identify the right areas to improve. Their actions are starting to increase levels of attainment across all key stages and rates of progress at Key Stage 2 are now good. However, planning for improvement lacks fine-

tuning because the school's analysis of pupils' achievement is not always fully accurate.

- Leaders do collect and analyse information about pupils' achievement. However, sometimes the information is not clear and does not always match to what pupils show they can achieve in lessons. For example, children entering the Nursery have skills that are above those shown in the school's information.
- Performance targets for teachers are used to improve the quality of teaching. Targets are linked to pupils' achievement, the national Teachers' Standards and pay progression. Teachers are given useful training to improve their skills, but as yet the school is not drawing sufficiently on the good teaching it has, or good and outstanding teaching elsewhere, to use as a model.
- Partnerships are helping to increase the capacity the school has to make further improvements. For example, the school is strengthening its partnership with the local authority, including the use of reviews about the quality of teaching and learning. There are also close links with other local schools through a partnership.
- Funding is used carefully, such as the new funding for primary school sport. This is directed at training for staff and the employment of specialist teachers to work directly with pupils. This is starting to have a positive impact on pupils' physical education because the quality of teaching is good and lunchtime supervisors are applying their training to introduce playground games. Teachers work alongside trained coaches to help them improve their skills.
- Subjects are taught through themes and topics such as 'Ancient Greeks', 'Seasons' and 'People Who Help Us'. The way subjects are taught helps to motivate and engage pupils, who like this way of learning. There is a programme to help improve reading and writing and this is starting to bring about quicker rates of progress in English.
- The school is good at promoting pupils' spiritual and cultural development. For example, pupils have visited a church and a Muslim pupil has led an assembly about the Muslim faith and religious practices.
- Safeguarding requirements are met, including checks on adults working with pupils.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body knows the school well. Members of the governing body visit the school frequently and have links with subject leaders. School improvement plans are regularly monitored through committees. However, the governing body is not always rigorous in how it contributes to school improvement planning or in how it evaluates its own effectiveness. Members of the governing body have undertaken a range of training. This includes courses on safeguarding, understanding information on pupils' achievement and school improvement planning. As a result governors understand how to analyse data.
 - Governors check school finances regularly and members of the governing ensure that funds are used for their intended purpose. For example, when new building works took place they closely monitored expenditure and the building work itself. The governing body knows how much it receives for the pupil premium and makes sure that it is spent in a way that helps those pupils, for example, on the use of support staff to help individuals and small groups. It also knows that these pupils often make better progress than other pupils.
 - Members of the governing body challenge the headteacher through the use of performance targets that link to pupils' achievement and to pay progression. They know how good teaching is and support the headteacher in improving it.

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	115016
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	425228

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	282
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Geoff Penketh
Headteacher	Marianne Fuller
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2011
Telephone number	01279 445538
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