

Downs Barn School

69 Downs Barn Boulevard, Downs Barn, Milton Keynes, MK14 7NA

Inspection dates

5–6 December 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Satisfactory	3
	This inspection:	Good	2
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Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Children make a good start to learning in the Nursery and Reception classes, especially those in the early stages of learning English. They achieve especially well in their language and personal and social development.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 1 and 2 and have made much improvement since the last inspection. Nearly all are reaching the standards expected for their age in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Teaching is consistently good throughout the school and sometimes better. Teachers have a good knowledge of the needs of all pupils, and learning benefits considerably from the excellent contribution of learning support assistants.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. They are enthusiastic, work well together, are respectful towards adults and each other, and enjoy their stimulating learning activities.
- The headteacher leads the school most effectively and has successfully managed the school through a time of great change. He is well supported by a good team of senior and middle leaders and highly motivated staff.
- The school benefits very positively from its partnership with Southwood School, especially through the sharing of resources and management and teaching expertise.
- The governing body is both challenging and supportive and played a successful role in helping the school through its transition to federation. Governors also ensure that pupil premium funding is spent effectively.

It is not yet an outstanding school because:

- Not enough teaching is outstanding in order for pupils to reach attainment levels in reading, writing and mathematics which are consistently higher than average.
- Teachers do not help pupils to sufficiently develop their thinking skills, or their ability to learn independently without continual support from adults.
- Pupils' presentation and setting out of their work is sometimes careless and untidy, and can lead to mistakes.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed 10 lessons taught by five teachers. Five of these lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, members of the senior management team, three governors and a representative of the local authority.
- The inspector observed the school's work. He examined the school's development plans, checks on how well it is doing, safeguarding arrangements, health and safety records, school policies and a range of pupils' work and information about their progress.
- The inspector was unable to take account of the online Parent View survey as there were fewer than 10 responses. The inspector examined 44 responses from parents and carers to the school's own recent survey of their views. He also held informal discussions with a number of parents and carers before school.
- The inspector examined 16 questionnaires from staff.

Inspection team

Rodney Braithwaite, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Downs Barn School is smaller than the average-sized infant school.
- Nearly three quarters of pupils come from a wide range of ethnic heritages, including new arrivals from several Eastern European countries in the last two years. About a third of pupils are of Black African heritage, and a quarter are White British.
- Over two thirds of pupils speak English as an additional language, although few are in the early stages of learning English.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs at school action is below average. The proportion supported by school action plus or a statement of special educational needs is also below average.
- The proportion of pupils supported through the pupil premium is slightly below average. This is additional government funding for particular groups including children in the care of the local authority and pupils known to be eligible for free school meals.
- The school has a Nursery which two groups of children attend: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. These children sometimes join with the Reception class. There are two other classes: Year 1 and Year 2.
- The school provides a breakfast club and after-school club.
- The school belongs to the Boulevard Primary Partnership. This is a hard federation with a nearby local junior school, Southwood School. The two schools have the same headteacher and a single governing body. A number of staff from Southwood, including senior leaders and teachers, also work at Downs Barn.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise the proportion of outstanding teaching by:
 - training teachers to give pupils more opportunities to develop their thinking skills
 - giving teachers more opportunities to observe models of outstanding teaching and higher-level teaching skills in order to help them to develop their own practice.
- Encourage pupils to take more care with the presentation of their work, and understand the importance of setting out work neatly and accurately so that mistakes are avoided.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Children start in the Nursery with skills at below the levels expected for their age. Some children new to the country have language skills well below the levels expected. All children make good progress in the Nursery and Reception, and many are reaching expected levels in mathematics and literacy by the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Teachers and their assistants have an excellent knowledge of the needs of all children from the moment they enter the school. Children are enabled to make rapid progress in their learning and social development because they have much personal attention and support. This is particularly important for children with spring and summer birthdays as they have one or two terms less than others in school at the start of their education.
- Achievement in Years 1 and 2 has risen quickly in the last two years and continues to do so. This has been because teaching is constantly improving, and the school provides increased resources for groups and individuals. Throughout every day the school is a hive of activity with numerous small groups in every available room or working area being supported and guided in their learning by teachers and learning support assistants.
- This was seen particularly where small groups of pupils in Year 1 were observed to be successfully learning their letters and sounds (phonics), and other aspects of literacy such as grammar and spelling. This has had a very positive effect since 2012 on pupils' attainment in reading and writing, so that many pupils in Year 2 are already working at above average levels.
- Achievement is good for all groups of pupils. This includes Black African pupils who achieve particularly well, and other smaller minority ethnic groups, many of whom speak English as an additional language. Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make similarly good progress because their needs are very carefully analysed by school leaders who make excellent provision for them. More-able pupils are also well challenged and make good progress.
- Pupils who are supported through the pupil premium make good progress. The progress made by them in English and mathematics is similar to that of other pupils in the school and they attain higher levels than similar pupils nationally.
- Pupils enjoy reading and have many opportunities to read to adults and classmates in their regular guided reading sessions. They are also benefiting from the individual support they receive from the 'better reading' mentor, who also helps language development through 'talking partner' tuition.
- Pupils achieve well in other subjects, for example science and art, and at all times are encouraged to develop their ideas on personal and social responsibilities. The school is benefiting from the new sports funding which has resulted in extra clubs and resources as well as improving skills for some pupils.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is typically good throughout the school, and sometimes outstanding. It is most successful when teachers and their learning support assistants support and guide pupils in small groups and occasionally individually so that learning is very personalised for individual needs.
- This was seen happening frequently in the Nursery and Reception classes. In a lesson in Reception, for example, children rapidly learned the names of numbers and recognised their spelling. This learning was enhanced by other activities such as 'write, dance' so that learning was strengthened through combining literacy skills with writing and dancing.
- The linking of different subjects is used well throughout the school. In a literacy lesson in Year 2 for example, pupils were making simple electrical circuits with bulbs and crocodile clips. The main purpose of the lesson though was to write an accurate instructional text developing writing

skills.

- There is not yet evidence of sufficient outstanding teaching to enable all pupils to reach their maximum potential. There has been considerable improvement since 2012, and the school continues to build upon this, so that more pupils reach the highest levels.
- Teachers have yet to encourage pupils sufficiently to develop their thinking skills and taking initiatives. Their guidance has been successful in raising attainment and achievement, and pupils are now ready for the further development of their skills without relying so much upon adults for support.
- Teachers have a good understanding of the wide range of data produced, including half-termly progress checks, which are used very effectively in planning for the needs of all pupils. This is especially successful in the Nursery and Reception where comprehensive learning information about all children is recorded and reviewed on a regular basis with parents and carers.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are excellent. There is mutual respect and pupils have great trust in the adults. This was shown in several examples of circle time in all classes when pupils were encouraged to talk about what they liked in school (Reception) and what they understand by 'respect' (Year 2). Almost every child was confident enough to make a verbal contribution.
- Many pupils can talk about their simple learning and social targets. Teachers also give some guidance in their marking but this is not always developmental. Not enough attention is given to encouraging all pupils to take care with the presentation of their work, especially in the initial stages of recording. This sometimes leads to careless and untidy work and unnecessary mistakes.
- Parents and carers indicate that they are pleased with the school's teaching and that teachers are very approachable.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- Pupils' behaviour is good both in and out of the classrooms. They move around the school calmly, play happily together on the playground and field, and are sociable and well behaved in the dining hall.
- They have enthusiastic attitudes to their learning, even occasionally exuberant when they are excited by their activities such as role play or making electrical circuits. This does not get out of hand because both they and their teachers have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.
- Many mention with glee their varied learning activities such as the Nativity play, outside visits, 'going to Southwood for The Giant Turnip' and 'we went to Pizza Express and made pizzas', which they then replicated in the Reception class.
- Children settle very quickly into the routines of the Nursery and Reception. A number of parents and carers commented on how pleased and surprised they were at how well their children settled in school. A feature of their behaviour is how well they cooperate together in their learning. Younger children especially benefit from their daily interaction with older reception children.
- Pupils maintain good relationships in Years 1 and 2. They are helped by the school's constant promotion of the 'Four Rs', and explain very seriously the necessity for 'resilience and responsibility' in their day-to-day lives. 'Respect and reflection' also contribute to the school's good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- In responses to a survey in school, and discussions during the inspection, the great majority of pupils felt that they are safe in school, that adults look after them very well, and that there is very little bullying, which is mainly 'shouting' or 'bumping into people outside'.
- Pupils have an appropriate awareness of internet bullying for their age but say it does not happen to them.

- Racial harmony is good in a school where there is a range of different backgrounds and cultures.
- The school works closely with external professionals and services which support the pupils and families whose circumstances make them vulnerable. The school's social inclusion teacher, and other members of staff who make home visits, make helpful and sympathetic contributions.
- Behaviour is not yet outstanding partly because attendance has been below average for a few years, and some pupils are still late for school. This situation has been steadily improving in the last two years because of rigorous monitoring by the school, and in this school year attendance is in line with the national average.
- Behaviour in the well-managed breakfast and after-school clubs is good and pupils enjoy attending them.
- Parent, carer and staff responses all indicate that behaviour in the school is at least good and well managed.

The leadership and management are good

- The school has been very effectively led by the headteacher since it was federated with Southwood. Good improvement has been made in a number of areas, most importantly to teaching and the consistently better achievement of pupils.
- Since the last inspection, the time targets set for improvement in Years 1 and 2 and for strengthening the leadership of the school have been met, and new increasingly challenging targets set.
- The clear-sighted and incisive management of the headteacher has been enhanced and supplemented by the deployment of senior leaders from its federation partner. Leaders have thrived upon shared aspirations and increased responsibility, and as a result there is a strong team of well-motivated staff.
- Attainment and achievement in literacy and numeracy, and their use in other subjects, have also shown good improvement. They are not yet outstanding though because the better performance has not yet been sustained for long enough, and because teaching does not yet reach the very highest levels of skill.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher in particular have worked very hard and successfully to raise teaching skills. The school has an effective model of improvement which encourages teachers to reflect continually about both the successes of their teaching and how it can be improved.
- Teachers' targets for the performance of their pupils are very closely related to the school's priorities for development. Leaders recognise that the next step for higher performance is to develop teachers' skills even more.
- School leaders have an accurate view of the school's work. This applies equally to the preparation of pupils for their next phase of education in the junior school. Shared staff and leaders help the transition of pupils to be a very rewarding and confidence boosting process.
- The school provides a good range of learning opportunities for pupils. Leaders are already introducing an even wider range of stimulating learning opportunities for pupils in order to build upon the existing good attitudes of pupils, and their good spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- The school promotes equal opportunities and is fully inclusive with effective integration of many cultures and different faiths. Leaders ensure that there is no discrimination through gender, disability, special educational needs or ethnic heritage.
- The local authority works closely with the school and has been especially supportive in helping the school during its recent changes. The authority was pleased to notify the school in the summer that it no longer required specific support or intervention because of 'improved provision and outcomes for pupils'.
- The school has very good relationships with parents and carers and does all it can to involve

them in the education and well-being of their children. This was seen during the inspection when parents and carers organised a very successful Christmas Fayre.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The shared governing body has a good knowledge of the school's performance, and while being strongly supportive, is also constantly challenging school leaders. Governors have a detailed knowledge of the performance targets set for teachers and their pupils and more general targets, for example, to double the rate of outstanding teaching. Consequently they are creating a clear set of guidelines for the pay progression of staff. Governors oversee the use of the pupil premium funding rigorously, and ensure that funding is used to support pupils' progress. They also have a good knowledge of the new sports funding, how it is being used, and whether it is resulting in improvement to pupils' physical skills, teaching, and health and safety. Governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and that school policies are regularly reviewed.

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	110372
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	426428

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

Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elna Ball
Headteacher	Bryan Schram
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 January 2012
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