

Dowson Primary School

Marlborough Road, Hyde, Cheshire, SK14 5HU

Inspection dates 18–19 March 2014

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		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

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

- Pupils' attainment in Key Stage 1 is too low. Although it is improving, there is still ground to make up, particularly in reading and writing.
- Not enough pupils make high levels of progress from their relative starting points in reading in Key Stage 2.
- Teachers do not always pitch work correctly for the different groups within their classes and this sometimes restricts the progress of the most able pupils.
- Teachers do not always check that pupils are attending to improving spelling, punctuation and grammar sufficiently in their writing. Consequently, errors persist that affect the overall quality of their work.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are taking decisive action to improve teaching and raise standards.
- There is good practice in teaching that can be shared and developed across the school.
- Pupils' progress in mathematics has accelerated in response to a clear focus from leaders and teachers.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage is of good quality. Children in Nursery and Reception learn well in a stimulating and supportive environment.
- Pupils' behaviour is good and makes a significant contribution to their learning.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe is outstanding. The level of care provided by staff is excellent and relationships throughout the school are very strong.
- Governors are highly skilled and hold the school to account effectively.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 19 lessons, including one observed jointly with the headteacher and one with the deputy headteacher. They made several short visits to other lessons. One inspector visited several reading sessions along with the literacy leader. Inspectors listened to groups of pupils reading and reviewed the work in their books over time.
- Inspectors visited breakfast club and assembly. They observed pupils' behaviour during breaks and lunchtime.
- Meetings were held with school leaders; staff responsible for mentoring pupils and monitoring their attendance; four governors including the Chair of the Governing Body; a representative of the local authority and an independent consultant who provides support to the school.
- Inspectors held informal discussions with many pupils and held a formal meeting with members of the school council. They reviewed responses to the school's survey of pupils' views. Staff views were also considered.
- An inspector met with a group of 13 parents and held telephone discussions with two others. The 53 responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) were considered, along with the results of the school's recent survey of parents' opinions that had been completed by the majority of parents.
- Inspectors observed the work of the school and examined a number of documents. These included the school's records of achievement of pupils currently in the school, records of the school's monitoring of teaching and appraisal arrangements for teachers. The school's self-evaluation document was considered along with reports completed by the headteacher who supports the school on behalf of the local authority, and the independent consultant whose support is contracted by the school.
- During this inspection, inspectors asked additional questions designed to ascertain the school's view of the impact and effectiveness of local authority services to support school improvement. This information will contribute to work being carried out by Ofsted to assess the use, quality and impact of those services.

Inspection team

Shirley Gornall, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Michelle Murray

Additional Inspector

Jeremy Barnes

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is much larger than the average-sized primary school. It includes a Nursery and occupies three buildings on one extensive site.
- An average proportion of pupils are supported through the pupil premium. This is additional funding for those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals, children from service families and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language. The school's population includes small numbers of pupils from Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani and Caribbean heritages.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported at school action is similar to the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is below average.
- A lower proportion of pupils joins or leaves the school at times other than the normal transition points than is the case nationally.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which are minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.
- The school has recently received the Green Tree School gold award from the Woodland Trust, along with Arts Mark Gold, Eco Green Flag and Bronze Sports Mark.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that it is consistently good and sometimes outstanding, leading to more pupils making accelerated progress, by:
 - ensuring that pupils routinely check their work for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, and learn from their mistakes
 - reviewing and improving the teaching of reading skills so that pupils' comprehension skills develop further and they understand writers' language choices
 - ensuring that work is appropriately pitched so that it challenges higher-attaining pupils sufficiently and is accessible to pupils with lower attainment
 - ensuring that lessons are well paced and clearly organised.
- Further develop the leadership of literacy by giving subject leaders more opportunities to monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching.
- Provide additional opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The attainment of pupils in Key Stage 1 dipped in 2013 to a point that was significantly below that found nationally in writing and mathematics, and below the national standard in reading. The proportion of pupils in Year 1 achieving well in the check on their understanding of phonics (the relationship between letters and the sounds they make) was also lower than the national figure, although an improvement on the previous year's performance.
- Pupils' achievement has improved overall in Key Stage 2, particularly in mathematics where the school has expended considerable time and energy on developing consistently good teaching. Pupils' attainment in reading was not as high as the national figure in 2013 and fewer pupils made exceptional progress from their relative starting points than was the case nationally. They generally performed well in writing, and the proportion achieving well in English grammar, spelling and punctuation was similar to the national figure.
- Higher-attaining pupils did not do as well as they should at Key Stage 1, or in reading at Key Stage 2, in 2013.
- Inspection evidence, including close analysis of the school's tracking of progress of pupils currently in the school, and observation of their work in lessons and over time, indicates that teachers and pupils are rising to the challenge of raising achievement and that pupils are now better equipped to achieve well from their starting points.
- Children settle quickly in the Nursery classes and soon begin to learn early reading and counting skills. They enjoy 'walking on the wild side' in the school grounds and learning about the outdoor environment. Staff ensure that children make a smooth transition into Reception and continue enjoying learning; more are now achieving a good level of development. Regular practise of hearing, speaking and representing sounds helps them to become ready for Key Stage 1. Their personal development is generally good. Children in the Reception class used language well and showed good social skills when building a castle and ensuring that the turrets were at the right height.
- The school has changed its approach to teaching phonics. It now adopts a consistent approach to ensuring that pupils learn and consolidate their understanding of sounds and letters in a sequential way so that gaps are avoided. Most pupils are now making better progress in writing the different combinations of letters that represent sounds, and distinguishing between 'alien words' and regular words. Standards are rising in Key Stage 1, and any pupils who fall behind are well supported.
- In Key Stage 2, pupils continue to make good progress in mathematics and are increasingly confident in leading investigations and using mathematical vocabulary appropriately. The mathematics subject leader and senior leaders have undertaken observations and provided feedback to teachers that has helped to ensure mathematics lessons are generally well paced and productive so that achievement is secure.
- The school has recognised the need to raise standards further in reading. Some pupils do not readily grasp the reasons why writers structure their texts in particular ways or make precise language choices. Invitations to read are prominently displayed in each building and pupils enjoy choosing books from the well stocked libraries, as well as reading online. Most now develop comprehension skills as well as decoding skills to a better level. One pupil explained clearly to an inspector the importance of reading 'behind the text and between the lines' in order to deduce non-literal meanings; the challenge for the school is for more pupils to develop this strength of insight. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to discuss their reading and to read aloud in class.
- Specific sessions have been introduced to help pupils improve their skills in using spelling, punctuation and grammar accurately but some opportunities to do this within literacy teaching and subjects across the curriculum are missed. Sometimes errors in spellings of key vocabulary go undetected in topic work.
- Pupils are generally articulate and confident speakers who are keen to use varied vocabulary in

discussion, but do not necessarily translate this into their writing.

- Pupils with special educational needs generally achieve well because their needs are clearly known and a variety of interventions are put in place to help them develop their skills and confidence. Teachers do not always ensure that these pupils make the best possible progress in whole-class sessions.
- The attainment of pupils eligible for support through pupil premium was around a term and a half behind that of their peers in 2013 at the end of Key Stage 2. The gap was wider at the end of Key Stage 1. The school has a growing number of pupils who are within this group. The special educational needs coordinator is conscious that a significant number of pupils who are eligible for pupil premium have additional needs and is working hard to ensure that these are met.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Although improving, teaching has not yet resulted in pupils consistently demonstrating high levels of progress from their relative starting points. There are no endemic weaknesses in teaching. However, the many strengths that are apparent in some teachers' work are not fully embedded across the school. Teachers share a strong commitment to develop their practice, are reflective and self-critical.
- A number of specific drives to improve teaching and learning are having a positive impact but need to be implemented for longer to ensure that pupils' attainment is raised. The quality of teachers' marking has improved overall. The use of pink and green pens to identify positive features and next steps is clearly understood by pupils and they appreciate the time they are now given to read and respond to their teachers' comments. This means that teachers' feedback is more productive although some basic errors persist in pupils' work.
- Teachers share the criteria they want pupils to demonstrate in their work and this is enabling pupils to judge how well they are doing during lessons as well as over time.
- On some occasions, teachers find engaging ways to stimulate pupils' interest but then lose a focus on which skills are actually being developed. In some reading sessions, pupils' learning loses pace because, although they may be enjoying texts, the tasks they are following independently are not sufficiently clear in terms of the reading skills that are being developed.
- Opportunities for skills to be developed in meaningful contexts give pupils real purposes for their learning; Year 6 pupils marshalled their persuasive skills when writing letters to their teacher explaining which venue would be the ideal place for an end-of-year trip. On other occasions, worksheets are used that do not have the same immediate relevance to pupils' own experiences.
- Teachers do not always pitch work at the correct level to meet the needs of different groups of pupils in the class. This results in higher-attaining pupils sometimes doing work that is too easy for them. Occasionally, individual pupils with special educational needs find difficulties coping with class work. Generally, additional adults are well deployed by teachers and work effectively with groups of pupils.
- Teachers' questioning is often, but not always, a strength. Teaching frequently involves asking open-ended questions of a wide range of pupils, and encourages them to build on each other's responses. On a few occasions, unclear questions are asked and this causes pupils some confusion.
- The quality of pupils' displayed work throughout classrooms and in open spaces is a real strength of the school. Displays include examples of interesting writing, such as definitions of different mythical beasts and accounts of the sinking of the Titanic. Art work, including children's depictions of the Chinese Year of the Horse in a Nursery classroom, emphasise the value teachers place on cultural education.
- The standard of presentation of pupils' work was recognised by leaders as being below expectations, particularly in Key Stage 1. This situation has been much improved through the recent introduction of a 'presentation pledge' that pupils and their teachers sign up to.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils typically behave well, including at times when they are not closely supervised. Older pupils have identified that behaviour can be categorised as 'brilliant, bothering or bullying' and established criteria for each type. This helps them to recognise degrees of seriousness in any misbehaviour that occurs. They have led discussions with parents on the distinction between 'bothering' and 'bullying' behaviour and keep a close eye on whether their peers are behaving well enough. Parents, including those who regularly spend time in the school as helpers, confirm that the behaviour at the school is good.
- Pupils' attendance is above average and virtually no pupils are persistently absent from school.
- Bullying at the school is rare and on the very few occasions when it occurs, it is dealt with rapidly. A few isolated incidents have resulted in short exclusions. These have had a positive impact on pupils' behaviour and prevented any recurrence of problems.
- Behaviour at the school's breakfast club, which significant numbers of pupils attend, typifies the positive relationships that make the school such a warm and safe place. Pupils of different ages willingly talk and play together so the day starts off on a good footing. Older pupils notice when staff would welcome assistance in serving breakfasts during busy periods and willingly help out.
- Pupils relish taking on responsibilities, including when they are given particular roles in lessons. The Dowson Owls take their prefect duties seriously and make a valuable contribution to the school's ethos. The school council is very well organised and addresses any concerns pupils may have assiduously. Groups of pupils promote health and well-being and further develop the school's impressive grounds.
- Pupils are encouraged to contribute their own skills and talents to the school: a small group of older pupils capture the key news in the life of the school and publish 'The Dowson Recorder' on the school's website.
- Pupils have good social and emotional skills. They cooperate with their peers well during lessons. Most pupils have very positive attitudes to their work, show perseverance and increasing independence in solving problems for themselves. Most enjoy reading and willingly undertake extra research in their own time to maintain their learning logs. They are ambitious and strive to reach their targets. On occasions, they do not pay sufficient attention to improving spelling, punctuation and grammar in their own work and this slows progress in writing for some.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. The three buildings are meticulously maintained. The inclusion team, comprising learning mentors and an attendance officer, are very well regarded by pupils and their parents. They monitor the attendance and behaviour of pupils very carefully and rapidly coordinate support, including from external agencies, whenever it is needed. Their work in keeping vulnerable pupils safe and learning is highly effective. Pupils are given clear advice on how to keep safe, including when they are online. Pupils' perceptions of safety are regularly surveyed by the school and confirm that they feel very safe.

The leadership and management are good

- The long-serving headteacher is deeply committed to the school. She is honest, positive and shrewd; well respected by staff, pupils and their families. She has developed a very capable leadership team whose complementary skills have galvanized improvement in the face of several changes in staffing since the last inspection.
- The deputy headteacher and special educational needs coordinator have an excellent understanding of pupils' performance. They track pupils' progress in meticulous detail and, together with teachers, swiftly act upon their analysis to adapt group compositions, teaching plans, and additional interventions. Their intelligent gathering and insightful scrutiny of data have led to more rapid improvement so that the school is now well placed to meet more ambitious targets.
- The wider senior leadership team, comprising assistant headteachers, one of whom is very new

to her role, ensures that high expectations of teaching and behaviour are consistently maintained across the foundation stage unit, and the lower and upper schools. Despite its size and complexity, the school operates seamlessly; its policies are consistently followed and in each building, a stimulating and thoughtfully-used learning environment supports pupils' creativity, independence and safety.

- The leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is strong and children's' achievement has improved as a result of careful curriculum planning and deployment of skilled adults who continuously encourage children's learning through questioning, counting games, role play and physical activities.
- The whole-school curriculum is kept under review. 'Wonderful Wednesdays' contribute to pupils enjoying a broad and balanced education. Pizza-making in Upper Key Stage 2 was a great hit with pupils, enabling them to discuss healthy eating and apply their numeracy skills in a practical way. Pupils also get a good grounding in learning to speak French.
- The leadership of teaching is robust and rigorous. Under-performance has been challenged in a decisive but humane way and inadequate teaching has been eradicated. An increasing proportion of teaching is consistently good. Teachers who are new to the school and new to the profession appreciate the high level of support they receive from leaders and colleagues. Leaders have managed significant staffing changes well so as to minimise disruption to learning.
- The school's self-evaluation is accurate and based on the thorough analysis of wide-ranging qualitative and quantitative data. Leaders recognise that although many aspects of teaching are good, there is still inconsistency in its effectiveness, particularly with regard to improving reading and writing.
- Concerted steps to improve mathematics have resulted in good levels of attainment for pupils. The mathematics leader has observed lessons, led work scrutiny and evaluated progress data very thoroughly. The literacy leader has been similarly robust in analysing data but has not yet had sufficient opportunity to observe practice in the teaching of reading and this has led to guidance to teachers not being as fully developed.
- The opinions of staff, parents and pupils are sought and acted upon. More could be done to develop pupils' leadership skills through the curriculum; the pupils are ready for this additional challenge.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of education are strongly promoted. Pupils sing enthusiastically in assembly, are positive in their relationships with one another and fully aware of the difference between right and wrong. Pupils are very proud of the school's many varied trees and contribute to 'ground force' activities to ensure that these flourish; their environmental awareness is evident.
- Resources, including those made available through pupil premium and primary sports funding, are effectively targeted to make a difference. Staffing costs, which are met in part through the use of pupil premium funding, enable mentor support to be provided; this makes a real difference to pupils' learning and participation. The school funds educational visits and part of the cost of uniforms for pupils so that they are fully included in school life. Additional sports funding contributes to the school's commitment to making pupils healthy by providing coaching opportunities and new equipment for pupils to develop their gymnastics skills. Swimming and other sports have a high profile in the school.
- Following its last inspection in April 2012, the school received no support, direction or challenge from the local authority. The situation improved in the autumn term 2013 when, at the request of the headteacher, a school support officer began to visit. She has been helpful in validating the school's self-evaluation. The school has been proactive in seeking support from other sources, including two Teaching Alliances, one of which has its hub in Tameside, and in engaging an independent consultant.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body includes individuals with a range of skills, backgrounds and expertise that are put to good use. A governor produces a data report summarising both historic and current pupil progress that is of excellent quality and enables governors to hold challenging conversations and monitor the work of classes very carefully. Governors who are teachers and

accountants bring their knowledge to discussions. Parents and the local community are well represented; consequently the governing body has a well rounded and objective view of the school's performance and priorities.

- Governors have taken shrewd decisions regarding spending, including with regard to pupil premium. They monitor the school's finances carefully and check that the school is doing all it can to ensure good value for money; this includes adopting and monitoring arrangements for teachers' performance management that ensure that pay awards are linked to pupils' achievement.
- Governors have valued training provided by Thameside Governor Services that has helped them to keep abreast of national developments.

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	106198
Local authority	Tameside
Inspection number	430997

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	476
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Plackett
Headteacher	Janet Rathburn
Date of previous school inspection	18 April 2012
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