

Downs Park School

Foredown Road, Portslade, Brighton, BN41 2FU

Inspection dates 14–15 October 2014

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- All groups of pupils achieve well from very low starting points and are very well prepared for the next stage of their education or training. Nearly all pupils make at least the expected amount of progress.
- School leaders, including governors, have high aspirations for what pupils can achieve, and plan well to turn these ambitions into reality. Parents and staff fully support these expectations.
- As a result, aspects of the school's work, such as improving the pupils' progress in reading, safeguarding procedures and the effectiveness of the early years provision, have improved and are outstanding. Progress in communication, writing and mathematics is good.
- Teaching is good throughout the school and where there is outstanding practice it is used well to support the improvement of others. Teachers are good at setting work at the right level of difficulty.
- Pupils behave well. They enjoy school and are often excited by the interesting activities they are asked to do in and out of lessons.
- The positive atmosphere in the school reflects the school's emphasis on respect and tolerance where every pupil is valued highly and given an equal chance to succeed.
- School leaders know the strengths and priorities for development well. This is aided by the meticulous tracking of the academic and personal development of pupils.
- The focus by all school leaders on improving the quality of teaching is successful. Leaders check learning in lessons carefully and match this to work in pupils' books and the views of parents and pupils. These checks are followed up by effective training and development linked to both individual teacher and whole school needs.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils' progress in writing is not yet as good as that in reading.
- Pupils are not always given clear guidance on what they need to do next to improve their learning. Teachers do not always make sure that pupils make improvements to their work following teacher feedback and marking, especially in their writing.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited 12 lessons, taught by 10 of the school’s teachers. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with members of the school’s leadership team.
- Meetings were held with pupils, staff, senior leaders, as well as with an officer from the local authority and with four members of the governing body. Younger pupils were heard reading.
- The inspectors observed the school’s work and reviewed school documentation including development plans, records of pupils’ progress, arrangements for safeguarding, documents on monitoring teachers’ performance and minutes of the meetings of the governing body and the school council.
- The inspection team took account of the views of parents in the school’s survey of parental views in September 2014 as there were insufficient responses to the online parent/carer questionnaire (Parent View) to activate analysis. The inspectors took account of the views expressed in 34 questionnaires returned by staff.

Inspection team

Timothy Feast, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Fiona Robinson

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The school is broadly the same size as others of a similar type.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The most frequent reasons for these statements/plans are moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication difficulties, or because pupils are on the autistic spectrum continuum or have attachment difficulties.
- School leaders and other staff support the learning and emotional well-being of children throughout Brighton and Hove through leading the Complex Needs and Autistic Spectrum Continuum support services.
- A majority of pupils are boys of White British origin.
- About a third of the pupils are girls.
- More than half the pupils are supported by the pupil premium. This is additional funding for those disadvantaged pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals and for those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- There are a smaller proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language than is found nationally.
- The school's executive headteacher is a National Leader in Education. She is providing support to the leadership of the Brighton and Hove Pupil Referral Unit.
- The school is part of a federation with two other schools and outreach provision.
- The school does not use any alternative provider for secondary aged pupils.
- The early years provision is full time, although at the time of the inspection the children were working up to full time attendance.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching and further accelerate pupils' progress in writing by making sure that:
 - all teachers provide more frequent opportunities for pupils to practise their writing in other subjects
 - there is a greater focus in classroom displays and around the school of examples when pupils write well
 - pupils can regularly make amendments and improvements to their work following feedback from teachers and other adults.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- School leaders are passionate about the school providing the very best for pupils, both academically and personally. This passion is valued highly by the parents and carers, and by the staff whose morale is high.
- This ambition has enabled significant improvement to be made in important elements of the school's work. Pupils' attendance has improved, progress in pupils' reading skills has developed significantly, provision in the early years is outstanding and there has been a considerable extension of the externally accredited courses that pupils take in Years 9, 10 and 11.
- School leaders, including the governors, identify priorities for improvement effectively, basing their decisions on an in-depth knowledge of the school's strengths and areas for development. Detailed action plans focus on these priorities and the plans are checked systematically to see that they are being implemented successfully. These plans clearly demonstrate the school's ambitions and its dedicated pursuit of excellence, rooted in the promotion of equality of opportunity and tackling any discrimination.
- The headteacher has developed very effective ways of checking pupils' academic and personal progress. In this way, those needing additional help are quickly spotted and extra support given to them. This ensures that all groups of pupils, including those disadvantaged pupils supported by additional funding, make equally good progress.
- Middle leaders are very proud of their school and what it achieves and contribute positively to the school's improvements.
- School leaders are justifiably proud of their broad and relevant curriculum that offers pupils an exciting range of activities which prepares them well for the next stage of their education and for contributing positively to life in modern Britain. Older pupils talked enthusiastically about their next steps when leaving Downs Park and this shows the positive impact of the advice and guidance they receive.
- The school's safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive, fully meeting statutory requirements, and are extremely effective in ensuring the safety of the pupils.
- The local authority provides light touch support to the school and this is appropriate. Currently, it is in discussion with the governors as to the future direction of the federation.
- The physical education and sport premium has been used very effectively, allowing additional specialist time on the curriculum and extending opportunities for inter-school competitions and for using specialist facilities such as the Brighton and Hove Albion gym.
- Good use is made of partnerships with external agencies to help remove some of the barriers to learning, including the provision of speech and language support and occupational therapy.
- The support school leaders give to other schools and providers is extremely well thought of by the local authority and presents good development opportunities for school staff.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governance is good. There is one governing body for all the schools in the federation and it is effectively led and managed. The result is an appropriate focus on the performance of individual schools within the federation as a whole. The governors challenge leaders on the academic and personal outcomes for pupils and know about how well the school is doing compared to others nationally. They are clear as to the quality of teaching and how well the school uses additional funding to improve the achievement of targeted groups. Governors monitor the professional development of staff which is being undertaken to bring about improvement. Scrutiny of leaders' checks on teachers' performance is effective and the governors ensure that these are linked to any salary increases. Governors have been appropriately involved in the school's evaluation of its own performance and in putting in place action plans to tackle priorities identified.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. For many pupils their current behaviour and attitudes indicate a significant turnaround since they came to the school, reflecting the high quality support they receive from staff.
- Pupils' attendance is above average and has improved since the last inspection. The school has effective procedures to encourage good attendance, particularly their work with specialist agencies where pupils have medical needs.

- Pupils enjoy coming to school and talked with enthusiasm about some of the activities they are involved in, such as school productions and inter-school competitions. When given the opportunity, pupils can take risks and can deal maturely with questions which are potentially embarrassing for young adults. However, sometimes pupils become distracted in lessons and do not concentrate fully.
- Staff are extremely skilful in establishing a calm and productive atmosphere in lessons and around the school. They have been well trained to deal with difficulties should they arise. As a result, exclusions are rare, as are incidents of inappropriate behaviour, including bullying. Comments from pupils, parents, carers and staff are positive about the good standard of behaviour in the school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- The school's policies and procedures to keep pupils safe are fully comprehensive and very effective, so that pupils feel totally safe at school. It is clear that they can raise any concerns with adults and that these are dealt with promptly to reduce any stress.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of what they need to do to keep safe. During the inspection they worked well on using their different senses to identify and react to potential dangers on the road. A very good focus on safety was seen in food technology and drama lessons. Pupils were able to tell inspectors convincingly about dangers posed by using technology, including the internet, and the steps they would take to keep safe.
- Discussions with pupils indicate that they are very clear as to what constitutes bullying. They say that such incidents are very rare and this was confirmed when the school's records were examined. Pupils were very confident that staff would help them and were very pleased with the pupil 'Bully Busters' and how they could help them if necessary.

The quality of teaching is good

- The work seen in both this term's and last year's books, as well as the information from the achievement analysis and from evidence collected during the inspection, confirms that teaching is typically good.
- Teachers have both good subject knowledge and an understanding of the type of challenge that will motivate and engage their pupils. As a result, pupils both enjoy their lessons and make good progress. This was seen to good effect in a drama lesson where skills in 'stage fighting' were used to develop pupils' control and concentration extremely well.
- Teachers usually get the best out of their pupils, giving them a good variety of tasks that stretch and challenge them and capture their interest. As a result, most pupils work with enthusiasm, enjoyment and a desire to make fast progress.
- Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, and pupils respond well to these expectations. Teaching assistants share in these high expectations and contribute positively to pupils' learning.
- Literacy and numeracy tasks are planned well. There has been a particular focus on reading and this has resulted in pupils making outstanding progress with both their reading skills and their reading comprehension.
- While progress in writing is good, it is not as good as that for reading, and pupils are not always given chances to develop their writing skills across all subjects.
- There is a good focus on computational skills in numeracy and progress is good.
- Teachers' marking and feedback to pupils, although very effective in some classes, lack consistency across the school, especially the marking of writing. Not all teachers provide clear enough advice for pupils about how to improve their work further. They do not always make sure that pupils follow up this advice by applying it and showing their teachers that they have understood.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make good progress whilst they are at the school. Starting points are usually low skills in reading and numeracy, but by the time they leave the school pupils are taking a wide range of externally accredited courses. Their results prepare them well for the next stage of their education or training.
- All groups make similarly good progress including the girls, pupils with English as an additional language and pupils on the autistic spectrum continuum or having attachment difficulties. More able pupils in the school make good progress, as seen by their performance in externally accredited courses.
- Pupils eligible for the pupil premium often achieve well in comparison to other pupils. At the end of Year 6

these disadvantaged pupils outperform their fellow pupils in reading and mathematics and progress at a similar rate to their fellow pupils in writing. By the end of Year 11, pupils eligible for the pupil premium make similar progress to their fellow pupils in English and mathematics and achieve a similar range of externally accredited courses.

- Most pupils read with confidence and enjoyment. The progress that all groups of pupils make in their reading is high when compared with that expected nationally, and their achievement is outstanding. The curriculum gives pupils plenty of opportunities to read and to use this skill in a wide range of subject areas other than English.
- The progress pupils make in writing, although good, is not as strong as the gains they make in their reading. This is because there are too few chances for them to write at length across the range of subjects they study.
- Pupils' achievement in numeracy is good and their mathematics books show considerable practice of computational skills, using money and recognising shapes. There is less evidence of them using these skills in other subjects.
- Pupils make good progress with their physical development and the younger pupils have been helped in this by the effective use of the physical education and sport premium to increase the amount of physical activity. Pupils in the discrete autistic spectrum continuum classes start the day with a brief period of physical exercise which prepares them well for lessons during the rest of the day.

The early years provision

is outstanding

- The Early Years Foundation Stage is very well led and managed so that children receive excellent, well planned experiences on which to build their learning. Leaders have a very clear idea of children's strengths and areas for development from the accurate monitoring and evaluation that they do.
- The children's behaviour and attitudes to learning are developed extremely well from very low starting points. The children progress extremely well across all the areas of learning to achieve good development. Such progress reflects the excellent teaching that these children receive over time and the innovative use of resources by staff.
- The bright stimulating learning environment supports an exciting curriculum which covers all the areas required for good development, with particular impact on children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children learn through topics such as 'Animals' which engage and motivate them.
- Children's progress is tracked well and accurately through their 'learning journals'. Parents and carers are appropriately involved in identifying the attainment on entry and their child's progress during the key stage. Individual needs are accurately assessed and appropriate support is put in place.
- The children's safety is paramount and procedures and policies are implemented extremely effectively.
- Parents and carers are given regular information about their child and how well they are progressing, and they have plenty of opportunities to talk with staff. This partnership helps children to accelerate their progress.

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	114685
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	447879

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Keegan
Headteacher	Jackie Brooks
Date of previous school inspection	24–25 January 2012
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