

Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Road, Ramsden Heath, Billericay, Essex CM11 1NU

Inspection dates	28–29 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Downham Primary is a good school. It has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- The school continues to develop at a good pace because of the ambition and determination of all school leaders, including governors.
- The governors' accurate view of the school helps ensure that pupils benefit from a good education.
- The joint headteachers and their deputy have complementary skills and form an effective team.
- The skilled phase leaders drive improvements in the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements.
- The school has rightly earned a reputation for enabling pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities to thrive. Extra help is carefully matched to each pupil's needs. The school works closely with parents so home and school act as one.
- Pupils make good progress because teaching is good. Feedback, including marking, gives pupils a much clearer idea of how to improve than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Capable, well-trained teaching assistants support pupils' learning effectively.
- Pupils' personal development is outstanding. They demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning, try their best and work together harmoniously.
- Classrooms are a hive of purposeful activity because pupils behave well and listen attentively.
- Pupils say they feel safe and happy at school, and that they are well cared for by staff.
- Early years provision is good. Children make good progress and are well prepared for Year 1.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not of a similarly high standard throughout the school.
- Some teachers do not expect pupils to spell to the best standard they can in their general writing.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to work scientifically.
- Foundation subject leaders are yet to make significant impact on standards in their subjects.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further share outstanding practice within the school to raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make sustained and consistent progress, particularly by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of the accuracy of pupils' spelling, particularly when pupils write in other subjects.
- Make sure that the school adequately covers the requirements of the national curriculum for science by ensuring that pupils have adequate opportunity to work scientifically.
- Develop the leadership capacity further by ensuring that middle leaders of foundation subjects quickly become as effective as those of reading, writing and mathematics.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- School leaders, governors and staff share a strong determination to see the school build further on the current solid foundation.
- Everyone, staff and pupils alike, practises the school's ethos of 'care, consideration, courtesy' in their behaviour so that the school is a fully-inclusive, harmonious and purposeful learning environment.
- The dual headteachers form a very effective team with complementary skills. Each brings particular expertise. One parent said, 'We get twice as much knowledge, experience and skill as having one headteacher.'
- The dual headteachers' approach is 'no compromise'. When they could not find highly talented teachers, they did not appoint until they could. This has made a significant difference, particularly to the leadership of English and mathematics, which is very effective.
- Staff's skills are recognised by the dual headteachers and exploited to pupils' benefit. For example, the highly effective use of the deputy headteacher's analytical skills enable the school to track the progress of pupils closely. As a result, any pupil struggling or falling behind is quickly recognised and action taken. This is a very significant improvement since the previous inspection and an important factor in the good progress pupils now make.
- Highly skilled phase leaders drive improvement across the school. They are enabled to significant impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements. They form a highly effective team, 'bouncing' ideas off one another and agreeing changes to be recommended. Each is responsible for either reading, writing or mathematics across the school, and for teaching, learning and assessment in specific year groups. As a result, they thoroughly understand the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Leadership of most foundation subjects, however, is still in its infancy. As a result, these leaders have fewer opportunities to impact on the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements in their subjects.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is highly effective. The highly skilled coordinator thoroughly understands each pupil's needs. Consequently, extra support is tailored to these. She fully informs and involves parents, so they work closely with the school and use the same approach at home as staff use in school.
- The curriculum includes many interesting and exciting activities that 'hook' pupils into learning. It is regularly enriched when an area, such as 'the arts', is a special focus. Pupils' curiosity and interest is aroused by stimulating experiences such as composing 'garage' music using mini-computers. Working with a sculptor to create stunning three-dimensional creatures and masks clearly enthralled pupils. However, the curriculum contains few opportunities for pupils to investigate scientifically and, for example, to understand how science can be used to predict how things will behave.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Assemblies are special occasions when pupils come together, often to celebrate one another's achievements. Pupil involvement is high, including writing prayers. They thoroughly enjoy opportunities to compete and work as a team, whether players in a sports team or singers in a choir.
- The school is inclusive. Pupils say, 'We treat everyone equally, we treat others how we want to be treated. We are all different in some ways but the same in the most important ways.'
- Pupils' preparation for life in modern Britain is promoted well. Pupils express strong moral values, and show respect for one another. In philosophy lessons, for example, they learn that it is perfectly normal for people to hold different views and disagree with one another. Pupils' understanding of 'democracy' is strong. One pupil said, 'Everyone has the right to an opinion, then we all come together and decide.'
- Leaders effectively target the use of pupil premium funding. Eligible pupils generally make good progress because their needs are accurately assessed and the right extra help given. Funding also enables pupils to participate in activities such as visits.
- Primary school sports funding is generally used effectively. Pupils participate enthusiastically because they understand the importance of exercise to health and general well-being. Use of the extra funding to increase staff competence and confidence is more limited. The school is aware of this.
- Links with local schools are very strong. Staff regularly collaborate and share ideas, pupils enjoy opportunities to work and compete together. In practical ways, such as identical absence procedures and occasional holidays, schools work closely to support parents and encourage regular attendance.
- The school is very outward-looking, drawing on good advice and guidance from a wide range of sources, including the effective use of local authority assistance. This is an improvement since the previous inspection.

- The relationship with parents is strong. Parents are very supportive of the school, for example raising significant sums to enhance school provision. They appreciate the opportunities to express their views, and useful information sessions, for example to explain phonics (letters and the sounds that they make). One parent stated, 'All-in-all, it's a lovely school, one I wish I could have attended myself!'
- **The governance of the school**
 - The governing body is effective because it has benefited greatly from the review it received and putting the recommendations into practice.
 - Governors responded positively to the previous inspection report's recommendations, summed up in one frank appraisal, 'We have all changed our mind-set, there has been a tremendous effort to improve, today we see a vastly different school to three years ago.'
 - Governors work closely with leaders and staff to maintain the impetus of improvement now established. They share a strong commitment to providing high-quality education for pupils.
 - Effective use is made of each governor's individual skills so that the school and pupils benefit from this expertise.
 - Checks on the progress of pupils are analysed carefully to ensure that pupils do well and to question and challenge leaders if they do not.
 - Governors oversee the performance of staff, including teachers, rigorously. Decisions about pay increases are based on a good range of evidence.
 - Governors fully understand the importance of balancing the budget and achieving good value for money. To this end, their oversight of the school's finances is thorough.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders and governors ensure that all staff training is up to date and the school fully complies with the latest safeguarding guidance. Governors and school staff are fully aware of their duty to keep pupils safe. The school clearly explains to parents its role in safeguarding their children, and works closely with parents to see that their children are safe from harm. Nearly all parents responding to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, agree that their children are well looked after and safe from harm.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good overall. In particular, school leaders' highly effective use of training has improved teachers' use of assessment, including marking, to make sure work is hard enough for pupils.
- Very positive relationships between pupils and staff ensure that classrooms are a hive of activity and no time is lost, for example when a class moves from one activity to another. Teachers manage their classes effectively and, in their actions, promote 'care consideration and courtesy.'
- Teachers follow the school's marking policy closely. Pupils are encouraged to respond to their teachers' feedback, and demonstrate they understand.
- Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to learning. They receive high-quality training. For example, the special educational needs coordinator checks that they fully understand how to teach the extra programmes to struggling pupils.
- Questioning is used effectively. For example, a teaching assistant's skilful use of open-ended questions promoted pupils' discussion until, by reasoning and deduction, they arrived at the correct answer for themselves.
- Teachers adapt their teaching to successfully promote pupils' learning. They ask their pupils how they learn best, and incorporate pupils' views in their lessons. For example, they use role play to bring reading and writing alive.
- Teachers encourage the most able pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, and to think for themselves. If pupils are stuck, they know how to help themselves. For example, they check examples of their previous learning displayed around their room.
- Teaching of speaking and listening skills is effective. In a Year 3 and Year 4 class, for example, good teaching means pupils know how to construct answers using full sentences. Pupils benefit from the many opportunities to practise this, such as when they greet visitors to their classroom and articulate their recent learning.
- Reading is taught effectively. Good training means that staff teach phonics successfully. More advanced reading skills, such as inference, are taught equally well. Teachers engage pupils' interest with activities such as drama so that pupils deepen their understanding of the story by putting themselves into character.

- Writing is generally taught well. Pupils' engagement is high because material is presented in interesting ways. Grammar and punctuation are taught well and practised in writing in all subjects. However, pupils are not expected to transfer their spelling skills to their general writing, so the standard dips.
- Mathematics is taught well. A high proportion of activities are problems for pupils to solve using their good reasoning skills. They often learn from one another by collaborating and sharing ideas.
- While teaching of reading, writing and mathematics has improved greatly since the previous inspection, there remains a lack of parity between classes in other subjects. For example, some teachers' handwriting does not provide pupils with a good example. As a result, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is not of the same level across the school.
- Effective use of homework enables pupils to practise basic skills, such as reading. In addition, staff give the most able pupils opportunities to choose and pursue their interests through a range of activities.
- Nine in every ten parents responding to Parent View agree that their children are well taught and making good progress at Downham Primary. Many added that staff are very approachable.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Overwhelmingly, parents responding to Parent View feel their children are happy at school.
- Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning significantly impact on their achievements. They come to school each day ready and eager to learn. Pupils want to learn and improve, and take notice of their teachers' feedback. They value their education and see it as fundamental to their future lives.
- Pupils demonstrate resilience and perseverance, and understand the importance of these attributes to learning and their future lives. They will say, for example, 'I don't know that *yet*,' demonstrating a mature understanding of themselves as learners. They say, 'We want to be the best we can be, to use the talents God has given us.'
- Assemblies are special occasions. During the inspection, pupils debated a moral dilemma relevant to their lives – 'what to say to a friend who has lost a race'.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enhanced, for example in their studies of global topics. They respect other cultures and empathise with people less fortunate than themselves. They express a very moral approach to trade and feel that producers should receive a fair return.
- In many lessons and activities, teachers promote pupils' collaborative learning through the numerous opportunities to work together. For example, pupils discuss events in stories and how the characters might be feeling. Pupils invariably show respect for one another's ideas and points of view.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are catered for very effectively, so these pupils are highly positive about their learning and personal development.
- Pupils welcome opportunities to take responsibility and help others. For example, play leaders help those younger than themselves at playtimes. 'Reading buddies' are very clear about their role; 'You're not doing it for them, you are helping them.'
- Pupils eagerly celebrate each other's achievements. They appreciate public recognition, for example when they help others or show the right attitude to their learning.
- Pupils enjoy participating in sports. They know that regular exercise, a balanced diet and rest are all important to healthy living and mental well-being.
- Pupils' thorough understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe is promoted through many relevant activities. For example, lessons include regular reminders of how to use the internet safely. Other skills, such as safe cycling, are also practised.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' behaviour towards one another, staff and visitors is exemplary. They give, and know they will receive in return, 'care, consideration and courtesy'. There have been no exclusions since the previous inspection.
- About nine in every ten parents responding to Parent View believe that the school makes sure its pupils are well behaved. A similar proportion agrees that the school deals effectively with bullying.
- Pupils know right from wrong; they are self-disciplined and very rarely misbehave. They fully comply with the school's behaviour approach and procedures.
- The care provided for pupils is exemplary. Staff know that pupils must be well cared for if they are to thrive at school. In particular, the special educational needs coordinator ensures that anxious and

vulnerable pupils are very well supported. Nine in every ten parents responding to Parent View agree that their children are well cared for.

- Pupils say that incidents of bullying are very rare. Should any occur, they are confident that staff would ensure that they were resolved quickly.
- Attendance is above average. Pupils' punctuality is very good, too. They respond positively to the good education provided and enjoy the interesting lessons. The school works closely with local schools to promote good attendance.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils' achievement has improved since the previous inspection. The strong focus on improving the quality of teaching has led to good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Variation in progress in these three subjects reported at the last inspection has largely been eradicated.
- The school's checks on progress, and the quality of work in pupils' books, show that the vast majority of pupils, including the most able, now make good or better progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The rate of pupils' progress in all three subjects is similar throughout the school. In each year and each subject, eight or nine pupils in every 10 make good progress.
- These improvements are the result of leaders taking very effective action so that pupils make faster progress. However, the inconsistencies in teaching and pupils' progress reported at the previous inspection mean that, even though teaching is now good, it has not been so over time. This particularly affects older pupils who have been in the school longer. As a result, some of these pupils have a legacy of lower standards.
- The proportion of pupils reaching or exceeding the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics screening check was below average in 2015. This year, the proportion is much improved and eight in every 10 pupils have reached or exceeded it. The improvement is because of high-quality training for all staff teaching phonics and parity in teaching approaches.
- The small number of disadvantaged pupils make progress similar to that of their peers. When they struggle, they are given extra help closely tailored to their needs. As a result, they generally do well.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make very good progress, although often from lower starting points. The special educational needs coordinator regularly checks on their progress, and gives teachers and teaching assistants tips on how teaching can be improved. She sees pupils regularly, and works closely with parents so that the approach at home mirrors that in school. As a result, pupils are motivated to learn.
- The quality of work in their books shows that the most able pupils make good progress. Pupils' strong work ethic, and the challenging activities, mean that they quickly become engrossed in learning.
- The small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is fully included in all lessons and school activities. They enjoy learning and school life, and do as well as their peers.
- Special events, such as the arts fortnight, give pupils opportunities to pursue their interests at greater depth. They benefit from learning from specialist visitors, or staff with particular skills in those areas.
- Pupils' scientific knowledge is limited because they have few opportunities to investigate and perform simple tests. As a result, their ability to think scientifically, such as to observe and use their observations to suggest answers to questions they may have posed, is restricted.

Early years provision

is good

- Most children enter early years with skills and knowledge typical for their age. About a quarter have skills and knowledge of a higher level than this and a similar proportion of children have special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- Children make good progress during the year. The proportion reaching a good level of development by the time they enter Year 1 has risen since the previous inspection and in 2015 was above the national average. This year the proportion has increased further. This increase is due largely to the effective actions of leaders, who have continued to build on the good achievement in early years reported when the school was previously inspected.
- The effective use of checks of children's progress helps to ensure that they achieve well. For example, the progress of children with speech, language and communication needs is closely monitored so that the extra help they are given is tailored to their needs. Checks also showed that some boys were reluctant to

read and, more particularly, write. Staff responded effectively, for example providing 'tool belts' for them to wear, including the 'tools' for writing.

- Children's personal development is very strong. Children grasp any and every opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning. Year 1 pupils sharing the class provide excellent role models.
- From the moment they arrive each day, children immerse themselves in learning. They listen closely to staff and fully engage in the activities introduced to them. Afterwards, they will often return to an activity, try it out for themselves, and consolidate their understanding.
- The structure and organisation of the class is clear. Children quickly learn what is expected of them, and what they can expect of others. They know, for example, that they will have a phonics lesson each day, and that this helps them with their reading and writing. Staff seek every opportunity to encourage children to sound out words they do not know.
- The classroom is full of stimulating activities to give children a wide range of learning opportunities from which to choose. Outdoor provision is equally good. Planned activities incorporate aspects of all required areas of learning while providing numerous chances for children to follow their interests and curiosity.
- Teaching is good. Questioning is used effectively; staff know the children well and pitch questions at the right level of difficulty to challenge each one. When a child is found to be ready for more advanced work staff will often incorporate an extra task.
- Effective use of external support has helped the development of the provision since the previous inspection. For example, the local teaching schools' alliance has provided training to staff in how to stimulate children's language through storytelling. This is particularly beneficial to children with speech, language and communication needs.
- Transition into the early years is good. Much is done to work with settings and prepare children and parents, for example through visits to the early years. Transition to Year 1 is equally smooth because children are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Relationships with parents are positive. Parents are welcome. School and home are seen by parents as real partners in their children's education.
- Leadership is good. Staff ensure children's safety with constant vigilance and regular reminders to children themselves.

School details

Unique reference number	115119
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10011778

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	230
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Robert Turner
Headteachers	Sue Crace and Helen Craig (Joint)
Telephone number	01268 710387
Website	www.downhamschool.org
Email address	admin@downham-ceap.essex.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–23 January 2014

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- All classes in the school are mixed-age; Reception and Year 1, two classes of Years 1 and 2, two classes of Years 3 and 4, one class of Years 4 and 5, and two classes of Years 5 and 6.
- The school has two headteachers. One works Monday to Wednesday, the other Wednesday to Friday.
- The vast majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium funding is well below average. This is additional funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The overall proportion of pupils who receive support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities is below average. However, the proportion with more significant needs who hold an education, health and care plan, or statement of special educational needs, is well above average.
- In 2015, the school met the government's floor standards, which are the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics by the end of Year 6.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors visited all classrooms. Some observations were conducted jointly with one of the headteachers or the deputy headteacher. In addition, the inspectors observed small groups of pupils being taught.
- The inspectors looked at work in pupils' books and listened to pupils read.
- The inspectors observed pupils in other activities and as they moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteachers, other leaders, teachers, and governors.
- The inspectors met with pupils to discuss their experiences at school.
- The views of 42 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, were taken into account. The inspectors also held informal discussions with parents.
- The inspectors looked at a range of school documents and information. These included the school development plan, checks on the quality of teaching, curriculum plans, minutes of meetings of the governing body, and pupils' behaviour and attendance records. They also looked at arrangements for and records of safeguarding procedures.

Inspection team

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