



# Downs Barn First School

## Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 110372  
**LEA** Milton Keynes LEA  
**Inspection number** 278417  
**Inspection dates** 10 May 2006 to 11 May 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Charalambos Loizou AI

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

<b>Type of school</b>	First	<b>School address</b>	69 Downs Barns Boulevard
<b>School category</b>	Community		Milton Keynes
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3 to 8		MK14 7NA
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 604430
<b>Number on roll</b>	149	<b>Fax number</b>	01908 231359
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mrs Hilary Wright
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	28 February 2000	<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Margaret Hart

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This small school currently has pupils up to Year 3 but will serve pupils up to Year 2 from September. The school admits three-year-olds into its nursery on a part-time basis. Most pupils are of White British heritage but a significant number come from a diverse range of backgrounds and many are at the early stages of learning English. A significant number of pupils are from families seeking asylum. The proportion of pupils joining or leaving the school at different times is high. The school serves a generally disadvantaged area. An above average percentage of pupils has learning difficulties and disabilities. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 3

The inspection judgements agree with the school's evaluation that it provides a satisfactory education. The school gives satisfactory value for money. The pupils enjoy school, are well behaved and have positive attitudes because their personal development is good. However, attendance rates are below average because a few pupils do not attend well. The staff take good care of the pupils and support them well.

The pupils make satisfactory progress and reach the standards expected for their age in reading, mathematics and science. Standards in reading and mathematics are rising but writing standards are below average and should be higher. There are too few opportunities for pupils to write independently and at length and the pupils' writing targets are not challenging enough. Pupils with learning difficulties and those in the early stages of learning English make good progress. Teaching is satisfactory overall but the pace of some lessons is too slow.

There is satisfactory provision in the Foundation Stage. Nursery children make good progress in relation to their starting points. Those in reception make satisfactory progress and standards are below those expected by Year 1 in language, communication and mathematics.

Leadership and management are satisfactory and have led to satisfactory improvement since the last inspection and a smooth transition towards the school's reorganisation. Overall standards are rising because teachers' planning and assessment have improved. Governors provide satisfactory support and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Parents are very pleased with what the school offers their children. Given the overall improvements made since the last inspection, the school demonstrates satisfactory capacity to continue improving.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the teaching of writing and provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length
- Ensure that all lessons are sufficiently brisk and challenging to accelerate pupils' progress
- Improve attendance rates.

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 3

The pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve average standards in reading, mathematics and science. Standards are below average in writing.

The results of national tests show that compared with writing, a much higher proportion of pupils reach or exceed the expected levels in reading and mathematics. Standards are rising in reading and mathematics. Writing standards are too low because of

weaknesses in developing pupils' extended and independent writing and the targets set for them are insufficiently challenging.

The children start school with language, communication and mathematics skills that are below those expected for their age. Foundation Stage children make satisfactory progress in most areas of learning and good progress in personal, social and emotional development. Stimulating and fast paced activities in the nursery successfully reinforce early language and mathematics skills. Reception children make satisfactory progress but the pace of lessons is uneven so they do not always make the progress they should.

Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because they are supported well enabling them to reach their learning targets. Pupils in the early stages of learning English make good progress.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They reflect quietly on their experiences and learn to appreciate other points of view. They enjoy celebrating other pupils' achievements in assemblies. African artefacts and special art topics are used well so pupils learn about 'the way we live' across the world. These enhance the pupils' spiritual and cultural development. They cooperate well and relationships are good. As one said, 'I like working with my friends, we can work things out together'. The pupils are well behaved and eager to do well, 'I like learning new things', says one. Pupils in the school council take responsibility and appreciate that the staff will act on their views like their idea to provide picnic benches outdoors.

Attendance rates have been declining over recent years due to a few families having inconsistent attendance. The school is monitoring this and, with the support of parents, is beginning to reverse this trend, reflecting the pupils' good levels of enjoyment. The eating of fruit at break times is helping the pupils to adopt healthy lifestyles. Pupils know how to work and play safely. They are learning important life skills in reading and numeracy as well information and communication and technology (ICT) skills.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have improved assessment procedures to track the progress of pupils who join the school at different times. Support staff are used well so pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those learning English make good progress. The teaching is having a positive effect on the pupils' personal development.

Planning is consistent, including that seen in the Foundation Stage where weaknesses were identified in the school's last inspection. Teachers use effective record systems to track how well the pupils are doing. This helps their planning so it is clear to the

pupils what they want them to learn next. In Year 2, for example, the teacher provided different tasks that were well matched to the pupils' needs based on accurate assessments of their progress.

Individual pupil targets are not challenging enough to accelerate pupils' progress in all lessons. This is particularly the case in writing where targets are sometimes too broad so it is not easy for pupils to work towards the next level in manageable steps. The pace of lessons varies. Some lesson introductions are too long, leaving less time to reinforce pupils' learning with extended writing tasks. In good lessons the pace is brisk and tasks are challenging, as when nursery children were being questioned about plant growth or when Year 1 pupils improved their spelling by identifying letter sounds using 'sound buttons'.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory. The school is increasing opportunities for the pupils to enjoy the arts, physical education, science and music. All pupils learn to play the recorder and this is a valuable addition to the music curriculum. There are good opportunities to use computers to support learning. The school's bright and well stocked library is used often so pupils make good progress using books to find out facts or to read for pleasure. Foundation stage children learn to choose activities for themselves and how to solve problems but some reception children find it difficult to sustain an activity because there is no specific focus or challenge. In other classes lessons do not always provide enough time for the pupils to write at length independently.

Topics are linked well to healthy living. Nursery children learn scientific skills when growing vegetables and pupils throughout the school learn the importance of healthy food groups in science and snack time when eating fruit. Art and design lessons provide good opportunities to study art from around the world. The use of professional artists and visits to art galleries enhance learning. Younger children learn about cultural difference in stories, as one nursery child observed, 'The sun in other countries is very hot', when pointing out why we wear different clothes to suit the climate.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils are well cared for and supported. The supervision of pupils at break times is well organised and procedures to protect them are good. The pupils feel safe and secure and are pleased with the support they get, 'I like my teachers because they help you', says one. Systematic risk assessments and health and safety checks are carried out and there are robust child protection procedures. The vast majority of parents feel welcome and trust the staff to take care of their children.

Assessment systems are satisfactory and have improved considerably in the last two years. These are used by the staff to track pupils' performance and interpret trends as well helping to assess the needs of pupils who join the school at different times.

Pupils understand what is expected of them in lessons because staff are attentive to their needs but pupils' individual targets are not always challenging enough to help accelerate their progress.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Monitoring of lessons and pupils' work is focussed on the priorities in the school's improvement plan. These priorities arise from accurate assessments of teaching and the pupils' performance. In this way the school's self-evaluation identifies strengths and weaknesses and highlights where improvements are needed. Target setting for groups of pupils and year groups has improved recently so teachers are able to predict with reasonable accuracy how well pupils will do in national tests. However, monitoring is not always picking up where pupils' individual targets are insufficiently challenging.

Standards are improving in reading and mathematics because there has been a focus on these in the headteacher's monitoring. The current focus on writing is beginning to have a positive impact on writing standards. Leadership in the Foundation Stage is satisfactory and has improved since the school's last inspection. The school's track record in dealing with the issues raised in the last inspection as well as raising overall standards demonstrates that it has satisfactory capacity to continue doing this.

Governors provide satisfactory support. They receive regular feedback from the headteacher and subject leaders. Governors are linked to subjects and aspects of the school and are increasingly using these to hold the school to account for its performance but recognise that this could be more systematic. The school regularly surveys parents' and pupils' views. Relationships between staff, parents and governors are good and the vast majority of parents hold the school in high regard.





## Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16-19</b>
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### Overall effectiveness

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	3	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	NA

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3	NA
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	NA
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	NA

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	4	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	NA
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	NA

### The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	3	NA
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	2	NA

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	3	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	3	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
<b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
<b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
<b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	NA
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	NA

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Pupils

Thank you for making me welcome and a special thank you to all the children who spent time talking with me. I think that your school is satisfactory and there are some good things that help you do well.

I was especially pleased with these things: \* Your behaviour is good, you are polite and nice to each other and you try hard in lessons. \* Your teachers and other adults look after you well and make sure you get the help you need. \* You are doing well in reading, mathematics and science. I know this from your test results. \* You enjoy school and your parents like the way they are made to feel welcome.

I think that these things could be better: \* Your teachers are not always making sure that your writing work is as good as your work in reading and mathematics. \* You understand your targets and have told me that these help you to do better but some targets are not the right ones to help you do the very best you can. \* It is important that you do not have too much time off and your parents help you all to attend school every day. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours faithfully

Charalambos Loizou

Lead inspector