



Downs Park School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114685
LEA Brighton and Hove
Inspection number 279432
Inspection dates 6 March 2006 to 7 March 2006
Reporting inspector Jacque Cook AI

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

Type of school	Special	School address	Foredown Road
School category	Community special		Port Slade
Age range of pupils	4 to 17		Brighton, East Sussex BN41 2FU
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01273 417448
Number on roll	120	Fax number	01273 439619
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr Phil Herring
Date of previous inspection	30 October 2000	Headteacher	Ms Gill Golding

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Downs Park is a special school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The special needs of pupils have become more complex since the last inspection. Of the current population, 43 pupils have autistic spectrum disorders, 21 have speech and communication difficulties, 18 have emotional, behavioural and social difficulties and several have sensory impairments. A few have severe learning difficulties. There are about twice as many boys as girls, five looked after children and a few pupils from ethnic minorities.

The school is also responsible for the management of two special units for eight pupils with autistic spectrum disorders. One is attached to an infant school and the other to a junior school. The school and the local authority jointly manage the Autistic Spectrum Disorders Support Service which is based at Downs Park.

Brighton and Hove have been conducting a review of special education since 2003, which has led to much uncertainty about the future of the school. A proposal to close the school and merge it with another was eventually abandoned.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The overall effectiveness of the school is good, in keeping with its own judgement. In the Reception Year and Years 1 and 2, the outstanding quality of teaching and learning leads to children making extremely good progress and having a very good start to their schooling.

The care and commitment of the staff and the very high quality of the links with outside agencies contributes throughout the school to pupils making good progress in their academic and personal development. Their communication skills are improved particularly well. Last year, a significant number of pupils, mainly, but not exclusively in Year 9 did not make as much progress as they should have in mathematics. This is due to some weaknesses in teaching and in how the subject is managed. Strategies used in special classes help pupils, particularly those with autistic spectrum disorders, to do well. Specific support from the excellent Learning and Inclusion Support Service (LISS) enables most pupils who display very difficult behaviour to also improve and do well.

Good leadership and management and effective monitoring ensures the quality of teaching and learning is good. A thorough self-evaluation process ensures any weaknesses are identified and addressed. This is evident in the school's recognition of the weak performance of some pupils in mathematics. Value for money is good and as there is a good track record of improvement, the capacity to improve further is good. However, the monitoring of the units attached to two mainstream schools is not sufficiently clear.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

Although the post-16 provision was only established last September, and at present provides for very few students, its overall effectiveness is good. This is a more positive view of the quality of provision than the school's judgement which erred on the side of caution because the facility is in the early stages of development. The links with the local college are excellent and the courses provided are very suitable for students and enable them to do well. Their personal development is well catered for through good levels of support. For example, a parent expressed their pleasure at the gains being made in independence and social skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve the co-ordination of secondary mathematics to ensure that the weaker teaching and learning in some classes is improved and all pupils, particularly those in Year 9, make better progress
- monitor the quality of the provision in the units attached to the mainstream schools more effectively.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils make good progress given their abilities and starting points but as a result of their learning difficulties, their attainment remains below that of most pupils of their age. Children in the Reception Year and those in Years 1 and 2 make outstanding progress in all areas of their work because they are taught very well. Pupils in Year 11 gain a good range of Entry Level awards. The few post-16 students are making good progress.

A recent focus on pupils' speaking and listening skills has been very effective and most pupils make particularly good progress. As a result of this, and the good quality of the work in the special classes, pupils with autistic spectrum disorders also do well. Specific and specialised support from the Learning Inclusion and Support Service (LISS) has led to many pupils with behaviour difficulties achieving well because they improve their behaviour, their literacy skills and self-esteem. There are no significant differences between the progress made by different groups of pupils.

Although most pupils are making good progress towards challenging targets, last year a significant number of pupils in Year 9 did not reach their targets in mathematics. This year their progress has improved to satisfactory partly because they are no longer taught with younger pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The school succeeds in its aim of assisting pupils to 'be the best we can be'. As a result of the great emphasis placed on encouraging independence, pupils quickly take some responsibility for their own progress and behaviour. They take their personal targets very seriously and are increasingly involved in setting them. Most pupils behave well. Those who find fitting in and settling to work difficult receive practical help from staff and make good and often very good progress, in improving their behaviour. Pupils comment on how much they enjoy the range of things they learn and consequently their attendance is good. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. They learn to value the actions and beliefs of others and form their own views. Children in the Reception Year quickly learn to play alongside others amicably. Pupils feel safe and adopt safe practices. They are very aware of the value of a healthy diet and lifestyle and most participate enthusiastically in physical education and sporting activities.

Through the school council, all pupils have a valuable opportunity to influence decisions, and contribute to the community. For example, they developed a healthy tuck shop and contributed towards plans for enhancing the recreation areas. Pupils' economic awareness is developed well. Older pupils develop valuable specific work-related skills in school and through attending college.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Staff build strong relationships with the pupils and use praise and encouragement very effectively. This leads to good levels of concentration. Most staff have high levels of expertise and are very skilled meeting the needs of the pupils. The specific teaching strategies used for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders effectively help them to gain confidence from the routines and the visual timetables that signal changes. Staff also manage pupils' behaviour very well. Pupils know what staff expect, want to conform and enjoy the stickers or behaviour slips they can earn. Teaching assistants are used very well. They are skilled in intervening at the right time and giving support when needed while encouraging pupils to be independent.

In the best lessons, which are often outstanding, there is very good pace so interest is maintained and pupils rise enthusiastically to challenges. Where teaching is less effective, this is usually because teachers have not made clear to the pupils what they are expected to learn. There are instances, notably in mathematics, where work is repeated unnecessarily, is too easy and pupils are reluctant to get started. Assessment procedures are good, but the school recognises there is a little more to do to ensure consistency. Work to make certain that teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment is accurate has been successful, but there are a few instances where work is not pitched at the right level and this slows pupils' progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 1

The curriculum is good. Children in the Reception Year get an excellent start because their work is planned very effectively and is combined very successfully with play activities.

Every pupil has the opportunity to achieve some form of external accreditation and there are plans to extend this further. The post-16 provision is extremely good and includes a very wide range of academic, vocational and leisure courses.

For pupils experiencing difficulties with their behaviour, there is an 'alternative curriculum' that is very well organised by staff in the LISS. This allows pupils to work on a one-to-one basis for part of the week in settings where they can achieve more success. This sometimes includes out-of-school activities and works very well.

The school has developed a wide range of enrichment activities, including lunchtime clubs, visits to theatres and galleries, together with many visits from artists and musicians. The recently developed 'activity week' provided pupils with a very wide range of exciting experiences including, golf, movie-making and pop dancing.

At present there are too few opportunities for pupils to attend other schools for wider social or educational experiences.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The care, guidance and support of pupils are good. All staff are committed to making this school a place where pupils learn, play and develop in safety. Safeguarding procedures are robust. Recent pupil anxieties about bullying have been well addressed and pupils report that this is no longer a major concern. A valuable part of this process has been the pupil-designed concern forms and secondary pupil 'bullybusters'. The healthy school award and imminent application for the silver award demonstrate the good focus on this aspect of pupils' development.

The support provided by the LISS is, in many cases, exemplary. This service ensures that the provision for pupils with behaviour problems is effective and far-reaching, including, for example, strategies to improve anger management.

Very good teamwork and the development of excellent links with health and other outside agencies, including the Connexions service, ensure that pupils are supported by the widest possible range of expertise. Parents are particularly appreciative of the advice and support they receive from the school.

Specific checking on the progress of looked after children and regular meetings lead to their overall good progress. Close and regular links with home ensure that concerns are dealt with speedily and parents kept informed. Pupils report that they trust all adults within the school and always feel able to share problems and seek guidance.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management by the headteacher and senior leadership group are good. There is a clear vision for the future of the school. This is based on a good self-evaluation. The focus on raising achievement is very clear in the school's comprehensive monitoring of its work. This leads to well-considered action where weaknesses are identified. The change from a separate behaviour centre for pupils with significant behaviour problems to the inclusion of these pupils within classes with support from the LISS was particularly well managed. This has dramatically reduced the number of exclusions from the school and the progress of most of these pupils has improved considerably. The good track record of improvement since the last inspection demonstrates a good capacity to improve further.

Subject co-ordinators are increasingly taking an active role in monitoring their subjects. This contributes well to pupils' good achievement. However, there is a weakness in the co-ordination of mathematics in the secondary part of the school, which has led to inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning and in pupils' progress.

The governance of the school is good. Governors are very aware of the strengths and areas for development through close participation in the self- evaluation process. They provide appropriate levels of challenge to the leadership of the school.

There is insufficient clarity about the management of the units attached to the mainstream schools. This is the responsibility of Downs Park, even though the pupils are not on its roll. The monitoring arrangements are not rigorous and liaison with the host schools is not good enough. The management of the Autistic Spectrum Disorders Support Service is shared with the local authority

and individual roles are not sufficiently clear. However, the provision in the units and the work of the support service are highly regarded by the mainstream schools involved.

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Inspection judgements

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

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	1	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	insufficient evidence

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you very much for making my colleague and me feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed seeing you working and talking with you. We would like to especially thank the members of the school council and the other pupils who told us about the school.

This is what we liked about the school:

you work hard, are doing well and enjoy school a great deal

pupils in Orange class make very good progress because they are taught very well

your speaking and listening are very good

the staff in the LISS help pupils to make very good progress in improving their behaviour

you are looked after very well at school and staff work very effectively with other people to help you make good progress

your school is run well

links with college are excellent for the students that go there.

This is what we have asked the school to do now:

improve teaching and learning in mathematics in some classes in Years 7 to 11

check on the work of the units at the primary schools more effectively.

With best wishes