



Down Hall Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114936
LEA ESSEX LEA
Inspection number 279479
Inspection dates 13 June 2006 to 13 June 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Ian Nelson LI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to inspect any school in England. The inspection is to be treated as a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Primary	School address	Brooklyn Drive
School category	Community		SS6 9LW
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01268 780018
Number on roll	284	Fax number	01268 783427
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. Barry Dimond
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2000	Headteacher	Mr. Ian Barton

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
4 to 11	13 June 2006 - 13 June 2006	279479

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, staff, pupils, parents and governors, scrutinised a range of documentation and visited classrooms. He took lunch with the children and observed them at play. The school's own self-evaluation document provided critical evidence in shaping the inspector's judgements. The receipt of 112 questionnaires from parents further assisted the writing of this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school serving an affluent area where few children qualify for free school meals. The vast majority of children have White British heritage. Only a handful of children are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. Low numbers of children need extra help because they find learning difficult. Very few children join or leave the school during a school year, though the current Year 6 is the exception and several children have moved because of their parents' work commitments. When children start in Reception they generally have the skills and knowledge expected of their age but there are some weaknesses in language and literacy, especially among boys.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The children rightly say this is a good school. They say it is a happy school where it is easy to ask for help. They take any worries or concerns to their teachers because the caring attitude of staff ensures that they listen and take children's upsets seriously. At lunch time children, 'Go to the ladies in red bibs,' (lunchtime supervisors) with any concerns, knowing that they will be well cared for. Parents echo their children's views of the good quality of the school. They say Down Hall is, 'A very happy school, it is a lovely place with a friendly welcoming atmosphere. I am absolutely thrilled with every aspect of the school,' and, 'in the time my children have attended they have learned valuable lessons. Any fears or concerns they have ever had have been quickly allayed by staff and teachers.' One parent summed the school up perfectly by saying, 'This is a very good school. However, no school is perfect and some issues have arisen but the school itself is the first to admit that improvements could be made.' The real secret of the school's success is that it rightly judges itself to be a good school but there is no complacency. It is a school that reflects continually on how well it is doing and what it could be doing better. This reflection is done as a partnership between all those with an interest in the school. Governors, parents, staff and children are all involved and confident that their views are important and taken seriously. The work of the governors is outstanding. They know their school extremely well. As well as being very supportive and hardworking they also challenge staff when they need to. For example, they discuss the information the school collects on how well children are doing and challenge whether the predictions for their test results at Years 2 and 6 are high enough. Staff accept such challenges and review their predictions. Governors expect the best of the school. The vigorous debate that ensued when asked whether they thought they were good or outstanding as a governing body exemplified their determination to avoid complacency, as well as illustrating their modesty and the high expectations they set themselves. The parents' council does excellent work in reviewing school policies and documentation to ensure that they are meaningful to parents and avoid educational jargon. The school council confidently gives its views on matters of concern to the children and organises a range of fund raising events for the benefit of the children and the charities they support. The parent teacher association (PTA) is very active in its support of the school. Parents say this is a real community school. Because the school reflects so thoroughly on its performance it knows that children achieve particularly well in mathematics and science by the end of Year 6 but that standards are not quite as high in English, although they are still above average. The staff have looked closely at why this is and taken steps to address the issues. They know that too many children struggle with longer pieces of writing that require complex sentences and that the school needs to continue to help them to master this. They know that some boys are not naturally attracted to literature and books so they use techniques to get around these issues. This was illustrated superbly in a literacy lesson with a group of mainly boys from Years 5 and 6 who were reflecting on the feelings of characters from a story. The teacher could have used a stirring story like Macbeth and had them consider the feelings of the main characters. But because he knew the children well he chose a story that he knew would appeal to them, that of the World

Cup 2006. As a result, the children were hooked, worked hard and identified how different characters, players, coaches and fans might be feeling. This not only ensured excellent learning of literacy but also helped to develop their social skills as they worked together and exchanged ideas. Getting children to take responsibility for their own learning typifies the best teaching in the school. It was also demonstrated with pupils in Years 1 and 2 who listed questions they would like answers to about various fruits. With excellent teaching like this it is not surprising that teaching makes a substantial impact on pupils' learning. Children thoroughly enjoy the very good range of activities that the school provides to help them to learn. They particularly like the specialist teachers who take them for physical education. They also speak well of the after school clubs and trips; one four-year-old is already looking forward to the Year 6 residential trip to the Isle of Wight. The excellent displays of children's work around the school are testament to the breadth of the activities they enjoy. Art work is of a high standard and gives children the opportunity to study the work of famous artists. There is clear commitment to extend children's understanding of a range of cultures and the school appreciates the need to continue to develop this work. Children explain very clearly what constitutes a healthy and balanced diet through their work in science lessons. The school's celebration of the gifts and talents of individuals, like the motocross champion, the ballet dancer and the budding sports stars, illustrates the knowledge the staff have of the children and their achievements within school and beyond. Not only does the school work hard to improve the standards of children's work and their test results, it also works hard to promote their personal and social development. Children have ample opportunity to take on responsibilities in class or around the school and many enjoy the opportunity of participating in concerts and performances for their families and the wider community, including the local schools' music festival. Excellent links with local schools, both primary and secondary, help staff to share ideas with, and learn from, other professionals. These links enable older children to enjoy science lessons with teachers at a local secondary school which they thoroughly enjoy. Parents speak highly of the way Down Hall staff ensure that children are very well prepared for every stage of their schooling, whether it be starting in Reception or moving between classes and eventually transferring to secondary school. A key figure in the school's success is the headteacher. He has built on the school's strengths with the very good support of his staff and governors. He has taken advantage of the Primary Leadership Programme to help to identify and address the issues in English while also developing the skills of those staff with management responsibilities. The good leadership and management has led to a school that is committed to planting the seeds of learning early and nurturing them to fruition rather than hot-housing children at Year 6 with constant test preparation to try to gain good results. It is this forward thinking attitude, shared by all staff and governors, that has led to improved standards over recent years and that has put the school in a very good position to move up a gear from its current very good status to become outstanding in the foreseeable future. But, of course, the school's success could not be achieved without the cooperation and commitment of the children themselves. They are keen to do well so behaviour is exemplary, attendance is above average and attitudes are excellent. The children say, 'there is no bullying but we sometime have arguments.' In the school's survey of their views the only things they really expressed concern

about were school dinners, although they ate them heartily enough, and school uniform. So these are very normal children then! Except that when asked what was good about the school the first to answer was a child from Reception who said, 'you learn things.' Although other children filled in the detail of the kind of things they learn, there is no doubt that this is a good school where staff and parents work together to promote an ethos where children want to learn and do well. And they do.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

This information can be found in the Overall Effectiveness of the school section

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

This information can be found in the Overall Effectiveness of the school section

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

This information can be found in the Overall Effectiveness of the school section

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

This information can be found in the Overall Effectiveness of the school section

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

This information can be found in the Overall Effectiveness of the school section

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

This information can be found in the Overall Effectiveness of the school section

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

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
--	-----------------------	--------------

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	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	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

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	1	NA
The attendance of learners	2	NA
How well learners enjoy their education	1	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	1	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	NA

The quality of provision

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

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	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	NA
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	NA
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	NA

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	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

Thank you for making me so welcome when I came to inspect your school recently. I enjoyed talking with you and hearing your views of your school. This letter is to tell what I thought was good about your school and how it could be even better. You told me that Down Hall is a good school and I agree with you. You say that there is no bullying in school but that sometimes you have arguments. Your teachers and lunchtime supervisors take excellent care of you and help you if you are worried or concerned. You told me that the teachers provide interesting things for you to do and that you like the school trips and the PE lessons. Because you enjoy your lessons and work hard you make very good progress, although you do better in mathematics and science than in English. Your teachers tell you what is good about your work and what you need to do to reach the next level. You know what levels you are expected to get in your Year 6 tests. Your school council does a very good job of telling the adults in school what you think about things. The worry boxes are a good idea and you say you like them being there. Your headteacher, teachers and governors are always checking how well the school is doing. They have good ideas for making it better still. You can play your part by continuing to behave excellently and trying even harder with your writing, especially the longer pieces that are a bit more complicated. It was lovely meeting you and I am sure your school will go from strength to strength.