



The Downs Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 118684
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280368
Inspection dates 8 March 2006 to 9 March 2006
Reporting inspector David Collard AI

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Owen Square
School category	Voluntary controlled		Walmer
Age range of pupils	4 to 11		Deal, Kent CT14 7TL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01304 372486
Number on roll	394	Fax number	01304 380471
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr J Roberts
Date of previous inspection	11 October 1999	Headteacher	Mrs C Karunaratna

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Downs is a larger than average primary school serving a local community of mixed housing. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is broadly in line with the majority of most primary schools as is the proportion with statements of educational needs. The low number of pupils from minority ethnic groups has slightly increased recently although relatively few have difficulty communicating in spoken English.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is an effective and improving school that has remedied many of the weaknesses evident after the last inspection. The school's self-evaluation is realistic but, due to the rapid improvement made this year, it overstates how good the school is. External reviews provided by the local authority have shown that the substantial support and training have had a significant impact and radically improved the school's provision, but there is still more to do. Achievement is now sound, standards while average are much improved, and the personal development, care and welfare of pupils are good.

Better teaching has been at the heart of the improvement. The teaching is still not as consistent as it might be and, for this reason, is still only satisfactory overall. The sound leadership of the senior staff and the highly effective governing body know how to address the weaknesses.

Pupils enter the school with standards below those expected. Satisfactory provision in the Foundation Stage enables them to enter Year 1 with knowledge and skills slightly below those expected for their age. The consistency of approach is most evident in Years 1 and 2 where all classes make good progress. Inconsistent teaching in Years 3 to 6 is the reason why pupils in some classes make rapid progress while others only learn satisfactorily. This is affecting the progress of some groups more than others. For instance, not all pupils capable of achieving higher levels are managing to do so, while those with average ability are progressing soundly. Despite the work still left to do, the turnaround in the school's provision demonstrates good capacity to improve further. It provides sound value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching in the Foundation Stage and Years 3 to 6 by building on the consistent practice evident in Years 1 and 2.
- Ensure that the potential of more able pupils is fully realised.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement through the school is satisfactory but better in Years 1 and 2 because teaching is more consistent. Progress in the Reception classes is satisfactory. Assessments show that by Year 1 most pupils are achieving the objectives set for their age. In communication, language and literacy, particularly writing, pupils in the Foundation Stage are working at levels below those expected.

By Year 2, pupils gain the standards expected and have made good progress. The basic skills are mastered in reading and mathematics, although writing skills are not as strong. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 make satisfactory progress but this has not always been the case. From an unsatisfactory position in 2003, there has been a significant rise in the national test results for Year 6, and the 2005 results demonstrate how much more the older pupils are learning. Realistic school targets suggest the upward trend will continue.

The school's focus on raising overall achievement is proving successful, but some groups are progressing better than others. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those within the middle ability range achieve satisfactorily. Pupils with the potential to achieve higher levels should be doing better. The legacy of weaker teaching has left them with a lot to catch up on, and the improved teaching is taking time to have an impact on standards. The small numbers of pupils with English as an additional language quickly become effective communicators and as one parent said 'the teachers know exactly how to encourage my bilingual child to understand more technical language'.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, social, emotional and cultural well-being, are good. Pupils have positive attitudes to school, as evidenced by the improved level of attendance. They are particularly enthusiastic about the extra activities and clubs such as the exciting 'Oscars' ceremony for the best films produced by Year 6.

Pupils work and play well together and there are very few instances of anti-social behaviour. Discussions with pupils show that they feel safe and when concerns have arisen they are dealt with appropriately. Parents' questionnaires show that they are generally happy with their children's education. The school is twinned with another in France and has other links to schools in India and Africa. These enable pupils to have good awareness of cultures other than their own. Through the Eco Club there is equally good awareness of the importance of looking after the environment.

The school forum contributes effectively to enhancing the environment, such as by purchasing play equipment, and is also providing good life skills. Pupils find ways of contributing to the local community, such as knitting blankets for the elderly, and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle through activities such as the 'Fruit for School' scheme.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory but ranges from particularly good to adequate. The most consistent teaching and best progress are in Years 1 and 2. It is promoted most effectively when the expertise of skilled teachers is used to model good practice to less experienced teachers. This raises expectations about what pupils are capable of. In the past, too much teaching was mediocre and resulted in falling standards. A rigorous process of training has ensured that teaching quality has improved substantially, even though some teaching does not yet fully cater for the potential of all groups. Good use is made of assessment to aid groupings, identify underachievement

and to set individual targets. The impact can be seen in the much improved achievement of pupils.

Where teaching makes the most difference, it is because teachers have cleverly linked imaginary experiences to learning the basics. For instance, Year 2 was dismayed to hear that their baby clinic was being held to ransom by Blackbeard the pirate and that they had to pay in 'fives'. Inevitably, they quickly calculated the necessary gold coins known as 'fives'.

In some years, pupils are not given enough opportunity to consolidate and apply their learning through extended activities. It is when this happens that the more able pupils are not fully challenged.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good, enabling most groups of pupils to make sound progress. Following a recent whole-school focus, the curricula for English, mathematics and science have been successfully adjusted. This has led to better learning in those areas and a stronger focus on improving writing. There are some notable strengths, such as the provision of French teaching in all classes, but also weaker areas such as some disappointing wall displays.

The curriculum is enriched by interesting themed weeks, such as those for health, the arts and for ecological awareness. Learning is enhanced through visitors, such as rail workers and music groups who help to capture pupils' interest. Visits out, such as to the Dover Discovery Centre and to France, also help make learning relevant.

The school provides a very wide selection of opportunities for out of hours activities. Around 270 places are available for a range of sporting, music and general interest clubs, including the nationally acclaimed school radio station.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. The school rightly prides itself on the calm learning environment, and pupils feel safe and valued as individuals. Child protection procedures are fully in place. Staff communicate health and safety issues effectively. The recently introduced breakfast club is well organised and pupils see it as a positive start to the school day.

Pupils are given good support in their personal development and feel comfortable that there are members of staff in whom they can confide. The satisfactory procedures for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress are beginning to have some impact on teachers' planning in order to influence the next stage of learning. These are also beginning to raise expectations of achievement but are not always used well enough in all classes. Good use is made of individual learning targets and pupils are developing an awareness of what steps are necessary in order for them to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The effectiveness of leadership and management is satisfactory but has the potential to be good. Inspection evidence confirms that the headteacher and senior staff have built the capacity to move the school forward and, in conjunction with the governors, have shown strong commitment to improving standards and raising achievement.

2004 saw significant changes that were to have a positive impact on leadership and management. A new senior team was appointed and, with good support from the local authority, rigorous monitoring started to address a number of previously identified problems. This resulted in a measurable improvement in the quality of teaching and an upward trend of pupil achievement. By 2005, national test results, while still only reaching the national average, were the highest ever. The school recognises there is still more to be done to ensure teaching is consistently good and to enable pupils to work more independently and achieve as well as possible.

The governing body is highly effective. It is rigorous in holding the school to account and, because it effectively analyses the monitoring it has undertaken, knows where the strengths as well as the underlying weaknesses lie. Governors have been very proactive in monitoring the quality of provision and in dealing with the thorny and ongoing financial issues related to reduced pupil numbers.

Regular questionnaires ensure parents contribute to school decision making, such as the change in uniform policy. Equally, pupils are given a number of opportunities to have their say through the school forum. All these measures have resulted in a much improved school that is once again providing sound value for money.

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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?	3	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	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

How well do learners achieve?	3	NA
The standards ¹ 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	3	NA

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	NA
The attendance of learners	3	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	2	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3	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?	3	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?	3	NA
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	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	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

Dear Pupils

Thank you for making us so welcome during our recent visit to your school. We enjoyed joining you in lessons and talking to so many of you. No doubt you would like to know what we thought of your school, so I have included a few of the main points below.

• You told us that you enjoyed school and we can see why. Your school is a friendly, and a safe, place to be and you are cared for well. Your teachers are very approachable and they work hard at trying to find interesting things for you to do. • You all spoke highly about the many activities and clubs that you are involved in, and we thought there was a very good range so that you could find things to interest you. We listened to your very good radio station – perhaps some of you will become DJs when you grow up. • We think that many more of you are doing well in your studies than you were a few years ago. We could particularly see this from the improved SATs' results. We think that with the more challenging lessons this better trend is now going to continue. • We enjoyed the lessons we saw. We have asked your teachers to see if they can make all of the lessons as consistently good as the best ones. • All of you are making suitable progress but we think there are more of you who have the potential to get higher levels and so we have suggested that those pupils are given work that will make them think harder. • Your headteacher and the rest of the staff have improved the school well in the last two years and they have lots of other ideas to make it even better.

Finally, we wish you all the best for the rest of your time at The Downs and success for the future.

Yours faithfully

David Collard (Lead Inspector)