



# Downside Lower School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 109589  
**Local Authority** BEDFORDSHIRE  
**Inspection number** 288439  
**Inspection dates** 5–6 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** George Falconer HMI

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Primary	<b>School address</b>	Oakwood Avenue
<b>School category</b>	Maintained		Dunstable
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5–9		Bedfordshire LU5 4AS
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 661778
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	116	<b>Fax number</b>	01582 661778
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Rev Nigel Jones
		<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Judith Day
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 July 2001		

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<b>Age group</b> 5–9	<b>Inspection dates</b> 5–6 December 2006	<b>Inspection number</b> 288439
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## **Introduction**

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

## **Description of the school**

Downside Lower School is in an area of Dunstable where there are high levels of deprivation. Attainment on entry varies between low and very low. Pupils are mainly from White British backgrounds and there is also a small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is much higher than average, as is the number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities.

## **Key for inspection grades**

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Downside Lower is a great school. It is well led, the teaching is really good and pupils leave here well equipped for the next phase of their education, and ultimately for the world of work. In fact, parents wrote to say how good it is: 'Downside Lower is fantastic' and, 'It is the backbone to the community and a truly wonderful school,' are just two of the comments.

When pupils start school attainment is very low, especially in reading and arithmetic, and many find it hard to concentrate. They are taught very effectively and soon learn to mix well with others. They also learn that while they are in school every minute counts. This is because teachers and learning assistants put a lot of emphasis on time management and on assessing pupils well. Teachers exploit odd moments to good effect. For example, one teacher reinforced language skills well while pupils readied themselves for lessons after play. Pupils make very good progress in the Foundation Stage and by the time they leave school at the end of Year 4, standards are slightly above average.

The pupils greatly enjoy coming to school, and no wonder. They and their parents know that this is a safe haven where learning is interesting and enjoyable. Many lessons are fun but there are also times for serious reflection and to think about those less fortunate than themselves. They make a very positive contribution to the local community in a host of ways. Even though pupils are keen to be here attendance is low. The school works really well to make attendance better but does not involve other agencies fully as it cannot tackle this aspect alone.

Another reason for the very good progress of the pupils is the importance given to pupils' care guidance and support which is outstanding. The headteacher's wise investment of resources, for example, in high quality support staff, ensures that the personal development of pupils is excellent. Pupils know what is good for them and, for example, choices in the school canteen help them to lead healthy lifestyles. The school does all it can to ensure that pupils understand the many dangers they will face in life.

The leadership and management of the school is good with several very good features. The leadership of the headteacher is outstanding. The school is well placed to continue on its path of improvement but at present the new governing body is not yet in a position to fully support the school's needs, nor is it yet holding the senior staff to account sufficiently.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise attainment by improving speaking and listening, widening vocabulary and increasing mental agility.
- Strengthen the understanding of the new governing body to ensure that it contributes fully to the work of the school.
- Increase attendance by seeking ways in which other agencies can better support the very good work of the school.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 2**

Achievement and standards are good overall. Pupils' progress as they move through the school is very good. Many pupils enter school with little experience of language skills or reading and with levels of attainment below and often well below average. However, they make very good progress in the Foundation Stage as a result of close attention to detail in monitoring and assessing pupils' development. The use teachers make of assessment to help pupils learn is outstanding in the Foundation Stage and very good in the rest of the school. Staff do a really good job of developing the social skills of pupils in the Foundation Stage and, as a result, pupils are able to progress well in other areas of learning to meet challenging targets. By the end of Year 2 pupils' achievement is very good but attainment varies according to the intake and group size. The school works hard to accelerate the progress pupils make and they demonstrate very good levels of achievement by the end of Year 4. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make very good progress towards their individual targets. Although not yet verified, the 2006 Key Stage 1 results indicate improvement on 2005 figures with pupils attaining broadly in line with the national average at Key Stage 1 for reading and writing. Mathematics results are slightly lower.

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

### **Grade: 1**

Personal development and well-being are outstanding in this caring and inclusive school. Pupils really enjoy school and are keen to report that they are taught well, feel safe and know they can talk to adults in school if necessary. Most of all they are very happy and say their lessons are brilliant. Attendance is low but the school has well thought out strategies to improve attendance and figures are rising noticeably. The school is maintaining its focus on this aspect. Pupils also find great enjoyment in the playground where they can play in a safe environment and enjoy the variety of equipment provided. They make good progress in their spiritual development and excellent progress in their moral, social and cultural development. The school puts a lot of effort into this aspect of their education and it pays off well. Pupils understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle including healthy eating and exercise. The school has this as a top priority. Mealtimes are a pleasure for them. Many valuable educational visits are arranged, some in support of personal development and well being. One example is Hazard Alley for Key Stage 2 pupils to help them learn about keeping safe and healthy. Behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. Attitudes to learning are outstanding.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are good overall, with some outstanding practice observed during the inspection. Pupils make very good progress in their learning as a result of the good quality teaching. Teachers plan carefully and show good understanding of all pupils' needs. Attitudes to learning are excellent and pupils respond well to the appropriate challenges set. Most pupils are well aware of the progress they are making because the teachers involve them in assessing work. The staff includes the extremely well-deployed teaching assistants who show a very good level of knowledge and understanding of the pupils they work with and of their needs. The use of assessment to help pupils learn is outstanding in the Foundation Stage and very good in the rest of the school. This contributes well to the pupils' very good progress.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum is good with some very good features and interesting ways of teaching it. A good example is seen in the creative thought that goes into physical education. The curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of all the pupils. Regular contact with other schools maintains a good sense of continuity of learning within the curriculum as a whole. It is responsive to pupils' needs and the school is constantly fine tuning both the content and the delivery in order to obtain the best match for the pupils. A good example of this is the high level of debate between the teachers of the early years and Key Stage 1 to enable a smoother transfer for the pupils. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. There is good provision for both numeracy and literacy, and information and communication technology (ICT) is used effectively to support curriculum areas and to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Learners have opportunities to contribute ideas on the curriculum through the school council which also plays a big part in decision making processes. Curriculum enrichment is very good and has a good take-up.

### Care, guidance and support

#### Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. This is one of the main reasons that pupils' make very good progress. The school really excels in giving high levels of commitment to the nurturing and mentoring of these pupils and the impact on their development is very positive. All staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of their needs. Pupils say that the teachers are great and they feel really well looked after by the teaching assistants, and other staff also. All pupils are working to challenging targets that take them on in their learning, and most pupils are aware of them. Pupils' safety is a key feature in this school where child protection arrangements are robust and relationships with external agencies are very strong. Any pupils at risk are quickly

identified and there are effective arrangements to support them. Health and safety procedures are firmly established and reviewed on a regular basis.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good with some very good features. The leadership and management of the head teacher is outstanding. She is purposeful and very focused on making sure pupils achieve as well as they can. Staff are very professional and work extremely well as a team. Communication is strong and the work of leaders and managers at all levels clearly has a positive effect on the quality of education. Equality of opportunity is strong and the performance of each individual is monitored very carefully. The use of assessment to promote pupils' learning is outstanding in the Foundation Stage and very good in the rest of the school. Leadership and management are always seeking to provide the best education for all pupils. A good example is the successful development of the early reading programme to help lower ability pupils. Staff make sure that the well-being, interests, and education of the learners are fully safeguarded. The school has a good track record of improvement over recent years, including dealing effectively with issues from the previous inspection. The newly formed governing body is developing satisfactorily although it does not contribute fully to the work of the school. The chair of governors supports the headteacher well. Resources are adequate. The headteacher and staff provide the school with a good capacity to improve and very good value for money.

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## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	<b>School Overall</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>	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

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

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

### The quality of provision

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

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

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	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	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

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

7 December 2006

Dear Children

Downside Lower School, Oakwood Avenue, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, LU5 4AS

Thank you for making my visit to your school so interesting and enjoyable. I think you are really lucky to be in such a brilliant, caring school run by a great headteacher and her staff.

All the way through school, I can see how well you are developing in all areas of your learning. More importantly, I can see how much you are enjoying yourselves.

Looking at the very young ones among you, it's easy to see that you have lots of different activities and you do them very well. For instance, the salt dough you were making and then turning into Christmas tree decorations. I thought this was wonderful.

As you become older you really get stuck into your work and make lots of progress in reading and writing and in mathematics too. This is because the staff put such a lot of care into what they do. You have lots of interesting things to learn as well as lots of trips and visits and Year 4 showed me all they are learning about drawing maps with symbols.

When I talked with you in class you let me know you were making a lot of progress in your work and I agree with this. Let's look at what other things the school does for you. Some of you go to a nurturing and mentoring group which is brilliant. It gives you that extra help from very caring staff when you need it most. The breakfast club looks very good and you really enjoy talking with your friends as well as tucking into a good, hot breakfast. You have a good choice of healthy food at lunchtime and you are so well behaved.

So, what could be better? Well, your teachers never stop thinking about this. They have three main ideas:

- With the help from others, they will make sure that you are all always at school when you should be.
- They will give you greater opportunities to develop speaking, listening and thinking skills all through school.
- Finally, but very importantly, the people who are governors of the school are going to help your headteacher and teachers to make your school even better than it is now.

Just think, for a moment, about how you can help too.

Best wishes,

George Falconer

Her Majesty's Inspector