



# Downham Special School

## Inspection Report

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**Unique Reference Number** 113645  
**Local Authority** Plymouth  
**Inspection number** 289680  
**Inspection date** 5 December 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Mike Kell

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>	Special	<b>School address</b>	Horn Lane
<b>School category</b>	Community special		Plymstock
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3-16		Plymouth PL9 9BR
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed	<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 403214
<b>Number on roll (school)</b>	77	<b>Fax number</b>	01752 481539
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body	<b>Chair</b>	Suzanne Pyne
		<b>Headteacher</b>	M Loveman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	2 July 2002		

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

The school has a residential facility for up to 16 pupils, so it is able to admit pupils who live long distances from the school, including some from neighbouring local authorities. Currently, because of staffing problems the hostel is only open for three nights each week. The vast majority of boarders stay for only one or two nights each week.

The youngest children undergo assessment to determine whether they require a statement of special education need. All school-aged pupils have such a statement. In the majority of cases, pupils have severe learning difficulties. A small minority have profound and multiple learning difficulties. Consequently, pupils enter the school working at a level that is very low compared to the national average. There are twice as many boys as girls on roll. Almost every pupil has a White British background and all of them speak English as their first language. A very small minority of pupils are in public care.

The school has been faced with some significant changes in the last 18 months. A new headteacher was appointed then and there have been three heads of care. Three chairs of governors have occupied that position during the same period. At the same time, the nature of pupils' learning needs has changed. An increasing number now being admitted have more complex needs and there are more pupils with features of autism. Since September 2006, the school has been running what it refers to as 'satellite provision' in conjunction with a local primary school. This is a unit for up to ten pupils in Years 3 to 6. This arrangement provides these pupils with a combination of specialist teaching and resources and opportunities to be included with their peers in some mainstream classes.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 3**

The school provides a satisfactory education. Pupils make good progress in their personal development and achievement is satisfactory overall. However, achievement is variable. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress and achieve well, because they are well taught and have a good curriculum. Pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD), the majority group in the school, achieve satisfactorily. However, the progress made by the small group of pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) is inadequate. Boarding provision is also unsatisfactory.

Standards are exceptionally low, because of the nature and severity of pupils' learning difficulties. However, teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory. The high quality of day-to-day interactions and relationships with the pupils are key strengths in the school, making pupils feel safe and secure and promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Children in the Foundation Stage learn well. Teachers' expectations of those pupils with PMLD are too low. There are many good features to the curriculum, such as the well-balanced Foundation Stage curriculum and the breadth of the curriculum in Years 1 to 11, but again the quantity and quality of the learning opportunities provided for pupils with PMLD are inadequate. The satellite provision is newly established but the early indications are that it is effective; the pupils there have settled well and are making good progress. Staff provide good levels of care, guidance and support but the effectiveness with which they can support pupils academically is limited by the school's relatively ineffective use of assessment data.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The school works well in partnership with local schools. The links with secondary schools are long-established, but there have been recent good innovations, such as the school-based initiative taken with a local headteacher to set up the satellite provision. On the other hand, although managers have recognised the need to address problems, such as the progress made by pupils with PMLD and the quality of the residential provision, they have not yet tackled them with sufficient urgency. Although the school's overall effectiveness is satisfactory, its performance in these two respects is inadequate. Before its next section 5 inspection, Ofsted inspectors may visit the school to monitor the progress that it has made in remedying these weaknesses. The school will receive two to five days' notice of such a visit.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision**

### **Grade: 4**

Inspectors from the Commission for Social Care Inspections (CSCI) made an announced visit to the hostel in November 2006. They concluded that it failed to meet a significant number of minimum national care standards. Some strengths were identified, such as a high staffing level and the very good range of activities that were on offer, but the overall provision was inadequate. In particular, the arrangements for ensuring pupils remain safe and the extent to which they are encouraged to make a contribution to the community were judged to be poor. The accommodation was poorly managed.

The hostel makes a very limited contribution to supporting the work that is done in school. The school has been left with a lengthy list of what it needs to do to improve. The school has made a sound start in addressing these.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Accelerate the pace of school development.
- Track pupils' progress more effectively and use the data to set challenging targets.
- Improve the quality of education for pupils with PMLD.
- Ensure that the residential hostel meets all minimum national care standards.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Pupils' work remains at a level that is very low compared to the national average throughout their time in school, but achievement is satisfactory. The progress that they make from their starting points when they arrive in school is variable. Children in the Foundation Stage make good progress because they are taught skilfully and often outstandingly and the curriculum is planned to meet their needs. These children and pupils with SLD make good progress towards achieving their individual education plan (IEP) targets. Further progress is limited because different items of assessment are not brought together and used in target setting and so IEP targets are not connected sufficiently closely to 'P' level assessments. Nevertheless, pupils with SLD in Years 1 to 11 make satisfactory progress. The oldest pupils take some accredited examinations, such as Accreditation for Life and Learning, and the good links with other schools extend their learning. The pupils with PMLD do not make the progress of which they are capable because expectations are too low. Pupils are assessed annually in all subjects in terms of their 'P' or National Curriculum levels. These levels are recorded but they are not analysed to attempt to quantify the progress that pupils make. This means that senior managers have no measure of whether pupils' progress is improving.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Attendance is good and the pupils enjoy school, particularly when lessons are lively and learning becomes fun. Their behaviour is good. Many are beginning to manage their own behaviour and to support each other. They learn and play well together. As the pupils move through the school, they become increasingly aware of the importance of taking exercise and eating healthily. For instance, some show an increasing tolerance of tasting different foods. They also demonstrate a developing awareness of safety, such as the way they approach crossing the road. Pupils get the opportunity to contribute to the community by becoming a member of the school council, although this is currently restricted to the senior school. The pupils develop satisfactory skills to help them when they transfer to the workplace.

The school promotes pupils' personal development very well informally and through activities such as the French Day and the links it has developed with a school in Hong Kong. Teachers do not reinforce this by identifying in lesson plans how and when pupils' spirituality, morality and social and cultural awareness are to be reinforced. The school has not yet worked out a way to involve the pupils by letting them show the progress they have made in these areas by seeking their comments. A small minority of parents felt that the school did not take enough account of the pupils' views.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but variable across the school. Typically, teachers manage their pupils well and relationships are strong. In the Foundation Stage and in classes for pupils with SLD, teachers generally use time productively. Because teachers know their pupils really well, they have a good understanding of their needs. As a result, they provide activities that recognise these needs through the planning of individual learning objectives, but these are not as effective as they could be. This is because teachers do not use the information they have on pupils' previous achievements to develop structured individual learning programmes that build towards enabling pupils to achieve challenging targets. This limits pupils' achievements. The pupils with PMLD do not learn as well as they are capable of doing. There is no sense of urgency in their learning and the level of challenge and expectation is inadequate.

### **Curriculum and other activities**

#### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and has some strengths. Pupils' learning in the classroom is supported well by visits and visitors into school, such as African drummers. The Foundation Stage curriculum is well balanced between the different areas of learning. In Years 1 to 11, the curriculum for SLD pupils is organised in such a way that it maximises links with partner schools. For instance, physical education is taught by visiting specialist teachers and some pupils benefit from the using the physical education facilities in a local school. Others visit to use the food technology accommodation. Links such as these have a positive impact on pupils' learning and personal development.

The picture for pupils with PMLD is nowhere near so positive. Their curriculum is inadequate because it is not structured effectively and the available teaching time is not used efficiently.

### **Care, guidance and support**

#### **Grade: 2**

There is good provision for ensuring pupils' care and welfare in the school, although CSCI inspectors had serious concerns about the hostel. Speech and language therapists,

physiotherapists and art and music therapists all play a key role in contributing to pupils' communication plans and/or communication passports, behaviour management plans and care plans/medical intervention plans. Their input makes a very valuable contribution to putting pupils in a good position to learn. Procedures for child protection are well established and the school follows local authority guidance when vetting the appropriateness of staff to work with children.

Pupils receive very good support in their personal development, such as being actively encouraged to participate in writing their person-centred plan in Year 9. This plots the route for their last two years in school and supports and guides them in moving on. The quality of guidance given to pupils to help to stretch them academically is much less effective because of the inefficient use of assessment data.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

School leaders have had a satisfactory impact in the time they have been together. The headteacher was faced with a difficult task when he took up post. There was a stable staff, with many long-serving teachers. A governor commented that the school needed 'refreshing and to catch up with new ideas'. In practice this was evident in the school's evaluation of its own performance, made by the leadership team last year. In many areas of its work these judgements were higher than those of the inspection team.

The headteacher has identified those features of the school that need improvement, and measures to improve have had some impact. For instance, some innovative curriculum work is underway. Prior to the headteacher's appointment there were no structured and coordinated attempts to use assessment data as a tool to improve pupils' progress. 'P' or National Curriculum levels provide basic data, but the use of the data that results from assessments is not yet embedded. In a similar way, the leadership team monitors many aspects of the school's performance accurately, but the use of monitoring data to inform development planning is less secure.

The headteacher has had to balance the introduction of change against the need to bring staff with him. Neither the teaching staff nor the leadership team are as yet united in recognising the urgency of the need to implement change in order to raise standards. As a result, the pace of change has been too slow in some areas, for example, in improving the progress of pupils with PMLD. However, the capacity of the school to move forward is satisfactory. The headteacher has made a good start, but the full impact of the whole leadership team, working together and with governors, is not yet apparent.

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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>	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

### Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	3
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

### Personal development and well-being

<b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	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	2
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	3

### The quality of provision

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

<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>	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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**

Thank you for being so kind and friendly when we visited your school. We enjoyed our day with you.

Downham is a satisfactory school. It does some things well. It is good at helping you to develop as young people but teachers could listen more to what you have to say about things and use what you say to help you even more. You are good at going to school and you behave well and enjoy yourselves while you are there. The staff care a great deal and they look after you well. It is really good that you can go to other schools for some lessons.

Your lessons and what you are expected to learn are satisfactory. The youngest of you are doing particularly well. The senior teachers are doing alright in the way they run the school. They want to make your learning better. We have given them some ideas how to do this:

- Those of you who find learning really, really hard need more help.
- The hostel is not very good. This needs to get better.
- Your teachers should look more closely at what you have already done before giving you new work.
- The senior teachers have to make changes more quickly.

We wish all of you the best of luck in Downham and when you leave school.

Thank you once again.