

# Downs Junior School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114366
<b>Local Authority</b>	Brighton and Hove
<b>Inspection number</b>	311572
<b>Inspection date</b>	8 July 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Mike Capper

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>	Junior
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School	503
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Martin Cross
<b>Headteacher</b>	John Vousden
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	12 July 2004
<b>School address</b>	Rugby Road Brighton BN1 6ED
<b>Telephone number</b>	01273 558422
<b>Fax number</b>	01273 330769

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector, who evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues.

Standards and progress, especially in mathematics.

The way that enrichment of the curriculum encourages high levels of enjoyment and supports an understanding of healthy living.

Provision for gifted and talented pupils.

The impact of leadership on raising standards in writing.

Evidence was gathered from observations of pupils at work and play, discussions with staff, governors and pupils, scrutiny of documentation and an analysis of parents' views. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

## Description of the school

Most pupils in this much larger than average junior school come from their local communities in the northern part of Brighton. The school is housed in a listed Victorian building and has no playing field. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties is slightly above average.

Pupils' attainment on entry fluctuates significantly from year to year; in the current year groups, pupils in Year 3 and Year 4 had much higher starting points than those in Year 6, where attainment on entry was broadly average.

The school has an Activemark and Artsmark Gold for provision in physical education and the arts respectively and also has a 'healthy school' award. The school's 'Investor in People' accreditation was renewed in May 2008.

## Key for inspection grades

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

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

In this good school, pupils achieve well and learn to become responsible citizens. Through its good work, the school lays a strong foundation for the next stage of pupils' education and their later life. Pupils develop good attitudes towards learning, are happy and sociable and work together well.

Good academic support and good teaching mean that pupils make good progress from their different starting points. Consequently, standards rise to above average levels by the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science. Throughout the school, pupils make particularly fast progress in developing writing skills. This has been a focus for school development over the last two years and leaders have been very successful in ensuring rapid improvement. Pupils have benefited enormously from sharper target setting, greater opportunities to write in different subjects and additional support through activities such as the externally funded Young Writer's Club. The school's termly newsletter, *The Bell*, which is written by older pupils, is a good example of how writing is being made more purposeful. In mathematics, progress is generally good, but there are some occasions when work is not pitched at the right level for all pupils. When this happens, work is either too easy or too hard for some pupils, slowing the pace of learning.

Throughout the school, teachers make good use of resources such as interactive whiteboards to introduce new concepts and to bring subjects alive. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because they are supported well by skilled teaching assistants. In the last term, the school has made a good start to improving provision for pupils identified as being gifted and talented, thus starting to address a concern of a small number of parents. Senior leaders are doing the right things to ensure that new procedures are embedded across the school. Whilst there is suitable challenge for gifted and talented pupils in most lessons, this is not always the case, especially in mathematics.

Members of staff take good care of the pupils. The school has established some imaginative ways of ensuring that any worries are tackled quickly. For example, the school's excellent website includes a confidential 'worry box' for pupils to report anonymously any concerns. This means that pupils are confident that they will get help when they need it and ensures that their personal development and well-being are good. Pupils very happily take responsibility and make a good contribution to the community. The school council carries out its role very conscientiously. Councillors are diligent in their work and they play a good part in improving the school. For example they are able to talk to the chair of governors about any areas they would like to see improved. Some of these concerns focus on the school building which, despite recent improvements such as the addition of a new dining hall, is rightly acknowledged by pupils, parents and staff as being very cramped and needing extensive refurbishment. The school does well to minimise the impact of these limitations on standards and has a rolling programme of planned improvements. For example, toilets in Years 3 and 4 are due to be refitted shortly.

Pupils are polite and courteous and work hard in most lessons, although they do not always take enough care to present their work neatly. They generally behave well and when behaviour does occasionally fall below the school's high expectations, either in lessons or at break times, members of staff usually take swift steps to ensure that others are not significantly affected. Nearly all pupils enjoy school, with several commenting on the exciting way that activities

beyond lessons are used to enrich the already good curriculum. Creativity is fostered very imaginatively, with provision in music being outstanding. Pupils are very positive about the way they are encouraged to learn to play a musical instrument and there is a very high uptake for this. There are many opportunities for public performance, with the school's Samba band recently participating in a children's parade through the centre of Brighton and pupils in Year 4 taking part in an opera workshop at Glyndebourne. Pupils produce very high quality work in art, and this work is attractively displayed around the school. Pupils also like being able to learn Spanish, because 'it will help us when we go to secondary school'. The school's extensive efforts to promote positive lifestyles are reflected in the pupils' good knowledge of how to stay safe and their excellent understanding of the importance of adopting healthy lifestyles. Although the school has no playing field, members of staff compensate for this remarkably well. There are many sporting activities and pupils compete very successfully against other schools in sports such as rugby, football, netball, athletics and cross-country. Pupils are very comfortable with the school's decision not to allow unhealthy snacks at playtime, and they provide good challenge to outside caterers by talking to them about how to make school lunches even healthier.

The school is well led and managed. The good work of the headteacher and other senior leaders has helped the school to continue to improve since the last inspection. There are good systems for checking how well the school is doing and this means that senior leaders are able to tackle weaknesses quickly. The school is already taking the right steps to improve further pupils' progress in mathematics. There is a strong sense of teamwork across the school and subject leaders are keen and enthusiastic. However, they do not do enough to monitor teaching and learning in their subjects by visiting lessons regularly. This means that minor inconsistencies in provision such as variations in the quality of marking are not always picked up quickly enough. Governors provide good challenge to the school, and manage available funds astutely. The school sets itself challenging targets for development and it is well placed to improve further.

The school has good links with a range of partners, including other schools, support agencies and parents. Most parents are generally happy with the school, although some rightly feel that homework sometimes lacks challenge and does not always support learning well enough. One parent summed up the views of many by commenting that, 'My daughter has always enjoyed school and is moving towards secondary school as a well-rounded and mature 11-year-old, confident and well prepared for what lies ahead.' A Year 6 pupil, talking about her time at the school, said, 'I have had fun, made many friends and learnt a lot.' Comments such as these accurately capture the essence of this successful school.

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

- Ensure that teachers always provide the right level of challenge for all pupils, especially in mathematics.
- Strengthen the role of subject leaders in monitoring teaching and learning by visiting lessons so that any minor inconsistencies are picked up more quickly.

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## Annex A

## Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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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
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

### Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
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

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	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.

## Annex A

**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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	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, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

9 July 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Downs Junior School, Brighton BN1 6ED

Thank you for welcoming me to your school and for showing me your work. You are well behaved and very polite and friendly. I enjoyed talking to you. I agree that your school is good and that it does a lot to help you to learn quickly.

Some of the things I found out about your school.

- Good teaching helps you to learn well and to make good progress.
- You get on well together and work hard in lessons, although some of your work is untidy.
- Most of you are happy at school and greatly enjoy it because adults provide many interesting activities. You produce some super artwork and are lucky to have so many opportunities to take part in musical activities.
- You have a good understanding of how to stay safe and a very strong awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle. You take a very good part in sporting activities, and the school council is doing a good job in helping to make school lunches even healthier.
- All adults in school are very kind and caring and they give you good help with your work when you are struggling.
- Your school is well led and managed, and the headteacher, governors and staff are working hard to make it even better.
- Most of your parents and carers are pleased that you come to this school.

What I have asked your school to do now.

- Make sure that work is not too hard or too easy for some of you so that you can always make good progress, especially in mathematics lessons.
- Ensure that teachers who are in charge of different subjects visit lessons more frequently so they can be sure that you are doing as well as possible.

You can help your teachers by trying to make sure that you always produce neat work.

I thoroughly enjoyed talking with you about your work and watching you learn. I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Mr M Capper Lead inspector