

Downton CofE VA Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126475
Local Authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	315567
Inspection date	16 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	235
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Greg Yevko
Headteacher	Matthew Judd
Date of previous school inspection	13 January 2003
School address	Gravel Close Downton Salisbury SP5 3LZ
Telephone number	01725 510556
Fax number	01725 512335

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: current achievement and standards, teaching and learning, pupils' personal development and well-being, personal support and academic guidance, elements of the curriculum and aspects of leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation form (SEF), assessment and tracking records, observations of the school at work, discussions with staff, the chair of the governing body and pupils. The parental questionnaire responses were analysed. Other aspects of the school 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 the report.

Description of the school

This is an average sized rural primary school, which is popular and oversubscribed. Children's attainment on entering the Reception class is typical for that of 4-year-olds. The school population is predominantly White British. Since January 2007, an acting headteacher has been leading the school. A permanent headteacher has been appointed, starting from January 2008.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Downton is a good school with several outstanding features. Within a Christian ethos that permeates all aspects of school life, pupils are valued and cherished as individuals. Consequently, they flourish and are keen to do well. The overwhelming majority of parents are supportive of the school. One parental comment is typical of many, 'I am very pleased with all aspects of the school. The children are always encouraged to do their best.'

Pupils of all abilities achieve well because of the good quality of teaching throughout the school. Children get off to a good start in the Reception class because their individual needs are met well and so they make good progress. This progress is built on successfully through the rest of the school, with academic skills and creative talents being effectively nurtured. Because of this, by the end of Year 6 pupils achieve standards that are well above average in English, mathematics and science. Progress in Years 3 to 6 is particularly strong, as pupils become increasingly adept at using their prior knowledge and understanding to develop their current learning. A relative weakness in English is the achievement of pupils in writing in Years 1 and 2. Though standards are above average, they are not as high as in reading. This stems from pupils not having sufficient opportunities to practise and improve their skills in writing in a wide enough range of contexts, for example, by expressing their ideas by writing in subjects other than English.

Pupils also reach high standards in other subjects, such as information and communication technology (ICT), geography, music and art. This results from a good curriculum that is creatively planned to maximise pupils' performance. It is organised flexibly to include ability sets, mixed ability classes or small groups, depending on the demands of the subject. The enrichment experiences provided for pupils are excellent and make a very positive contribution to pupils' learning and personal development. The school is increasingly making use of first hand experiences for learning. There are frequent visitors to school and pupils go on many visits, including residential stays, to extend their horizons. Pupils spoke with enthusiasm, for example, about their activities during trips to the New Forest. The curriculum is planned well to develop pupils' understanding of the beliefs and traditions of the wide range of cultures found in modern day society. This plays an important role in their personal development as pupils live in an area of little ethnic diversity. There is a very wide range of after school clubs, with strong emphasis on sporting activity to promote pupils' health and fitness. Parents are very appreciative of the way staff give their time to run these clubs.

The acting headteacher provides strong leadership with a clear drive for school improvement. His vision is shared by the senior management team and all involved in the work of the school. This is evident in the very strong team ethos shown throughout the school. This has played an important part in ensuring the maintenance of high standards in a period of transition. A few parents expressed concerns about the lack of a permanent headteacher adversely affecting their children's progress. The school has worked hard to ensure this has not happened and pupils' progress has remained good. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and enabled it to identify the correct areas for priority development. This is seen in the way it has targeted improvement in writing in Years 1 and 2. The governors play an active role in supporting school improvement, which has been good since the last inspection. Given the school's recent track record, the capacity for further improvement is also good.

Pupils behave in an exemplary way, being polite and considerate to others. They enjoy coming to school, which is reflected in the high attendance rate. As one pupil commented, 'We really like this school because everyone is so friendly and we all get on well with each other.' They willingly take on responsibility, such as being a member of the school council or a prefect, and make a very positive contribution to the school community. They also contribute very well to the life of the wider village community, such as by taking an active role in church events. Pupils show an excellent understanding of healthy eating and the need for regular exercise. This is reflected in the very high take-up of sporting clubs. They talked confidently about how to stay safe and they act responsibly in and around school. Their high level of skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT show they are very well prepared for their future lives.

Teachers increasingly involve pupils in assessing how well they are doing. They plan lessons well to give pupils time to reflect and discuss how well they have done and what they could do next to improve. Teaching assistants support all pupils well, especially those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils collaborate well in pairs and small groups, showing very positive attitudes to their learning. There are thorough procedures for checking the progress that pupils make. However, the information gained is not always used well enough in Years 1 and 2 to improve pupils' writing skills.

Parents greatly appreciate the way the school looks after and cares for their children. One comment summed up the views of many, 'This is a really nice school with very helpful and caring staff.' Safeguarding procedures are very thorough, including rigorous risk assessments within and around school and also for off-site visits. There are very good links with outside agencies to provide extra support for individual pupils when needed.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children make good progress. This is because there are good procedures for introducing children into Reception and this helps them quickly settle into everyday school routines. Staff tailor activities very successfully to meet individual needs. These activities are practical, stimulating and effectively capture the children's interest. Children are encouraged to make choices for themselves, which helps them develop as independent learners. They achieve well and by the time they enter Year 1 are exceeding the levels expected of them in all areas of learning. The school is currently reviewing the development of the outdoor area to better develop children's creative talents. Children enjoy their time in Reception, playing and working happily on their own or with others.

What the school should do to improve further

- Provide a wider range of opportunities for pupils in Years 1 and 2 to practise and improve their skills in writing.

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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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ 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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	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

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

¹ 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

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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

17 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downton CofE VA Primary School, Downton, SP5 3LZ

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school. I really enjoyed meeting you and seeing the things you do. All the pupils I spoke to were very enthusiastic about your school, as were your parents. I would like to tell you I consider your school to be good with some outstanding features. It helps you to achieve well and attain standards by the end of Year 6 that are well above average in English, mathematics and science. You also reach good standards in other subjects, such information and communication technology and music.

Teachers are keen for you to do well and give you interesting activities that make you think hard. In Years 1 and 2, the standards you reach in reading are better than those in writing. This is because you are not given a wide enough variety of activities to let you practise and improve your skills in writing.

You behave excellently and are growing into extremely mature and responsible young people. You really enjoy your work and are getting better at deciding what you need to do next to improve it. The curriculum gives you many exciting experiences to extend your learning. These include the many out of school clubs you can join and the wide range of visits and visitors you experience. You told me you especially enjoy the trips to the New Forest and the many sports in which you can take part.

All adults take very good care of you and ensure you are safe while in school. You told me that if you have any worries or concerns, you can talk to an adult and are confident you would be listened to. The people in charge of the school are working hard to make it even better. A special word of thanks to the members of the school council who gave up their time to talk to me. The school is right to be proud of you.

What I have asked your school to do now:

- Provide pupils in Years 1 and 2 with a wider variety of carefully planned activities to help improve their writing skills.

I hope you keep being kind and friendly to everyone you meet.

Best wishes

Melvyn Hemmings Lead inspector

17 October 2007

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Melvyn Hemmings
Lead inspector