

# Downs Barn School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	110372
<b>Local Authority</b>	Milton Keynes
<b>Inspection number</b>	325139
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 June 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	John Earish

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Infant
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–7
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	135
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Amy Bright
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Bryan Schram
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	10 May 2006
<b>Date of previous funded early education inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>Date of previous childcare inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	69 Downs Barns Boulevard Milton Keynes MK14 7NA
<b>Telephone number</b>	01908 604430
<b>Fax number</b>	01908 231359

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<b>Age group</b>	3–7
<b>Inspection dates</b>	3–4 June 2009
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

## Description of the school

This small infant school serves a culturally diverse area of Milton Keynes. Just over half of the pupils are from minority ethnic groups. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, most of which relate to moderate learning difficulties, is broadly similar to that found nationally. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is high. The school was reorganized from first to infant in 2006 and has been fully federated with a nearby junior school since the start of the year. It has achieved the Artsmark, Healthy Schools Award and the Activemark. The school has provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Nursery and a Reception class. The governors manage a breakfast and after-school club for those attending the school.

## 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 a satisfactory and improving school. It has a number of strengths, mostly relating to pupils' personal development and care, which are of good quality. The overwhelming majority of parents believe it is a caring and friendly school where each child is valued and made to feel special. One parent, representing the views of many, said, 'My daughter goes to school happy and full of enthusiasm. Just as important, she comes home happy and excited to tell me about her day. She loves painting and playing outside and always has a new song to teach me.'

Very many pupils start school with very weak communication, language and literacy skills. They make good progress in their learning in the Nursery and Reception class and most of the children reach the levels expected for their age by the time they start in Year 1. Standards at the end of Year 2 have improved over recent years and are now broadly average. This is an improvement on the findings of the last inspection. Almost all pupils make the progress expected of them, so that achievement is satisfactory. Pupils who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and those who are at the earliest stages of learning English, are making good progress against their targets because they are well provided for. The school makes use of a good range of external partners to support the pupils' learning.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Although the amount of good teaching is increasing, it is still not enough to ensure that pupils achieve well. In the better lessons, planning meets the needs of all groups of pupils effectively and progress is good. In other lessons, work is not as well matched to pupils' individual needs and progress is not as rapid. This results in some uneven progress, particularly at Key Stage 1.

Pupils are well cared for and feel safe. They are knowledgeable about how to stay safe and healthy. Good new systems to track pupils' performance allow teachers to identify underachievement quickly and to deal with it. Pupils are well guided and supported in their learning, and are increasingly aware of what they must do to improve their work. A programme to help pupils discuss their emotions in the learning and achievement base has helped to create the school's calm and orderly atmosphere and their good behaviour.

The curriculum is satisfactory. Subjects are being linked together thematically to make the work interesting and relevant. The school recognises that still more needs to be done. Pupils' personal skills are promoted well and they have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles and staying safe. However, there are weaknesses. Teachers do not always plan well enough to ensure that higher-attaining pupils have sufficient opportunities to explore their own ideas through open-ended activities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The most important areas for improvement have been accurately identified and appropriate actions are being taken to tackle the issues. The school has rightly recognised the need to increase the influence of subject coordinators on the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Currently, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning mean that some pupils do not always learn as well as they should. School self-evaluation, now undertaken by staff at all levels, results in actions that are beginning to improve achievement levels. The school's good track record of raising standards since the last inspection, and its success at including all learners and dismantling their barriers to learning, mean that there is a good capacity for further improvement.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

### Grade: 2

Provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good because its leadership and management are strong. One parent, representing the views of others, wrote, 'The teachers and assistants are excellent, approachable and friendly staff who really care for the children. We are very happy that our son is at the school and he has really learnt a lot this year.' Children behave well and develop positive relationships because they are well supported to meet their teachers' high expectations of them.

Most children join the school with skills and abilities that are well below those expected for their age group. They make good progress throughout the Nursery and Reception classes because teaching and learning are of a consistently good quality. Achievement is good and most children reach the levels expected for their age by the time they start in Year 1. This is better than at the time of the last report. Staff diligently observe and record children's achievements and use these well to plan the next steps in learning. This is a key factor underpinning the children's good progress.

Children enter the Nursery from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. An effective system for 'home visits' ensures that all staff gain a clear understanding of their social, personal, emotional and academic needs before they start school. Consequently, the children settle quickly. The curriculum provides a good balance between those activities led by an adult and those initiated by the children themselves, including effective use of the outdoor area. Adults are particularly skilful at modelling correct language and helping children to develop and increase their new knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Purposeful indoor and outdoor play is well thought out and ensures that children learn effectively. Children really enjoy these activities because adults encourage them to be active and creative learners, even from a young age, as well as supporting them well to make their own independent choices. Adults help children to stay safe, are very aware of their individual difficulties or emotional needs, and support them well. Healthy lifestyles are encouraged, and fruit snacks and water are freely available. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is consistently good because teachers have a clear understanding of how young children learn. New ideas and concepts are explained well and the children achieve well. As a consequence, children make a confident and positive start to their education.

### What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the quality of teaching from satisfactory to good by ensuring that work matches pupils' individual needs more closely, and by increasing the opportunities for higher attainers to explore their own ideas through open-ended activities.
- Increase the influence of subject leaders on the quality of teaching and learning to ensure that pupils' progress is consistently good.

A small proportion of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

## **Achievement and standards**

### **Grade: 3**

Standards are broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics and achievement is satisfactory. The majority of pupils make expected progress from their starting points in Year 1. The most recent national tests show that in writing, compared with reading and mathematics, a much higher proportion of pupils reached or exceeded the expected levels. This represents good progress since the last inspection, particularly in writing, where standards were too low and targets were insufficiently challenging. Pupils of minority ethnic heritage make progress in line with their peers because their achievement is carefully monitored so that additional support can be put in place where it is needed. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are making good progress from their starting points and achieving well. This, too, is an improvement on the findings of the last report. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress because of the good-quality help and support they receive both in and out of the classroom.

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

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and the school operates as a harmonious community. Pupils enjoy school, are keen to learn and behave well. They concentrate for good periods of time and show good attitudes to their learning. Attendance is satisfactory and improving because of the school's very rigorous monitoring of attendance and punctuality. This, too, has improved since the last inspection. Pupils know how to keep safe, and say there is very little bullying and, when it occurs, it is always dealt with quickly by the adults. They make good, healthy choices of food and look forward to sporting and creative activities. This is recognised through the award of the Artsmark, Healthy School Status and Activemark. Pupils show a good awareness of personal safety and the well-being of others. This is clearly seen at break-time when they play freely while at the same time showing great consideration for one another. Pupils make useful contributions to the day-to-day running of the school by undertaking responsible jobs sensibly, and also show a responsibility towards the wider community. For instance, pupils raise money for charities such as Children in Need and the Salvation Army Food Bank. The breakfast and after-school clubs offer a good start and end to the day and make a marked contribution to the improving levels of attendance and the pupils' enthusiasm for school. Improvements in pupils' progress and their ability to work together cooperatively mean that they leave the school as confident individuals and satisfactorily prepared for future life and learning.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 3**

In Key Stage 1, there are inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning. In better lessons, the purpose of the activities is carefully explained and the adults move from group to group, clarifying pupils' ideas and moving them on to harder work where necessary. A good range of strategies are used to engage and motivate pupils. This helps them to make good progress in their lessons. However, on too many other occasions, work is not as closely matched to pupils' individual needs, especially for higher-attaining pupils. This is because teachers do

not make consistent and sufficient use of the assessment information they have to plan suitably challenging work. This slows pupils' progress, especially for pupils of higher ability.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 3**

The curriculum is satisfactory and meets requirements. Links are being made between subjects to make learning more interesting and purposeful, drawing on pupils' different skills and engaging them more in their own learning. However, the school recognises that more remains to be done. Opportunities for the creative arts have been increased. This has been recognised through the award of the Artsmark. Despite these strengths, planning is not yet consistently rigorous enough in providing challenge for pupils, particularly the higher attainers, to explore their own ideas through open-ended activities. This results in some uneven progress. There are good opportunities for personal, social and health education and this makes a positive contribution to pupils' personal development. The school has a good range of extra-curricular activities run in conjunction with the successful and well-run after-school club. This enhances pupils' education and adds much to their enjoyment of learning.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The vast majority of parents feel that the care, guidance and support their children receive is an important and effective feature of the school. A close check is kept on pupils' well-being and they are taught how to take care of themselves and how to make healthy and safe choices. Health and safety procedures are effective and are reviewed regularly. Child protection procedures are rigorous and there are good systems to support any children who are particularly vulnerable. The school is successfully increasing the use of target setting to accelerate pupils' progress. This is because the school's systems for tracking the pupils' progress have been improved and teachers are becoming more skilful at setting realistic but challenging targets for individuals to achieve. However, it is not yet sufficiently embedded in all classes to ensure consistently good progress. The school works well with parents, volunteers and a variety of external agencies to support all children, including those most at risk. These pupils play a full and active part in school life.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 3**

The headteacher provides good leadership, which builds on people's strengths and creates a culture where teamwork is strong. He is developing closer links with the federated junior school by sharing staff expertise to ensure the transition between the two schools is seamless. Adults are good at promoting equality and eliminating discrimination so that pupils from different backgrounds live and thrive alongside each other. Partnerships to promote pupils' well-being remain strong and effective.

Senior managers are using challenging targets well to raise standards and achievement. This is based upon accurate and detailed self-evaluation of all that the school does. Although subject leaders are making an impact on improving children's learning, they are not yet as effective at influencing the quality of teaching and learning across the school to ensure consistently good or better progress in all classes. Community cohesion is of satisfactory quality. The school has

increased its engagement with the wider community through, for example, running courses for parents so they can help their children learn at home. However, the school has yet to evaluate the impact of its actions on the immediate community beyond the school itself or fully exploit its international links. Governance is satisfactory. The newly formed governing body, which is shared with the federated junior school, are becoming much more involved in strategic management and are developing new ways of effectively holding the two schools to account for their work. They manage the breakfast club and after-school club well.

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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?	3
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

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

### Achievement and standards

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

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
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	3

## The quality of provision

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

## 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 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 eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
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

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

17 June 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downs Barn School, Milton Keynes, MK14 7NA

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed talking to you and your views and opinions have given me a lot of helpful information. I thought you might like to know more about what I found out.

Your school is giving you a satisfactory education, and I could see that it is getting better. Here are a few of the things I liked most of all.

- Your headteacher and the teachers are all working well together to make your school even better than it is.
- You listen carefully to what your teachers say and you behave well.
- Your work is improving and you are making much better progress in classes.
- The school council represents your views well and you all help the school to run smoothly.
- All of the adults in your school make sure that you are well looked after and are helping you to improve your work.

There are three things to do next to make your school even better.

- I saw a number of good lessons and am asking your teachers to try to make all of your lessons good or better by making sure that everyone in the class has work that is not too easy or too hard for them.
- I am also asking your teachers to give you even more opportunities to learn independently and to explore your own ideas.
- I would also like your subject leaders to have more opportunities to check on how well you are learning. This will help them to make your work even better than it is.

You can all help by continuing to work hard and by listening carefully to your teachers' advice. I am sure that you are ready for this challenge!

Yours faithfully

John Earish

Lead Inspector