

Downham Feoffees Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110799
Local Authority	Cambridgeshire
Inspection number	325223
Inspection dates	7–8 October 2008
Reporting inspector	John Paull

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.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	196
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	30
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs A Hodges
Headteacher	Mrs S Burry
Date of previous school inspection	8 November 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Main Street Little Downham Ely Cambridgeshire CB6 2ST
Telephone number	01353 699325
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Downham Feoffees is a little smaller than most other schools of its type. It has full-time Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision in a Reception class for four to five year olds. Most young children join this class with broadly average skills and knowledge. Pupils mainly live nearby, although some come from widespread farming communities. The proportion with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. The proportion entitled to free school meals is lower than average. Nearly all pupils are from White British backgrounds, although a few are drawn from a wide range of minority ethnic groups. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language.

The school holds an Active Mark award and is working towards Healthy Schools accreditation. It has also received recognition under the Reading Connect scheme. There is a privately run playgroup on the school site.

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 for its pupils, and it has some good features. Since the last inspection, satisfactory leadership and governance have put several procedures into place to secure improvement. However, staff changes in some key positions have at times slowed down the effects of this otherwise good work, so the capacity to improve has remained satisfactory. While better systems for assessing pupils' standards and for tracking their progress are evident, the use of these systems is occasionally inconsistent, because not everyone is equally practised in their use. Nevertheless, leaders and managers have successfully maintained aspects that were good, and have added positively to the work the school does with the local community. The overall provision in the EYFS is good, but outdoor facilities are limited.

Pupils' personal development and well-being is good and recent strong improvements in what is taught in science have further increased pupils' knowledge of what is good for the human body. They act on this learning, with a good take up of the sporting activities that are provided for them. They also make good attempts to eat a healthy diet. Furthermore, the staff actively seek out opportunities for pupils to involve themselves in challenges that help to bring the local community together, such as a local mathematics competition, several local sporting events and the Pingle Wood committee, a group that promotes conservation locally. All of this enhances a good curriculum. Within school, pupils contribute well to managing day-to-day routines, carrying out jobs in their classrooms and around the school. Older pupils also act as playleaders, known as buddies, to support younger ones. An effective school council provides all classes with the opportunity to raise issues that might concern them.

Procedures for the care and support of pupils are good. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and monitoring their well-being are in place and effective. Parents' comments in questionnaires indicate that nearly all of them are confident that this is the case and that the staff are friendly and approachable.

By the time pupils leave the school in Year 6, standards are average and achievements are satisfactory, although in 2006, pupils achieved well and results in English, mathematics and science were above average. Recently, indications are that the performance in science has not been as good as in the other tested subjects. A focus on the teaching of this subject has already been introduced to remedy the situation. Early indications are that this is starting to have a positive effect. Year 2 assessments in reading, writing and mathematics indicate that standards have recently begun to rise to above average, especially in reading and writing. Senior leaders, working with all staff, are active in seeking ways to guard against discrimination or barriers that might prevent pupils from learning. Telling examples are the willingness with which teaching assistants try out ideas that they acquire from training and how teachers give extra time to boost pupils' performances. The main outcome is seen in the often good progress made by those pupils who, for whatever reason, find learning harder than others.

Teaching overall is satisfactory. Teaching is consistently good in the EYFS and in Years 1 and 2. This is undoubtedly what lies behind pupils' good recent performance in these age groups. However, the picture is not as consistent as pupils move on. While teaching in the older age groups is never less than satisfactory, it varies in quality, leading to uneven and therefore sometimes slower progress of pupils in Years 3 to 6. A key factor in this is that teaching does not consistently make pupils' targets clear enough for them, so they do not fully understand what they are aiming to do.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Children thrive in the Reception class. Good leadership and management ensure that planning is already beginning to take account of the new EYFS requirements. Good partnerships with the on-site 'Busy Fingers' playgroup and with parents has meant that children joining the Reception class are well prepared for what they will find. Procedures to keep children safe are managed effectively. Teachers and other adults take great care to help the children settle and, even at this early stage of the year, it is clear that they feel comfortable and are ready and willing to learn. The quality of teaching is good, so progress gets off to a rapid start. Records indicate that children achieve well, although starting points vary considerably within year groups and sometimes from year to year. The accommodation is somewhat restricted by a lack of space in the fenced outdoor area. Adults ameliorate this difficulty as much as they can with careful planning. The lack of cover prevents its use during inclement conditions. Child initiated activity is also restricted when, for example, teaching outside is focused on numeracy or literacy, as space does not then permit the use of rolling toys. Appropriate plans have been drawn up to rectify this matter.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that teaching consistently maximises rates of progress for pupils in all age groups.
- Make sure that pupils' targets are used equally effectively in all classes.
- Provide cover and enlarge the exterior space available to children in the EYFS, as soon as funding permits.

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

By the time pupils leave in Year 6, standards are average. Taking pupils' starting points into account, their achievement is satisfactory. The main reason that it is not better is unevenness in rates of progress through the school. Progress is good up to the end of Year 2. It is then less steady through the older age groups, but never less than satisfactory. Based on pupils' work in their books, it is, however, consistently good again in Year 6. This pattern reflects the results of national tests and assessments. These indicate above average standards in Year 2, while results in Year 6 are average. Nevertheless, pupils often read well, with good expression, which reflects their interest in reading fostered through 'Reading Connect' and 'Accelerated Reading' system. Those pupils who find learning difficult for identified reasons make good progress through the school and often achieve well in relation to their starting points. Provision for them is well managed. Effective links with agencies are sought, so pupils with emotional difficulties or other barriers to learning receive the support that they need quickly and effectively.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils are often excited about practical work, know right from wrong and behave well and safely around the building. They

work and play well together and respect each other's ideas and backgrounds and, for example, have enjoyed learning about churches, mosques and countries and cultures different from their own. Pupils show good awareness of healthy lifestyles and are motivated to eat well and keep active. When asked, pupils say that they thoroughly enjoy being at school, which reflects the results of the school's Children's Questionnaire and their parents' views. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with the national average. Appropriate systems are in place to promote good attendance and patterns of absence are checked. Nevertheless, the figures are not as high as senior leaders would like and part of the reason is that a few parents take their children on holiday during term time.

Older pupils are supportive of younger ones in the playground and are sensitive to their needs. The playground buddy system works well and children are responsible and conscientious about the role. Children make good contributions to the community within school and to the wider community too. For example, they take part in village events and have also sung in Ely Cathedral. An active school council is effective in giving pupils a voice in school improvement. Pupils are satisfactorily developing skills that will help them prepare for the future.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is characterised by good relationships between staff and pupils. Several teachers adopt a bright, lively approach, helping pupils to behave well and to carry out the work expected of them conscientiously. However, the quality of teaching is not consistent across all classes. At its best, the teaching ensures that pupils know their targets and they are frequently reminded of the steps that are needed to achieve them. In these classes, pupils invariably make progress at a good rate. However, in lessons in the school's middle years, use of targets is not as frequent, so pupils are not as clear about the focus of their learning and progress is slower. Marking of work also displays inconsistencies. While positive comments are used regularly and marking is conscientiously up to date, it does not always tell pupils how they can improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school is developing its curriculum well to emphasise the acquisition of new skills. In science, for example, a greater emphasis is now apparent on skills related to environmental work and experiments, which pupils enjoy a lot. The recent introduction of French is broadening horizons beyond the language itself into ideas about the French way of life. Lessons promoting good personal and social attitudes, as well as how to live healthily and safely are also provided effectively. National Curriculum subjects are enhanced with a very good range of enrichment activities, including regular weeks that are devoted to, for example, art or history themes. These capture pupils' imagination effectively. Educational visits, visitors and residential trips in Years 4, 5 and 6 also add much enjoyment to learning in many subjects. Furthermore, pupils are enthused by an exciting range of out of school clubs and activities, such as gardening, football and dance. Currently, subject leaders are looking at ways to strengthen links between the content of different subjects, so pupils will understand better how to apply their skills in different contexts.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

All the staff take the welfare of pupils very seriously and are committed to promoting their health and building their self esteem. Statutory requirements to keep pupils safe are properly in place. Systems and procedures to keep bullying and racism in check are communicated well to pupils, who know what to do if they experience a problem. A school council gives them a useful platform for raising matters that concern them. They are confident that their ideas matter to the staff and will be acted upon whenever possible. The progress of all groups of learners is conscientiously monitored. In a minority of classes, pupils are not as clear about the focus of their learning and progress because their targets are not used frequently enough.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leaders, managers and governors take their responsibilities seriously to create a safe and attractive learning environment. They successfully manage resources, so pupils develop well at a personal level and achieve satisfactorily academically, thus ensuring satisfactory value for money. Senior staff and subject leaders monitor the school's provision carefully and accurately, and introduce changes accordingly. This approach has not produced a consistently good rate of progress in all years through the school. Nevertheless, what the school provides has clearly improved in recent years and the capacity to make further improvement based on, for example, checks on pupils' progress is satisfactory. Leaders also put great effort into ensuring that pupils in any difficulty are supported. Some exciting initiatives are also taking place, which have a positive impact on helping to bind the local community together, including improving the environment. The school manages community links well and is an important part of the local community. The values of tolerance and understanding of all others feature well in its work.

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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	3

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 ¹ 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

¹Grade 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

How good are 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	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

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	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	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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**

9 October 2008

Dear Children

Inspection of Downham Feoffees Primary School, Little Downham, CB6 2ST

Thank you for being so helpful when Mrs Robinson and I inspected your school. We thoroughly enjoyed spending our time with you, coming to your lessons and hearing about all the different activities that you do. We found that your work is progressing satisfactorily, although the rate varies at times. Even so, the standard of your work matches that of most children nationally. We were very pleased to hear so many of you say that you like your school and that the adults look after you well and listen to your ideas. I particularly enjoyed my discussions with school councillors during lunchtimes. Your involvement with Pingle Wood is something very special.

Here are some more things that are good:

- You behave well in lessons and around the buildings.
- Children in the Reception class learn in a good environment and do well in their work.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and midday supervisors care for you well and this helps you to feel safe.
- You know a lot about how to keep fit and healthy, and you act well on this knowledge.
- Day visits, opportunities to learn by going away from home together and French lessons all help to make what is taught more interesting for you.
- Your reading is often good.

Here are three things that we have asked your headteacher, teachers and governors to do next:

- Help you to achieve better by making sure that you learn at a good rate each year.
- Provide more outside space and cover for children in the Reception class, so they can learn out there more often.
- In some classes, to use your targets more often to help you learn. You can help with this by always trying to remember them.

Mrs Robinson and I hope that you will always be as proud of your school in the future as much as you told us that you are now. We wish you every success.

Yours sincerely

John W. Paull

Lead inspector