

Downs Park School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114685
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	326054
Inspection date	28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Farrell

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	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	87
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
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Phil Herring
Headteacher	Gill Golding
Date of previous school inspection	6 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Foredown Road Portslade Brighton BN41 2FU
Telephone number	01273 417448
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Age group	4–16
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Downs Park School educates pupils with complex learning needs who have moderate learning difficulties, and children with autism, and manages an 'Autism Spectrum Condition Support Service' for the local authority. It provides an 'outreach' service for pupils with complex needs taught in local mainstream schools. Since the previous inspection, pupil numbers have reduced from 120 to 87 and are expected to continue to fall. The school educates an increasing number of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The great majority of the pupils are White British. A small number of pupils have child protection plans and a small minority of pupils are in the care of the local authority. Numbers of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are sometimes very small and such children are taught with pupils from Key Stage 1. The few children in the Early Years Foundation Stage do not always stay at Downs Park when they are older but may move to other schools.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Downs Park School offers satisfactory provision. Many parents appreciate what the school offers, although nearly a quarter of respondents to the Ofsted questionnaire expressed negative views. Downs Park School maintains an effective partnership with other schools and services, including providing a successful 'outreach' service to other schools. Although in its previous inspection, all aspects were good, by 2007 to 2008, during long-term staff absences including some senior staff, the school's development slowed and pupils' progress was inadequate. Since September 2008, the situation has improved. The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. Leaders and managers are committed to maintaining stability and making further progress. Governors provide satisfactory support and challenge but the school has previously not always provided them with entirely reliable data on pupils' progress. This too is improving. Staff continue to work as a team and are committed to doing better. Overall, effective steps have been taken to bring about improvements and the school has a satisfactory capacity to make the further improvements now necessary. The school recognises the importance of ensuring the robustness of plans to minimise the negative impact of any further staff absences on pupils' progress.

The Early Years Foundation Stage offers good provision because staff are very focused and are successful in ensuring children make strong progress and develop very well. Across all other key stages, however, progress is satisfactory rather than good. Pupils' progress is adequate in English, mathematics and science, and good in some subjects such as physical education and music. Students aged 14 to 16 years progress better than other age phases, although progress still remains within a satisfactory range. Students achieve a satisfactory range of examination results. Satisfactory teaching and learning lead to students making adequate progress. Strengths include good relationships and good behaviour. Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together and provide good personal support for pupils and students. However, the pace of lessons is not always brisk enough and assessment information including in English and mathematics is not always fully used to ensure pupils are as academically stretched as they should be.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is strong in certain areas, for example physical education. It is flexibly meeting the learning requirements of different groups of pupils. Activities outside school enhance provision and include educational visits to places of interest. However, the curriculum is not always focused enough on practical activities and those with real-life applications. Pupils make good progress in personal development because they are well supported pastorally. The school has clear systems for helping ensure pupils' safety and as a result of good care pupils feel safe. Pupils know about healthy eating and exercise because the school promotes these well. Attendance is satisfactory, being in line with the national average, but improving. Pupils say they enjoy school and try hard in their work because they have confidence in staff. Especially through the school council, pupils make a good contribution to community life. Their economic well-being is satisfactorily supported by strong links with outside agencies and satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy. Academic support is satisfactory. The school is making up lost ground from a period when assessments were not as secure as they should be. Assessment is improving and is now used satisfactorily but not all pupils are sufficiently aware of what they have to do to improve their work and this limits the progress they make.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Good provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage successfully promotes good progress. Activities are varied, engaging and well planned so that children participate well. Careful assessments are made of what a child can do and activities are developed in response. Through observing children carefully and adapting activities, staff ensure the children are stimulated and happy. Children learn and develop well because they are fully integrated into the group, which includes older pupils. Children's welfare is well promoted because the setting is secure and welcoming and they are encouraged to play safely. Behaviour is good because staff interact with children well and are sensitively responsive to any changing moods. The attractive, self-contained outside play area is used well and enjoyed. The provision has a calm, orderly atmosphere. It is well led and staff work effectively together as a team, continuously striving to do their best for the children.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve teaching and learning, especially in English and mathematics, ensuring work is more challenging and that assessment information is used to the full to improve progress.
- Develop activities in the curriculum which are more practical and related to real life.
- Work with the local authority to implement robust plans to minimise the impact of any staff absences.

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 the next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

The attainment of pupils is exceptionally low because of their learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall. After the previous inspection, good progress was maintained for a time but by 2007 to 2008, mainly as a result of staff absences, it was inadequate. Since September 2008, progress has improved and is now satisfactory with pupils progressing towards individual targets that are appropriately challenging. In English and mathematics, pupils make adequate progress overall, although some do better than this. In some other subjects, for example music and physical education, progress is good. Progress for students aged 14 to 16, while still satisfactory overall, is stronger than that in other key stages because students are motivated to achieve examinations. They obtain a range of nationally recognised qualifications including Entry Level certificates. There are no significant unexplained differences in the progress of different groups. For example, pupils with autistic spectrum disorder make similar progress to other pupils in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The good personal development and well-being of pupils are typified by their good behaviour in lessons and elsewhere, their enjoyment of many lessons, and their feelings of safety in school. There are very few incidents of bullying and where they do occur, they are handled well by staff. Consequently, pupils feel safe in the school. Pupils know about healthy eating and living and act accordingly, for example participating enthusiastically in physical activities. Spiritual,

moral, social and cultural development is good and pupils benefit from experiencing music from different parts of the world. Pupils value the school council and take an active part in raising funds for various charities. Attendance is satisfactory, being consistent with the national average. Rates are improving because the school makes considerable efforts to tackle absences. The school works hard to develop links with others that benefit pupils' economic well-being. The impact of satisfactory progress in literacy and numeracy restricts progress in this area, making it satisfactory overall.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Satisfactory teaching and learning are reflected in pupils' satisfactory progress. Lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to good. The school's observations indicate good teaching and learning but these judgements do not always take enough account of pupils' progress and are overgenerous. Among the common strengths of teaching and learning are good relationships among pupils and between staff and pupils. Pupils behave well and try hard at the tasks they are given because of these relationships. Staff work well together as a team and teaching assistants have clear roles in lessons, providing effective support. Good behaviour is encouraged effectively and pupils respond well to praise. In less effective lessons, the pace is not always brisk enough, activities are not always as practical and relevant as they could be, and assessment information is not always fully used to ensure activities are precisely pitched to provide maximum challenge to pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum, which meets statutory requirements, is diverse and promotes good personal development. There are purposeful opportunities for creative development, for example, in art, music and drama. The school is making considerable efforts to build flexibility in the curriculum as the types of disabilities and disorders of pupils coming into the school change and this is developing satisfactorily. The curriculum is enhanced through many varied educational visits to local places of interest. All older students have the opportunity to obtain a recognised qualification and this is being further expanded. However, the activities that form the curriculum are not always as practical and as related to real life as they should be and this limits teaching quality and slows progress.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support, whilst satisfactory overall has notable strengths in its care aspects. These support the good progress pupils make in their personal development. The school has established systems in place to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils, enabling pupils to approach staff to express any concerns they have. The school complies with requirements such as checking staff backgrounds to help keep pupils safe. Behaviour is well supported. The school liaises effectively with outside agencies such as the health services to support personal development and well-being. The academic guidance aspects are not as effective as those of care, but they are nevertheless satisfactory. Because of the period of weak assessment and data gathering between 2007 and 2008, the school is only recently effectively using targets

for pupils to gain the fullest impact. Pupils are not always aware of targets for learning and how they can make improvements and this has negative effects on their progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory as the school asserts. The school's clear sense of direction has recently suffered from long-term absences among senior staff but is now recovered to satisfactory. After a period when assessments became insecure, the school is now producing better data and beginning to use the information more effectively. School targets are set for improvement through a suitable performance management system for staff. The school's self-evaluation is satisfactory. The school's assessment of itself matches inspectors' judgements in some areas but is too generous in others, for example with regard to pupils' progress and teaching learning. Equal opportunities are satisfactorily promoted. Community cohesion is adequate and is satisfactorily supported and evaluated. It is not as strong in terms of pupils' awareness of global issues as it is in school and local aspects but is still satisfactory. Resources are suitably deployed, for example teaching assistants are effective in their role. The outreach service has developed well and is valued by other schools. The governing body takes its duties seriously, provides satisfactory support and challenge to the school and is keen to do better.

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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?	3
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	4
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	3

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?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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	3
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

30 April 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downs Park School, Brighton, BN41 2FU

Thank you for being so helpful to my colleague and me when we inspected your school. We enjoyed talking with you and hearing what you thought about the school.

We found that Downs Park gives you a satisfactory education. Across the school, you behave well and enjoy what is provided. Downs Park is satisfactorily led, and the teaching, curriculum, and the care and support you receive are all satisfactory. You are being successfully helped to grow into sensible young people. Your personal development is good.

There are several things the school can do better. I have asked the staff to: make sure you are more highly challenged to do even better in lessons; make the curriculum more practical and related to real life; and make sure there are careful plans if any staff are absent for long periods.

I hope you will support this by continuing to try hard and work even harder.

Thank you again and every good wish for your future.

Yours faithfully

Lead inspector