

The Downs Primary School and Nursery

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	115016
Local Authority	Essex
Inspection number	326111
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2009
Reporting inspector	Nichola Perry

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	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	210
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	Mr Geoff Penketh
Headteacher	Mr David Yeld
Date of previous school inspection	1 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	The Hides Harlow Essex CM20 3RB

Age group	3–11
Inspection dates	10–11 February 2009
Inspection number	326111

Telephone number

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Age group 3–11

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The Downs Primary School and Nursery is of average size and is situated in the centre of Harlow Town. The headteacher has been in post for one year. Most pupils come from White British families. The proportion from minority ethnic backgrounds, although increasing, remains below average. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language and, of these, a few are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of pupils who find learning difficult is below average, although a number of pupils experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, or speech and language difficulties.

An above average number of pupils leave or join the school at different times, mostly between Years 3 and 6. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average. The Early Years Foundation Stage operates mainly as two separate classes. Most children's knowledge and understanding on entry is well below that expected for three-year-olds, particularly in language development and personal and social development. The school is accredited with the Basic Skills Quality Mark and ECO Silver award. Links have been established with a local after school club to extend the care offered to pupils. The school is twinned with a similar school in a neighbouring county and links have been established with schools in China and Israel.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Downs Primary School and Nursery is a satisfactory school with strengths in the personal development of pupils and in the care, guidance and support it provides. It is a popular school and is held in high regard by its pupils and their parents. There is a strong sense of the school community working together and good relationships are a strength throughout the school.

Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils achieve well up to the end of Year 2, and standards are broadly average. The school is recovering from a period where pupils' progress, particularly in Years 3 to 6, has been uneven, leading to some underachievement. Gaps in pupils' prior learning have impeded achievement. Improved strategies are leading to pupils making expected progress and the unvalidated results in the national tests for Year 6 in 2008 were broadly average. There are now sound procedures to track pupils' progress, which teachers increasingly use to ensure planning focuses clearly on raising standards. However, targets set for individuals and year groups are not sufficiently challenging to ensure that this recent accelerated progress and rise in standards are sustainable.

Teaching is satisfactory, with an increasing proportion that is good. While this is contributing to improved achievement for all pupils, it has yet to have a sustained impact on progress and standards in Key Stage 2. Close monitoring by the headteacher and some senior staff has brought about improvements in teaching. However, this does not involve all subject leaders checking teaching quality and is not systematic enough to ensure long term improvement.

Behaviour is good overall. The very challenging behaviour of a few pupils has been successfully managed. The curriculum is good and provides better development of basic skills, particularly in writing and mathematics, across different subjects and greater focus on practical learning, which pupils love. The curriculum is enriched well by good use of the local and wider environment and many visitors to the school.

Fostering pupils' self-confidence and independence are a school strength, so that pupils' personal development is good. Attendance is broadly average. Pupils enjoy school and say they feel safe and well cared for. They show good understanding of how to lead healthy lifestyles and how to stay safe. Pupils are well supported, know their individual learning targets and receive helpful information about their progress in key subjects. This is helping them to develop a dialogue with their teachers and to understand what they are aiming for and how to achieve their goals. They enjoy being involved in assessing their own learning.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. Committed and enthusiastic staff have willingly taken on new leadership roles and are working well with the headteacher and assistant headteacher. Together with governors and staff, they are developing a more accurate picture of how well the school is performing, although this aspect of their role is underdeveloped. Cohesion between both the local and wider communities is promoted well so that pupils' understanding of different lifestyles and cultures, for example, in Israel or the Republic of China, is developing well. The school provides satisfactory value for money and recent improvements show that the school is adequately placed to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Provision and leadership are satisfactory overall and an adequate start has been made on implementing the new Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. Good relationships are

established with children and their families, which help children settle quickly. Parents are happy with the start their children make. Overall, behaviour is good and children enjoy school. While routines are mostly secure, this is not always the case in the Reception class and valuable learning time is lost. Strategies to improve this aspect are still too new to show any positive effect.

The satisfactory curriculum covers all areas of learning, and the learning environment is stimulating and appropriately resourced. The recently constructed outside roof is helping to improve the balance between the inside and outdoor curriculum; the outdoor activities are greatly enjoyed by the children. Increased opportunities are provided for children to make choices in activities and other aspects of their learning, which contribute well to their good progress in personal and social development. Children are taught basic skills, such as letter sounds, reading and handwriting. They make satisfactory, and sometimes good progress. Standards vary from year to year but overall are below average, particularly in communication, language and personal development, by the time they enter Year 1. Staff know children well and take suitable account of their interests when planning work. Good provision in the Nursery class helps children get a good start from a low base, particularly in their ability to communicate and in their personal and social awareness. Teaching and the curriculum in the Nursery are effective in helping children make rapid progress in developing basic skills and especially their self-confidence and independence.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the proportion of good teaching so that it is consistent across all year groups and the irregular performance across the school is minimised.
- Set pupils more challenging targets which are geared to promoting faster progress.
- Develop the role of the senior leadership team by involving them in a systematic programme of monitoring and evaluating standards and provision in their subjects.

A small proportion of the 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

From below average standards at the end of Reception, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 2 and attainment has been broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. A significant dip in the 2008 mathematics standards is being successfully reversed this year. Inspection evidence and school assessments indicate average standards in all subjects by Year 2.

The pace of learning slowed in Years 3 to 6 in recent years, leading to erratic standards and some underachievement. The school has worked hard to rectify this and the 2008 provisional national test results indicate a significant rise to broadly average attainment in all subjects. Inspection evidence and school data show current Years 5 and 6 pupils are making expected progress from their starting points, due to improved teaching and higher expectations of what they can learn.

Those who find learning difficult achieve satisfactorily and reach their individual targets. Great care is taken to ensure that increasing numbers of pupils with English as an additional language soon learn sufficient English to make similar progress to others. Pupils joining the school at times other than usual are soon settled and achieve satisfactorily.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils are friendly and polite to each other and to adults. Behaviour is good and the small amount of poor behaviour is dealt with quickly. Older pupils eagerly embrace responsibility, such as being school council members, house captains, prefects and playground buddies. Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay healthy through diet and exercise and take part in a wide range of sporting activities. Pupils are supportive of each other and work well together. There is a strong sense of community within the school. Pupils say they feel safe and are aware of the need for internet safety. Rare incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy the natural beauty of their sensory gardens and the school grounds. They develop good knowledge of their own and other cultures through assemblies and the curriculum. They are aware of the wider global community through the curriculum, various local and national fund-raising activities and developing links with schools in the wider world. Improving standards in key academic skills, combined with good personal skills, mean pupils are adequately prepared for the next stage of their education and later life. Attendance has improved in the past year from below average, due to the efforts of the school, and is now average.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, because teachers do not always set their sights high enough on what pupils need to do to increase their rate of progress. Current teaching shows good practice emerging; there is a better focus on learning through more practical activities, a closer match to pupils' widely varying needs and preferences and greater emphasis on more flexible learning styles. Pupils enjoy more active engagement in learning and increased opportunities to make choices. Technology is used adequately to support learning. Classrooms are suitably equipped with interactive whiteboards and pupils have regular access to computers. Assessment is satisfactory. Pupils like assessing their own and others' work and welcome discussing what has gone well and how to improve their work. Behaviour management is mostly consistent. However, the pace of learning in some lessons slows when class management and expectations are not high enough, resulting in some pupils not being good listeners to their teachers or each other.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school has worked hard on developing an interesting and more practical curriculum so that it matches the needs of pupils more closely. Teachers link learning in different subjects to make lessons more interesting and relevant. This, and new strategies in literacy and numeracy, are having a positive impact on pupils' learning. Pupils say they enjoy this new style of learning. There are good opportunities to develop sporting and other skills through physical education lessons and the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided. Links with local primary and secondary schools are good and provide benefits for pupils in sport and the performing arts. The good range of visits out of school and visitors to the school support learning effectively. Year 6 pupils particularly enjoy the challenges they experience on their residential visit. The

accommodation and grounds are of good quality and are used effectively to support learning and pupils' wider needs.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils are happy and develop confidence well due to good levels of pastoral care and support. They feel confident that staff will deal with any incidents or problems quickly and successfully. Robust procedures ensure the safety of pupils. At the time of the inspection the requirements for safeguarding pupils were met and child protection procedures complied with requirements. Pupils needing particular help with learning, behaviour or medical problems are well supported by teaching assistants. Good links exist with outside agencies to help vulnerable pupils and their families. Procedures for checking pupils' progress are adequate and used to identify underachievement early. Guidance for pupils has positive aspects. Pupils know their targets and are involved in discussions about their progress and what should be improved. Teachers' marking is often good and helps inform pupils how to improve their work, but this is not consistent across the school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. The headteacher has made a good start in setting an agenda for improvement. He has identified inconsistent progress across the school and re-organised his senior leadership team to tackle this. The newly formed team are clear about the urgent need to improve the quality of teaching and learning further in order to raise standards. The new structure better supports self-evaluation as subject leaders begin to reflect critically on the impact of their work. However, this element of their work is not well developed. While there is already clear evidence of actions leading to improvements, it is too soon for their contribution to be seen in consistently higher standards. Community cohesion is well addressed locally and in the wider world. Supportive governors, ably led by the chair of governors, have an effective working relationship with the headteacher. Although they challenge the school this is not sufficiently rigorous. Day to day management is effective and the school operates smoothly. Finance is monitored carefully.

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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?	3
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3
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?	3
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3

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	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?	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	3
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**

12 February 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Downs Primary School and Nursery, Harlow, CM20 3RB

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school recently. Particular thanks go to members of the school council who gave up some of their lunchtime to talk to us. I would like to thank you all for helping us find out about your school. What you had to say was very helpful to us. We enjoyed meeting you and your teachers and watching you work in lessons. We saw how you contribute to making the school an enjoyable place to be.

The school provides you with a satisfactory standard of education. The way the school is helping you to develop personally and socially is good. You obviously enjoy school, especially the practical activities, and you all get on really well. Most of you have positive attitudes to your learning and behave well, although a few of you still call out instead of putting your hand up to answer a question. It was good to hear that your headteacher would sort out any problems and that you feel confident to go to an adult if you have a problem. I agree with you that your teachers are 'kind and friendly and help you learn'. Your teachers do work hard on your behalf. They want the best for you and are trying to make things even better. You have all been working much harder recently and because of this you are making satisfactory progress, although standards still need to be higher. I was so impressed in the Year 4 lesson when you chose the more grown up 'connective' when your teacher gave you the choice. I was very sad to miss your 'Red Nose Day' assembly, but I heard that you ran it very well and all your teachers were very proud of your performance.

I am asking the staff and governors to do three things to help improve the school and ensure that you make the best possible progress.

- Make sure that the teaching gets even better in all classes and keep checking on how good it is.
- Make sure that your learning targets help you to make faster progress.
- Provide some more training for staff to help them know when things are working well or not.

Good luck and best wishes

Nichola Perry

Lead inspector