

The Downs Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118684
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	326868
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Gavin Jones

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	394
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	Jack Roberts
Headteacher	Catherine Karunaratna
Date of previous school inspection	8 March 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Owen Square Walmer Deal CT14 7TL
Telephone number	01304 372486

Age group	4–11
Inspection dates	30 June –1 July 2009
Inspection number	326868

Fax number

01304 380471

Age group	4-11
Inspection dates	30 June -1 July 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school in an urban setting. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is broadly average with some variations between year groups. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational needs is below average. The number of pupils from minority ethnic groups has increased since the last inspection and is now broadly average but few have any difficulties in communicating in English. The school makes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in its Reception class. Attainment on entry to this class has declined over recent years.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Downs is a good school. It is an effective one, taking pupils who enter with skills below the levels expected for their age and ensuring they achieve well by reaching above average standards by the time they leave. This is in spite of some year groups having higher than average levels of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and with some tailback to weaknesses in children's language and literacy skills on entry to school. The progress pupils make is due, in no small measure, to overall good teaching, which is especially good in the classes for the oldest pupils. 'Teachers are in tune with the needs of children,' said one parent expressing the thoughts of many. Teachers plan and deliver their work carefully. They ensure that there are challenges for the full range of abilities in their classes. Their questioning skills are good and their relationships with their pupils are often excellent. However, although teaching is good, there are some weaknesses, for example in the quality of teaching science and mathematics in some classes. This is particularly the case where specific vocabulary is not regularly learned and understood. There is insufficient monitoring of learning as opposed to teaching to highlight these small differences and so support individual teachers more effectively. Overall, progress is satisfactory in Years 1 and 2 compared with good progress in Years 3 to 6. The good curriculum helps pupils' progress by linking subjects together in meaningful topics and making them attractive to both boys and girls.

The school has created a happy balance between academic rigour and the personal development of its pupils. Their good personal development stems from the school's strong ethos and pastoral care. This is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage and accounts for children's excellent progress in their personal development. Pupils enjoy school, behave well and lead very healthy lifestyles. Even so, a minority of parents still take their children out of school for holidays in term time, making attendance 'only' average. Pupils are engaged very well in the school and local community. They are equally well involved in fundraising for children overseas. In spite of this, a minor weakness is that there are no firm links established with other schools in the United Kingdom, so that pupils can understand cultural and ethnic differences and similarities. Good literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, together with excellent opportunities to participate in enterprise activities, prepare pupils exceptionally well for the next stage of education and give them an understanding of the world of work and business. While the tracking of pupils' progress is good, marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. At best, it helps pupils understand how they might improve. However, in too many instances, it does not identify the next steps pupils need to take; neither does it always clarify the targets set for pupils in relation to the levels seen in the National Curriculum.

The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher and the leadership team. Their work in driving the school forward is based on good self-evaluation. Complex staffing issues have been dealt with and good support has been given to subject leaders in order that they might play their part effectively in school development. Governors are fully involved in all aspects of the school's provision and have a very clear and accurate view of strengths and weaknesses, through a range of monitoring activities. This information enables them to support and challenge the school on a wide range of issues. The school has good capacity to continue to improve.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Skills on entry to the Reception class are lower than those expected for this age group. Recently, these levels have fallen. A significant proportion of children arrive with poorly developed communication and language skills, which hold back their learning. At the same time, children's personal and social skills are weak. Staff work closely with parents and outside agencies to ensure that children's individual needs are met, checking their progress regularly. Children make good progress across the range of areas of learning and reach average levels as they enter Year 1. Best progress is seen in aspects of their mathematical and physical development. Because children are exceptionally well cared for, their progress in personal and social development is outstanding. Children behave well, play sensibly with each other and contribute very well to the running of the classroom. The curriculum reflects the national guidance and provides a suitable balance between activities led by adults and those chosen by children. Leadership of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Planning is detailed and makes excellent use of observations made by the teaching team. The outside area is well used, in spite of equipment having to be cleared and then reinstated every day. The school recognises the need to make stronger links with local nurseries, in order to make the induction process and gathering of pre-school information more effective.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate language which is used in specific subjects, such as science and mathematics, in order to improve standards and pupils' achievement.
- Ensure that marking more consistently promotes pupils' understanding of how well they are doing and helps pupils to appreciate the next steps in their learning through clear targets set for them.
- Improve attendance by working with parents to limit the number of extended holidays taken in term time which impact negatively on children's learning.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are above average by the end of Year 6 and pupils make good progress, achieving well. The most significant gains are made in Year 6. By Year 1, pupils are ready to start work in the National Curriculum. They make satisfactory progress in Years 1 and 2 in writing, but because of a focus on reading, results here are more positive, especially for more able pupils. In 2008, standards at Year 6 were broadly in line with national averages in English, slightly higher in mathematics and lower in science. However, the latest unvalidated results for 2009 strongly suggest further improvements have been made, with pupils achieving well and standards likely to be above those of the previous year and above national averages. Standards in ICT are good and pupils use their skills well in a range of subjects. Because of good support, vulnerable pupils including those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress and in Year 6 many reach the nationally expected levels in English, mathematics and science.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy school because learning opportunities are exciting and interesting. In spite of this and the wide range of rewards put in place by the school, attendance is only average. The

school's main concern is the small minority of parents who take their children on extended holidays during school time. Behaviour in class and outdoors is good and makes a significant contribution to learning. Pupils were keen to say they feel safe in school. Many parents comment on the good behaviour. Pupils have a good understanding of right and wrong, supported by aspects of the personal, social and health curriculum. They gain a good understanding of Christian values and show respect for other cultures and beliefs. They make a very good contribution to the school and local community and have a good understanding of global issues through their topic work and fund-raising activities. They have an outstanding understanding of healthy practices and know full well what constitutes a safe and healthy lifestyle. Pupils are happy to take responsibility for younger school mates and feel able to share concerns they have with adults. Pupils are well prepared for transition to secondary school. They gain, through the opportunities given to them to take part in enterprise initiatives, an excellent understanding of workplace skills which will contribute well to their future. Many were seen preparing presentations for products that they had researched, costed, produced and marketed.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Overall, teaching is good. Lessons are characterised by teachers setting clear expectations of behaviour. Relationships are good and support good behaviour. Routines are well established so that little time is wasted between activities. Teachers vary activities so that pupils can learn from each other through discussion as well as from the teacher. Activities are well tailored to the needs of all ability groups, with teaching assistants deployed well, mainly to support pupils needing individual help or groups of slower learners. Lessons have good pace, and resources, such as the interactive whiteboard are used well to motivate pupils and focus their attention on the work in hand. However, the quality of marking is inconsistent. It does not always focus on how pupils can improve and what their next steps in learning might be. At the same time, in some subjects, such as science, not enough emphasis is placed on pupils knowing and understanding technical vocabulary, in order that they might remember terms and use them later in their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school's good curriculum is broad and balanced, meets all statutory requirements and helps promote good progress as it is now becoming more imaginatively planned. As a result, pupils enjoy a wide range of enriching experiences. Recent changes, trialled by the school, provide teachers with more opportunities to present a more interesting and engaging curriculum, supporting links between subjects in the form of topics which support opportunities to improve both literacy and numeracy skills. During the inspection, the whole school was involved in enterprise activities, with older pupils making excellent use of their ICT skills, giving strong support to their business and economic awareness. Other changes in the curriculum have recently supported improvements in the teaching of science, with resulting higher standards at Year 6. The comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) results in pupils understanding what constitutes healthy living. Opportunities for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are good and ensure they make good progress. Visits and visitors enhance learning by providing pupils with valuable first-hand experiences. Pupils

talk excitedly about a wide range of school clubs. The residential visit to France provides many pupils with their first experience of foreign travel.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Staff pay outstanding attention to the pastoral care of pupils. All aspects of this care are good, while some are excellent, such as the way the school trains pupils to mediate in playground arguments and the support the school gives to vulnerable parents. 'Downs provides a safe, nurturing environment for children,' said one parent. Safeguarding and child protection procedures are robust and transition arrangements to secondary school are given due priority and are good. The school works hard with parents in an effort to reduce absenteeism, although this is not always successful. Pupils from minority ethnic groups and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are very well integrated into the school and as a result make the same good progress as their classmates. Outside agencies, such as the locally based programme for vulnerable pupils, are used very well to support the school's work. Provision, through the curriculum and other initiatives, to support pupils' understanding of health issues and citizenship is very effective. Academic guidance is satisfactory. While pupils know their targets, they do not have sufficient awareness of the levels at which they are working, which constrains their capacity to take greater responsibility for their own progress. Inconsistent marking does not always indicate the next steps pupils should take in order to improve their work.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher shows consistently good and very effective leadership and management of the school. She is very ably supported by her senior leadership team. Their combined vision for improvement is very clear and due, in no small part, to the good quality programme of monitoring and self-evaluation in place. Through this, senior leaders gather sufficient good information with which to make judgements and plan future developments. The success of this is illustrated by recent work on improving both reading and science to good effect. As a result, the school has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have improved in direct response to the quality of teaching and learning. However, detailed tracking of pupils' progress highlights that progress is uneven between Year 1 and Year 6. While the monitoring of teaching confirms quality, it does not focus enough on outcomes, and on occasions learning is not as successful as a focus on teaching might suggest. Teachers with oversight of areas of the curriculum fulfil their roles well. The school is an outstandingly cohesive community where links with the locality are extremely well developed. Pupils take part in a wide range of local initiatives, alongside other schools and by themselves. At the same time, they make good use of local amenities and places of interest to support their school work. The school already has good links with places in the wider world, through which pupils gain an understanding of life beyond their country. They raise money for children in these countries. However, links with other schools nationally, through which pupils can understand differences in cultures, backgrounds and lifestyles, are not well developed. The school has forged good links with other local schools to support pupils' progress. It offers equal opportunities to all of its pupils, including those who are more vulnerable, and no child is ever excluded from visits due to lack of finance. The governing body receives good quality information from the school, together with that which it gains from its own programme of monitoring visits. Governors take a full part in decision making with

confidence. They have successfully supported improvements to the building and resources, both of which have had a positive effect on pupils and adults alike.

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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 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?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	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/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	1
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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of 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

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 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	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

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

2 July 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Downs Church of England Primary School, Deal, Kent CT14 7TL

Thank you for your help when we visited your school for its recent inspection. You are proud of your school and listening to your views was very helpful. Yours is a good school, helping you to make good progress in your learning and reach standards which are higher than in many other schools.

- Here are some of the highlights we noted on our visit:
- The progress children make from Reception to the end of Year 6 is good.
- The welfare of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding, as is the progress those children make in their personal development.
- Your understanding of healthy lifestyles and the skills you develop for the next stage of your education and beyond are excellent.
- Teaching and the curriculum are both good.
- The care shown by all adults is good with some of it being outstanding.
- The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors lead the school very effectively.
- The school now needs to:
- Help you to understand and remember special words that you come across in subjects such as science and mathematics.
- Ensure that when teachers mark your work you know how to improve and have a better understanding of what your targets mean.
- Tell your parents how important it is that you don't take holidays in term time as it disrupts your learning.

I know that you will all do your best to keep up the good levels of work now seen in the school and continue to work and play well together.

Thank you again for a very interesting visit to your school.

Best wishes for the future

Yours faithfully

Gavin Jones

Lead inspector