

Downsbrook Middle School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	125894
Local Authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	328417
Inspection dates	25–26 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Anthony Shield

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

Type of school	Middle deemed primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	8–12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	455
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Iloyd Thompsett
Headteacher	Johnathan Grover
Date of previous school inspection	20 September 2005
School address	Dominion Road Worthing BN14 8GD
Telephone number	01903 230467
Fax number	01903 215049

Age group	8–12
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This larger than average school serves an area of mixed housing in Worthing. While most pupils are from a White British background, there are small numbers of pupils from a wide range of other ethnic heritages. The proportion of pupils identified with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is above average. Most commonly, these are pupils with specific learning needs, such as dyslexia to behavioural, emotional and social problems. The school has received several external awards in recognition of its work in promoting healthy lifestyles, the arts and sports. The headteacher was appointed in April 2008. The school houses before and after school care which is privately run.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Downsbrook provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. It has some strengths, notably in pupils' personal development, their care, guidance and support, and the curriculum. In particular, the imaginatively planned curriculum is leading to increasing enjoyment and participation of pupils in their learning. The new headteacher has brought energy and a renewed sense of purpose. Raising academic standards is central to his vision. All staff have welcomed his commitment to teamwork and appreciate the opportunity to get involved and take greater responsibility themselves for school improvement. The school is realistic in its analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and has set a clear agenda for development. At the heart of this is raising expectations and offering greater consistency in the quality of teaching. Parents are very supportive and recognise the significant changes already made. Although a small number express concern about pupils' behaviour and the school's response to their concerns, these opinions are not shared by most parents. Inspectors judge behaviour to be good and the school is working successfully to improve its communication.

Standards are broadly average and, given their starting points in Year 4, this represents satisfactory achievement. Writing is a relative weakness and is a barrier to more rapid progress in a number of subjects. In addition, more able pupils are not all achieving their potential. Where the school has taken action, for example to improve reading, this has had an impact on pupils' skills and confidence. Standards are rising because teaching is improving. The atmosphere in lessons is always positive and pupils approach learning keen to do well. Activities are thoughtfully planned to interest and motivate the pupils. While high expectations characterise much of the teaching, this is not consistently the case. Similarly, while much teaching is planned carefully to stretch pupils of all abilities, that is not the case for all. Pupils do not always know how to improve their work. Ensuring more consistently good teaching is a key priority for the school.

Pupils are friendly and polite, greeting visitors with a warm smile. They enjoy school and good attitudes help them to make progress. Pupils confidently talk about their work and the older pupils, in particular, have a strong sense of responsibility and contribute to the running of the school in number of ways. Their good personal development is encouraged by the school's inclusive approach to their care and welfare. Pupils grow up confident in the trust of adults in the school, and feel safe in the knowledge that there is someone to talk to. Regular reviews of their academic progress ensure that pupils' progress is well monitored. The care offered to vulnerable pupils and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is particularly thoughtful and well managed. As a result of this care and attention to their personal learning needs, they make satisfactory progress.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. While the headteacher has set about establishing a new sense of purpose and put in place more streamlined management systems, there is more to be done before rigorous monitoring and effective self-evaluation is threaded through all aspects of the school's work. There have been significant recent staff changes and a number of new governors. As a result, their contribution to school improvement, while satisfactory, is still developing. The school has a satisfactory capacity to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve standards, particularly of the more able pupils and all pupils' skills in writing.
- Raise expectations and make better use of information on pupils' progress to set work which challenges every pupil to do their best and ensure they know how to improve their work.

- Build the capacity of all staff to monitor and lead developments within their areas of responsibility.

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

A sharp focus on improving provision and pupils' progress has lifted both expectations and achievement. However, there is still more to be done. On entry in Year 4, pupils' attainment varies but is usually around average or a little below. Pupils' attainment in reading and mathematics tends to be higher than writing. In 2008, Year 6 pupils reversed a decline in standards in English and mathematics, and school data indicate that pupils are likely to do even better in 2009. However, the percentage of pupils reaching higher levels is below average, and writing is a relative weakness throughout the school. Pupils continue to achieve satisfactorily through Year 7 and, by the time pupils leave Downsbrook, standards are broadly average. Pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities satisfactory progress because of well targeted support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good personal and social skills contribute much to the school's happy atmosphere. Pupils enjoy school and work hard to do their best. Attendance, however, is only satisfactory, because too many pupils are taken out of school for holidays during term time. They speak confidently about school and what they particularly enjoy. Older pupils especially have a maturity and a very sensible approach to helping out with the running of the school. This is carefully nurtured by providing opportunities to attend governors' meetings, to show prospective parents around the school and to act as prefects. The confident manner in which pupils carry out these and other responsibilities is a distinctive feature. Pupils know their voice will be listened to and taken seriously. They make a good contribution to the community, locally, nationally and internationally, and have an exceptional understanding of their responsibility as global citizens through links with a school in Kenya. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness is good. They have a good sense of equality and fairness and both embrace and practise healthy lifestyles. Given their skills at fundraising, running the school tuck shop, and organising and running their own clubs, pupils are developing good skills for their future life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Classrooms are well managed and interesting places in which pupils are encouraged to work hard. Good relationships characterise the learning, and mutual trust between teachers and pupils ensures a good learning atmosphere. Tasks are well chosen to interest pupils and, very often, learning is made more meaningful by providing a context and relevance to the activity. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used well to excite and engage pupils. Teachers encourage pupils to collaborate, and discussion amongst pupils and in the class is developed well through questioning. Teaching assistants provide sensitive and helpful support

to pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Planning is often geared to the wide range of individual needs, but this is not consistent. Additional challenge, for more able pupils in particular, is sometimes missing. While teachers encourage pupils through a consistent use of praise, marking and feedback during lessons do not always inform pupils how to improve their work.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The well designed curriculum has been a vital factor in improving pupils' attitudes to learning. However, more time is needed before these curricular innovations impact fully on pupils' achievements. The school has responded to pupils' needs for a more active and personal learning programme, and this has been key. The programme is adding considerably to pupils' skills development, including their personal and social development. The acquisition of basic skills, including ICT skills, are emphasised. Opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their writing across subjects other than English are given, but this is an area for further development. There is a good range of well supported enrichment and extra-curricular activities, and visits and visitors make an important contribution. Support for vulnerable pupils is sensitively and effectively managed. The school's commitment to the care and welfare of all pupils is evident in the high levels of trust between pupils and adults. Pupils are very well cared for, and all staff work hard to nurture a supportive culture. Safeguarding and child protection procedures fully meet requirements. Systems for supporting pupils' academic progress are effective. The progress of every pupil is carefully monitored to identify any that are not doing as well as they might. Termly meetings to discuss the progress of individual pupils are held and these are proving very helpful in identifying where intervention or extra support is needed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's commitment to the care and welfare of all pupils is evident in the high levels of trust between pupils and adults. Pupils are very well cared for, and all staff work hard to nurture a supportive culture. Safeguarding and child protection procedures fully meet requirements. Systems for supporting pupils' academic progress are effective. The progress of every pupil is carefully monitored to identify any that are not doing as well as they might. Termly meetings to discuss the progress of individual pupils are held and these are proving very helpful in identifying where intervention or extra support is needed.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher has done much to establish a renewed sense of purpose and to drive school improvement. Low expectations are being challenged and monitoring of lessons is leading to greater consistency in the quality of teaching. While realistic targets have been set, there is room for these to be even more challenging as the school improves. There is a clear commitment to involving all staff in moving the school forward, and they have welcomed the agenda for change with enthusiasm. The quality of the school's monitoring and self-evaluation is satisfactory, but subject leaders do not play a significant part in this aspect of the school's work. The school rightly recognises the scope for building the capacity of all staff in leading and managing developments in aspects of school improvement. Hard working governors are

also involved in training to better equip them with the skills and confidence to make an effective contribution to strategic planning and monitoring. The school has carefully considered its approach to community cohesion and through its close links with the community is making a satisfactory contribution. For example, the visit of Brighton and Hove Football Club, which provides opportunities for family learning, was eagerly anticipated during the inspection

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

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	2

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?	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**

27 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downsbrook Middle School, Worthing, BN14 8GD

- We very much enjoyed our visit to your school. Thank you for being so friendly and welcoming. Downsbrook is a satisfactory school and is getting better all the time. You speak confidently about your school and how much you enjoy coming. There are a number of particularly good points:
- Many of you make a good contribution to the smooth running of the school.
- You enjoy coming to school and are keen to do your best.
- Most of you behave politely and sensibly.
- Most of you make progress, because you try hard and the teachers plan interesting work for you to do.
- The school takes good care of you, ensuring you feel safe and well looked after.
- The headteacher and all the teachers are working successfully to make your school even better.

We have asked the teachers to do the following in order to make things even better:

- Make sure that those of you capable of succeeding at the highest level do so, and that you all make better progress in writing.
- Make sure you aim higher, that information on how well you are doing is used to plan work to make you think harder and that you are told how to make your work better.
- Help all teachers to check how well things are going in their areas of responsibility so that they can all contribute to making your school even better!

You can certainly help the teachers with these things. Thank you once again for your help during our visit, and good luck with your work in the future!

Yours faithfully

Tony Shield Lead Inspector