

Downside Lower School

Inspection report

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|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Unique Reference Number | 109589 |
| Local Authority | Central Bedfordshire |
| Inspection number | 337329 |
| Inspection dates | 2–3 February 2010 |
| Reporting inspector | Steven Hill |

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

| | |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Community |
| Age range of pupils | 4–9 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 108 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Debra Brock |
| Headteacher | Mrs Judy Day |
| Date of previous school inspection | 5 December 2006 |
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The majority of time was spent observing learning. Seven teachers were observed during 14 different lessons or parts of lessons. Meetings were held with staff, groups of pupils and governors. An inspector attended a staff meeting. Inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at a variety of documentation, particularly that related to safeguarding or pupils' standards and progress. Questionnaires were analysed from pupils, from staff and from 30 parents.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at:

- how well pupils make progress across the school in speaking and listening, and how well pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities achieve
- whether the strengths in pupils' personal development from the last inspection have been maintained
- whether governors are providing better support and challenge to the school.

Information about the school

This is a small school, located on a housing estate in Dunstable. Most of the pupils come from the immediate area. Almost 40% of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities, a very high proportion. These needs cover a wide range but the most common are moderate learning difficulties, or social and emotional problems. The very large majority of pupils are White British, with small numbers coming from a variety of other ethnic heritages. Almost all pupils speak English as a home language. The school recently received the Healthy Schools award.

Provision is made for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage in a Reception class. The school hosts a pre- and after-school club, which is managed independently of the governing body. This was inspected separately and is reported on elsewhere.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

2

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

The key to the school's success is the exceptionally thorough way in which each individual's social, emotional and academic needs are identified and catered for. This means that, despite extremely low levels of attainment when children start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, they make good progress throughout the school. The outstanding start they get in Reception gives them a very firm foundation for their future progress.

Attainment improves steadily as pupils get older and standards by the time pupils leave are broadly in line with expectations. Speaking and listening skills have improved since the last inspection because of better provision for this by the school. Attainment in writing is lower than in reading and mathematics. This is not because pupils make less progress in writing, but because their initial starting points in this aspect are much lower. Some good use is made of discussion and drama to help pupils' improve their writing, but this is not consistent. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties do well academically in the light of their starting points, because of how carefully provision is matched to their specific needs. Pupils with emotional or social problems settle happily into school and are fully included through the outstanding pastoral support provided. The help provided by skilled teaching assistants makes a considerable contribution to these pupils' good progress.

Pupils' personal development continues to be strong because of the outstanding care, support and guidance provided. Pupils enjoy school because they feel exceptionally safe and well cared for. They like their teachers and have confidence in staff to address any issues that arise. They behave well both in class and around the school, and this contributes well to their learning. They have a good understanding of healthy lifestyles, because these are promoted very well by the school, as was demonstrated by the Healthy Schools award received last year. Teachers make very good use of the school's thorough tracking systems to ensure that pupils get work that is closely matched to their needs. Classes are managed well so learning happens at a good pace. Teachers monitor pupils' progress carefully in lessons, so that no-one gets left behind. Targets are set for pupils in English and mathematics, but discussion revealed that some pupils are uncertain about these. Marking is inconsistent in the extent to which it gives pupils precise information about how to make their work better.

There is a good and improving curriculum, which pupils find increasingly exciting. The exceptional provision for pastoral care is based on the rigorous analysis of pupils' emotional and academic needs, and the sharing of this among all staff. This is supported by the exceptionally good use made of partnerships with other providers, medical services, colleagues in the local authority, and many others. The varied aspects of

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leadership and management are at least good, and support the positive outcomes for pupils. The high levels of teamwork, the common vision, the improvements made since the last inspection and the continuing good achievement of pupils show that the capacity for further improvement is good.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise standards in writing throughout the school by
 - making more use of pupils' improved speaking and listening skills to help them to sort out their ideas for writing, through discussion and drama
 - building on the enthusiasm generated by the more 'creative' curriculum to give pupils exciting and interesting writing tasks.
- Improve the quality of marking and individual target setting by
 - making sure all pupils are fully aware of their individual targets
 - linking the comments made in pupils' books more directly to their targets
 - giving pupils more precise information in marking about how they can improve their work, especially in writing.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

2

Pupils' good and improving progress is confirmed by the better results obtained in national assessments last year at the end of Year 2. Current pupils in Year 2 are on track to do even better, with higher standards already apparent in writing. The comparative data from the local authority shows that pupils in Year 4, although attaining broadly average standards, make better than average progress from Year 2 compared with pupils in other schools. Pupils' good progress, very positive attitudes to learning and their very good collaborative skills prepare them well for their future lives, in education and beyond.

Pupils' good personal development strongly supports their progress, particularly their positive attitudes to learning, and their very good relationships with staff and each other. Boys and girls of all backgrounds and abilities play and work together happily. Year 4 pupils worked together well in twos and threes during a gymnastics lesson, for example, when devising a sequence of balances and rolls. Pupils throw themselves enthusiastically into exercise, both in lessons and at play, and know this is good for them. They know about healthy eating, and enjoy the fruit that is provided. Pupils' outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exemplified by their care for each other and their concern for others less fortunate than themselves. The school council, as well as contributing significantly to improving the school for pupils, takes particular pride in helping younger children, and in the money raised in the past for charity. Pupils are very concerned at the moment to help victims of the Haitian earthquake. One said, 'It feels good helping other people.' And another that, 'You get good feelings inside.' Pupils show respect for different people and points of view. In class or assembly, pupils reflect sensibly about moral issues and offer their ideas

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thoughtfully.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning | 2 |
| Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹ | 3 |
| The quality of pupils' learning and their progress | 2 |
| The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils feel safe | 1 |
| Pupils' behaviour | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community | 2 |
| The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 |
| Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹ | 3 |
| The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |

How effective is the provision?

The teaching is effective because it is based on consistent expectations of hard work and good behaviour. Teachers prepare different work for different pupils, so that all are able to make good progress. Good use is made of the skilled support assistants, particularly in helping those who might otherwise struggle with their work. Teachers provide tasks that greatly engage pupils' interest, particularly in the many hands-on practical activities available. Some very good use is made of interactive whiteboards to clarify teachers' explanations or to make lessons more interesting and to keep up a good pace. Teachers also give good opportunities to pupils to use computers themselves, as was seen when Year 3 were greatly enthused by designing and printing out greetings cards using laptops. Some excellent use is made of paired discussion in class to involve all pupils, but at other times such opportunities are missed.

The curriculum's great strength is the way in which it is continually adapted to cater for pupils' individual social and academic needs. A well-established scheme for personal,

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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social and health education strongly supports pupils' excellent social and moral development. The use of a 'creative learning journey' during many afternoons is starting to make learning more meaningful and enjoyable. A good range of visitors and visits provides enrichment to the curriculum, and older pupils are currently enjoying music lessons taught by a visiting specialist. The school's long-standing emphasis on singing maintains high standards.

The outstanding care provided underpins both academic and personal development. For example, there is an extra class, Little Acorns, which runs on four mornings a week for half of the current Year 1 pupils. This provides excellent support for their emotional and social development, whilst enabling them to make good progress academically. A strong focus on promoting attendance resulted in a dramatic rise last year from very low levels previously.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| The quality of teaching | 2 |
| Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning | 2 |
| The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships | 2 |
| The effectiveness of care, guidance and support | 1 |

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher provides very good leadership to colleagues, and is greatly respected by staff, pupils and parents. Together with the senior teachers, she has been successful in embedding ambition and driving improvement, forming a team with a common approach to helping pupils thrive socially and academically. Monitoring of lessons provides clear feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice. Self-evaluation is good and is based on such monitoring and on the careful tracking of pupils' progress. The governors share fully in this process, have a much better understanding of the school's performance than at the last inspection, and so are able to support and challenge staff much more effectively.

The school makes outstanding provision to ensure equal opportunities, particularly for the many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, both for those with academic needs, and those with emotional or social problems. The sharing of information about individuals, as was observed in a full staff meeting about pupils with special needs, means that the full range of the staff's expertise and knowledge is brought to bear on devising programmes that ensure all pupils are fully involved in the school's work and make good progress.

Excellent links with a wide variety of partners have a very positive impact on the school's work. The school works very hard to involve parents in their children's learning, and has gained their trust and support, although some still find it difficult to be directly

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involved. It promotes community cohesion extremely well within the school and the neighbourhood, and is working increasingly effectively to extend this practice further afield, for example through links with schools overseas. Safeguarding procedures are good and the staff and governors devote considerable time and money to ensuring this is so. Keeping children safe has a very high priority and paperwork meets all requirements, although the anti-bullying policy is light on specific detail.

These are the grades for leadership and management

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement | 2 |
| Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers | 2 |
| The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being | 1 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination | 1 |
| The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion | 2 |
| The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money | 2 |

Early Years Foundation Stage

Excellent leadership and management from the senior teacher mean that the large number of adults deployed in the Reception class support children's excellent progress extremely well. By the end of the year, children's attainment remains below average in all areas of learning, but they are very much closer to reaching the expected standards than would be expected from their very weak skills when they started. Children are settled and happy in the class because they receive high levels of personal attention from adults who work as an effective team. They make particularly good progress in their personal, social and emotional development as a result. Children's learning is continually monitored and recorded by all staff, and these assessments are used to plan activities that meet individual needs particularly well. A very good balance is drawn between short sessions which are closely directed by adults, and opportunities for children to choose from a wide range of exciting activities that engage their interest and enthusiasm. The teaching of early literacy skills is given a high priority, exemplified by a short, sharp session on initial sounds when children joined in enthusiastically to make excellent progress. Despite this, even by the end of Reception, standards in writing

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remain very low. The provision is spacious both indoors and out, and both areas are used extremely effectively to support all areas of learning, despite a relatively small covered area outside. Staff are very skilled at intervening in children's play to enhance their thinking, speaking skills and vocabulary. For example, during a five-minute 'run around' outside, children were encouraged to run along coloured lines and to talk about what they were doing. Children thoroughly enjoy their time in the class, and are given a flying start to their education.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| Taking into account: | |
| Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |
| The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage | 1 |

Views of parents and carers

The vast majority of parents are very positive about the school and appreciate what it does for their children. They particularly praise the progress their children are making, and how much they enjoy school. A few parents had concerns about how poor behaviour is managed. The inspection team found behaviour to be good, and that pupils who struggled to conform are managed very effectively and sensitively by staff. Pupils confirmed that, although sometimes a few children misbehave, adults deal with this well, so that they always feel safe, and are able to learn in class.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Downside Lower School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 30 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 108 pupils registered at the school.

| Statements | Strongly Agree | | Agree | | Disagree | | Strongly disagree | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----|-------|----|----------|----|-------------------|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| My child enjoys school | 22 | 73 | 8 | 27 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school keeps my child safe | 19 | 63 | 10 | 33 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school informs me about my child's progress | 17 | 57 | 13 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| My child is making enough progress at this school | 18 | 60 | 8 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The teaching is good at this school | 20 | 67 | 8 | 27 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps me to support my child's learning | 17 | 57 | 8 | 27 | 2 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle | 15 | 50 | 14 | 47 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment) | 13 | 43 | 14 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| The school meets my child's particular needs | 17 | 57 | 11 | 37 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour | 19 | 63 | 6 | 20 | 5 | 17 | 0 | 0 |
| The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns | 11 | 53 | 13 | 43 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| The school is led and managed effectively | 22 | 73 | 7 | 23 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school | 18 | 60 | 12 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs. |
| Grade 2 | Good | These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well. |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory | These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves. |

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

| Type of school | Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools) | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------|--------------|------------|
| | Outstanding | Good | Satisfactory | Inadequate |
| Nursery schools | 39 | 58 | 3 | 0 |
| Primary schools | 13 | 50 | 33 | 4 |
| Secondary schools | 17 | 40 | 34 | 9 |
| Sixth forms | 18 | 43 | 37 | 2 |
| Special schools | 26 | 54 | 18 | 2 |
| Pupil referral units | 7 | 55 | 30 | 7 |
| All schools | 15 | 49 | 32 | 5 |

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Achievement: | the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training. |
| Attainment: | the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons. |
| Capacity to improve: | the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement. |
| Leadership and management: | the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school. |
| Learning: | how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners. |
| Overall effectiveness: | <p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support. |
| Progress: | the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started. |

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



4 February 2010

Dear pupils

Inspection of Downside Lower School, Bedfordshire, LU5 4AS

Thank you for all your help and your warm welcome when we visited your school. You were very polite, friendly and sensible, and we enjoyed talking to you and watching you working hard in lessons.

We found that Downside is a good school. You are making good progress because the teachers are good at helping you to learn, although you do better in maths and reading than in writing. You have lots of interesting things to do, especially in the lessons for a creative learning journey. You work very hard, although some of you don't know your targets very well. You are really good at singing, and I enjoyed listening to you in assembly. Your behaviour is good, and you all get on well together. We found that you were very thoughtful about others, and we hope that you are successful with your plans to help the people in Haiti.

The adults are good at looking after you and make sure that you are safe and happy in school. They keep a careful eye on how well everyone is doing, and make sure that if anyone needs any extra help, then they get it. Your headteacher, the governors and staff organise the school well, and are always keen to make it better. We have suggested two main things for them to work on to do this.

They are going to help you get better at writing, especially through more opportunities for you to take part in discussion and drama.

They are going to help you to remember your targets better, and to show you more clearly how you can reach them, when they mark your books.

You can help by concentrating on getting to your targets, and by working hard to improve your writing. We hope you carry on enjoying life at school.

Yours sincerely

Steven Hill

Lead inspector

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