

# Downham School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113645
<b>Local Authority</b>	Plymouth
<b>Inspection number</b>	338209
<b>Inspection dates</b>	2–3 December 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	James Bowden

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

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	71
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Ann McDonald
<b>Headteacher</b>	Michael Loveman
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	5 December 2006
<b>School address</b>	Horn Lane Plymstock Plymouth PL9 9BR
<b>Telephone number</b>	01752 403 214
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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 11 lessons, and held meetings with the chair of governors, senior leaders of the school and a group of older pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at a wide range of documentation about policies and procedures, including 33 parents' questionnaires.

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

- the progress and achievement of all pupils over the last three years in the key skills of communication, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT)
- how effectively ICT is used to support teaching and learning and the delivery of the curriculum
- the effectiveness of teaching in challenging all pupils in lessons
- the effectiveness of leadership and management at all levels in driving school improvement
- how well the school plans for the promotion of community cohesion.

## Information about the school

Downham provides for pupils with severe learning difficulties (SLD). A few have profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The number of pupils with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) displaying challenging behaviour, Downs Syndrome or more complex needs has been increasing over the last few years. The school takes pupils from the local authority, as well as from Devon and Cornwall. It also has a 'satellite' classroom for up to ten pupils in Years 3 to 6 at a local primary school. This provides these pupils with a combination of specialist teaching and resources and opportunities to be included with their peers in some mainstream classes.

There is also a residential facility, Downham House, a local authority resource for children and young people with SLD. Extended day provision, Monday to Wednesday, and residential respite provision for up to six boarders, Thursday to Sunday, is available through referral to the Children's Integrated Disabilities Service Resource Panel.

Downham House was inspected by a Care inspector in October 2009. The headteacher has overall responsibility for the residential provision.

The school is subject to reorganisation proposals as a result of the local authority's plan to relocate SLD provision to a pupils' campus and adult education.

Currently, there are approximately four boys for every three girls on roll. Almost all are of White British heritage. Four children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are undergoing assessment for a statement of special educational needs. All, bar one, of the others have a statement of special educational needs for SLD. Amongst the school's many awards are the Basic Skills Quality Mark, Sportsmark and the International Schools Award gained last year.

**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

Downham is a good school. It meets well its core aim of promoting the independence and development of every individual, seeing every activity throughout the day as an opportunity for communication and learning. There are some outstanding features, notably the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage. In addition, the school provides excellent quality care, guidance and support for pupils and works highly effectively with parents and carers and outside specialist agencies to support pupils' learning and well-being. Progress is good for all pupils, particularly in the key skills of communication, literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage make excellent progress, particularly in their communication skills, which ensures their readiness for learning.

The quality of teaching is good. This results in enjoyable learning where pupils respond by trying their best. Teachers track pupils' progress during lessons and over time effectively, which enables areas for improvement in learning to be identified. Teachers and teaching assistants work well together and know their pupils well. However, the quality of support from teaching assistants in lessons across the school varies. Teaching is particularly effective in the Early Years Foundation Stage. This is because the work is planned to meet fully their individual needs so that children are highly motivated and enabled to make sense of the world around them.

The good curriculum tailors activities well to pupils' needs and interests. These include enrichment activities during the day as well as a wide range of physical activities, including access to specialist provision and coaching provided at the local sports college. This has resulted in the school gaining Sportsmark status. Older pupils are now able to take a range of accredited courses, which develops their independence and supports their transition to life beyond the school. The curriculum supports aspects of pupils' moral, social and cultural development particularly effectively. However, though there is an emphasis on broader aspects of spiritual development, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn about and experience different faiths.

Downham ensures that every child really does matter. As a result, pupils thrive within its caring ethos, making excellent progress in aspects of their personal and social development. This underpins their positive attitudes to learning and supports the good progress they make overall, including good attendance. At the time of the inspection, the school's outstanding safeguarding procedures fully meet national guidelines.

Safeguarding has a particularly high profile in the school, with ongoing monitoring and evaluation of their effectiveness, including highly effective updates to reflect developing technologies. Governors and all staff have a clear understanding of the issues involved and receive regular training. This includes regular updates on child protection for all and

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excellent collaborative working with other key agencies.

The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy, has been successful in continuing the drive for improvement. The newly introduced team leaders have added breadth to the overall leadership and management of the school. However, the impact of these changes has yet to be fully realised. Although the monitoring and evaluation of teaching has been effective, that of the work of teaching assistants has been less so. The school has maintained good improvement in its performance since the last inspection. The governing body, now more stable in terms of personnel, is effective in its role as a critical and supportive friend of the school. Because of the school's track record of enabling children and pupils to make good progress, its accurate self-evaluation and the determination to provide the best possible provision for all in a safe and caring environment, there is good capacity to sustain further improvement.

**What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Sharpen the rigour of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching assistants in order to provide greater consistency of good practice across the school.
- Provide further opportunities for pupils to learn about and experience different faiths.

**Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils****2**

Pupils make good progress because they develop the confidence and motivation to want to become good learners. Pupils are keen to attend school and attitudes to learning are really positive. Lots of smiling faces and positive gestures throughout the day are indicative of pupils' enjoyment of their education. Pupils of all ages particularly enjoy the 'shake-up and wake-up' sessions lead by teachers. A fine example of this was the 'rock and roll' session for older pupils at the start of the morning, where all joined in with high levels of enthusiasm. In lessons, pupils respond well to challenging questions, supported, where appropriate, by aids such as symbols, signing, switches or other technologies such as interactive whiteboards. In a senior school science lesson, the latter was used particularly well to develop pupils' understanding of how bees can be helpful to humans. Good progress is made in lessons across the school. The school's effective use of data to track and monitor progress in relation to national strategies confirms this. Good progress in developing communication underpins the progress pupils make. By the time they leave, pupils are now enabled to gain accreditation in independence and life skills, which eases their transition to the next stage of their education. There is no evidence of any significant underachievement by any individuals or different groups of pupils.

Pupils report that they are safe at all times and that there is no bullying or unpleasantness. They are appreciative of the school bringing in a drama group to highlight 'stranger danger'. Pupils are enabled to understand and adopt healthy lifestyles, choosing healthy options for lunch. This is underpinned further by personal, social and health education lessons, tutor times and, where appropriate, a broad range

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of therapies. Behaviour overall is good. In many lessons during the inspection it was excellent. There are, however, instances where inappropriate behaviour occurs. These incidents are linked to frustrations in relation to pupils' special needs rather than intent to cause disruption, damage or hurt. Pupils are actively involved in the school and the local community. They appreciate being involved in the school council, the minutes of which are recorded in a way pupils can understand. They also develop an understanding of the needs of others by actively supporting charities. This recently included planning and running a soup kitchen in conjunction with the Salvation Army. The school's focus on enabling pupils to successfully develop independence and communication and decision-making skills has been recognised by the Basic Skills Quality Mark Award.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	*
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
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	2
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Lessons are well planned and informed by effective assessment of previous learning.

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

\* In some special schools inspectors do not make a judgement about attainment in relation to expectations of the pupils' age.

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Classes are managed very well. Any incidents of untoward behaviour are dealt with calmly and effectively, thus ensuring the learning of others is not disrupted. Teachers know their pupils very well, which, in the best lessons, enable them to plan interesting and varied activities for all. In an outstanding primary lesson, the teacher ensured pace and progression throughout, knowing intuitively when to move on to another activity. This kept pupils involved in learning and enabled them to make excellent progress towards the targets set for them. Teachers' use of praise and encouragement is highly effective because it is not over-effusive. Pupils respond well to this and try even harder. The curriculum is underpinned by a focus on using communication skills to enable access for all. The school's effective focus on developing pupils' cultural awareness has been recognised by the International Schools Award gained last year. Personal, social and health education lessons support further pupils' personal progress and well-being. Cross-curricular provision, including literacy, numeracy and ICT, is good. In addition, pupils' progress is supported by a range of enrichment activities which include an activity week, off-site residential opportunities, charity days and 'money' week. However, the impact of the new arrangements for accredited courses in Years 10 and 11 has yet to be fully established.

The school provides an outstanding caring and supportive environment for pupils. This is underpinned by a highly appropriate range of policies and procedures that are well understood by staff and implemented consistently. It is particularly effective in how it supports each individual, including the most vulnerable, in very specific ways. There are well-established procedures and induction arrangements for children starting at the school, and well-organised transition arrangements for those planning to move on to further education colleges. Pupils are involved in making their own choices, with the support of teachers. Procedures for maintaining good attendance and reducing absence work very well. Unauthorised absence is minimal and authorised absence is mainly as a result of pupils' medical needs.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

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

## How effective are leadership and management?

The school evaluates its work well, the outcomes of which are used effectively to inform its strategic improvement planning in order to drive up the quality of teaching, learning and pupils' achievements. The school ensures that all have equality of opportunity and achieve well. The governing body has improved its effectiveness in challenging and

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supporting the school in its drive for improvement and the developments in relation to the local authority's plans for moving the school to a new site. Regular feedback between the school and governors, including issues of safeguarding and child protection, keeps all fully informed. Partnerships with other schools are particularly strong, which supports the school's ethos of inclusion and tackling discrimination. Pupils are enabled to spend time in local primary and secondary mainstream schools and a group of Year 9 pupils visit Downham on a regular basis. Timetabled links have also been made in specialist subjects, such as physical education and design and technology, to support the learning of Downham pupils. The school works effectively to promote community cohesion within its own community and beyond, but planning to extend pupils' experience of different faiths lacks clarity.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

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

## **Early Years Foundation Stage**

Outcomes for children in this stage are outstanding. The school has adapted the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance particularly well to meet the complex needs of the children. An integral part of the school's practice is the continuous, detailed monitoring and assessment, including in-depth initial assessments. This informs the individual programmes created for each child. A major priority is enabling children to develop their communication skills so they are ready to learn. As a result, they make excellent progress in relation to their starting points. The classroom environment is excellent, with a wide range of resources which make learning as exciting and interesting as possible. They provide a highly effective focus on promoting independence, learning to express



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likes and dislikes, making choices and taking turns. In a lesson focusing on developing children's awareness of size, the teacher's questions challenged the children and enabled progress to be assessed highly effectively. Leadership and management are outstanding in ensuring high-quality education. Close collaboration with parents starts with a home visit before their child attends the school and continues throughout their time in this phase, including monthly drop-in sessions. This helps ensure that similar learning routines are followed at home as well as at school. Parents value highly the provision in Early Years Foundation Stage.

*These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage</b>	<b>1</b>
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**

Almost all who completed the Ofsted questionnaire are positive about the school and are happy with the quality of education it provides. This inspection confirms their views. In particular, they feel their child enjoys school and are appreciative of the fact that the school keeps their child safe. One, echoing the views of most parents and carers, stated that, 'Downham has a very caring and nurturing feeling about it. I couldn't choose a better school environment for my child who has complex needs.' A couple of parents or carers have individual concerns about a lack of extension work to do at home to support their child's learning needs. However, inspectors found the school does provide advice on how parents or carers can support their child's learning at home as part of their individual education plans.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Downham 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 33 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 71 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	29	88	4	12	0	0	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	28	85	5	15	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	27	82	6	18	0	0	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	24	73	8	24	1	3	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	28	85	5	15	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	23	70	9	27	1	3	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	20	61	13	39	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)	17	52	13	39	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	27	82	5	15	1	3	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	17	52	16	48	0	0	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	52	15	45	1	3	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	25	76	8	24	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	28	85	5	15	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"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
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.**



Dear Children and Pupils

Inspection of Downham School, Plymouth PL9 9BR

Not so long ago, two of us came to the school for two days to see how well you are getting on and whether we could suggest anything to make things better. We were really impressed by your friendly welcome and we thoroughly enjoyed meeting you in lessons and around the school, as well as joining some of you for lunch. My colleague also met with a small group of you to ask for your opinions of the education you receive. Some of you also completed a questionnaire for us. You made it clear to us that you enjoy school very much. Lots of smiling faces on arrival in the morning and your positive attitudes support this view. We were particularly impressed by the way you all joined in the singing at the end of school on Wednesday afternoon. We have decided that you go to a good school, where some things are really excellent. Here is a list of some of the things that are good about your school.

- You work hard and enjoy your lessons.
- You make good progress in your work, and excellent progress in your personal development.
- There are many interesting activities, both at school and elsewhere, which help you become independent, make choices, work together and help you learn about different people and cultures.
- All the adults make sure you are safe and really well cared for.
- In lessons, teachers and other adults give you all the help and support they can.
- Your headteacher and his senior teachers run the school well and have plans to make things better for you.

We think the school could improve more in two ways if:

- the senior teachers checked more carefully how well all the adults working in lessons help you
- there are more opportunities for you to learn about different faiths.

Best wishes to you all and good luck for the future.

Yours sincerely

James Bowden

Lead Inspector

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