

The Downley School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131908
Local Authority	Buckinghamshire
Inspection number	315887
Inspection date	9 October 2007
Reporting inspector	Christopher Parker

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	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	438
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Lynn Thompson
Headteacher	Mrs Rosemary Saunders
Date of previous school inspection	9 June 2003
School address	Faulkner Way Downley High Wycombe HP13 5AL
Telephone number	01494 527033
Fax number	01494 474485

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector. The inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated how the school maintains high standards and the pupils' achievement in writing, the impact of the use of information and communication technology throughout the curriculum and whether all groups of pupils enjoy lessons and feel safe. Evidence was gathered from the analysis of pupils' test results, scrutiny of samples of their work, observation of lessons, parents' questionnaires, discussions with the headteacher, senior management team, chair of governors and pupils. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but the inspector found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in this report.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average primary school. Very few pupils are entitled to free school meals. About a sixth of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, the largest groups being of Indian and Pakistani heritage. Approximately one pupil in twenty speaks a language other than English at home. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is much lower than the national average. However, there is a much higher proportion among the older pupils than in other year groups.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

When the school was last inspected it was noted that, 'the necessary steps to maintain high standards and seek further improvement are being taken'. The inspector set out to investigate if the school had successfully maintained its performance and, if so, how this had been achieved.

Over the last five years the results of national tests at the end of Year 2 have been significantly above average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils build on this strong platform, make excellent progress and reach standards that are almost always exceptionally high by the end of Year 6. The proportion of pupils who attain the highest level is often double the national average. This was the case in mathematics and science in 2006. However, in English, although the results were significantly above average they were not as high as expected. The school's response to this 'blip' illustrates very well the considerable commitment of the headteacher and staff to maintaining high standards and the outstanding leadership that seeks immediate improvement. A detailed analysis, undertaken by the school, showed that standards in reading remained very high but in writing they had slipped. Further analysis revealed that those pupils with learning difficulties did particularly well in the tests, as did those who were working at the expected level. The school concluded that some higher achieving pupils did not do as well as expected in writing.

The headteacher enlisted the expertise of a consultant. The teaching of writing was observed and pupils' work examined. It was quickly established that the most able pupils needed greater challenge. Training for teaching and support staff was undertaken to ensure that lessons are always demanding. During the inspection more able pupils were observed during lessons that challenged them to think and develop their ideas. For example, in Year 6 pupils were framing interview questions in preparation for writing a biography. In lessons, pupils are strongly encouraged, through very effective teaching, to discuss and explain their ideas. The teachers mark the pupils' work very carefully and make comments that pupils find useful but some good opportunities for them to respond and improve their work are missed. The school is rightly looking to refine the way that targets are set so that pupils have a greater involvement and a very clear understanding of exactly what they have to do to improve their next piece of work. As a result of the steps taken so far, writing standards have risen considerably. In the national tests in English in 2007, six out of ten pupils reached the highest level. High standards and rapid progress are evident in the pupils' work. Many interesting opportunities to write in subjects throughout the curriculum also make a strong contribution to high standards in English.

A significant factor in the school's success in maintaining high standards is the pupils' enjoyment of lessons. The pupils have very positive attitudes to learning. They listen carefully, respond to questions and contribute thoughtfully to discussions. The teachers make the lessons interesting. In Year 1, for example, the pupils visited the sensory room at the neighbouring special school. They excitedly responded to sights, sounds and objects to touch. This lesson provided an excellent stimulus for their writing. The pupils also greatly enjoy the use of interactive whiteboards and laptop computers in lessons.

Discussion with pupils reveals their enjoyment extends well beyond lessons and the wide range of subjects, including French, they are taught. They speak appreciatively of the many opportunities the extensive curriculum provides for them. Music and sport have a very high profile in the school. Two choirs represent the school. Last year one sang at the Royal Albert Hall. This year both will sing at the Wycombe Swan Theatre. Sporting opportunities are enhanced

through excellent community links. Both Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps run coaching sessions alongside many other sporting activities run by the school. The pupils know the importance of these activities to a healthy lifestyle.

Pupils behave extremely well. They say they feel very safe at school and that any incidents of poor behaviour, although very rare, are dealt with speedily. The school listens carefully to pupils' views through the school council and also carries out surveys to get a broader response. One such survey revealed that some pupils of Indian and Pakistani heritage were uncertain about who to turn to if they had a problem. Discussion groups were set up for these pupils to establish how these uncertainties could be overcome. Conversations during the inspection, including with some of those involved, revealed that all groups are now very clear about the adults they can turn to if they need help. Furthermore, pupils say they are very happy on the playground and welcome the range of equipment available to them at playtimes. A few parents feel that lunchtime arrangements and supervision 'could be better'. During the inspection, pupils were well supervised by an adult in each classroom on a very wet lunchtime.

The school has strong and effective relationships with parents. Teachers are currently planning an additional mid-year report in response to parents' requests for an interim assessment of their child's progress. Most parents are very pleased with the work of the school. 'Delighted with the school...', '...absolutely fantastic...', '...teaching is excellent...' were among the many very positive views added to the pre-inspection questionnaire. A few parents raised concerns about support for pupils with learning difficulties whereas others were 'very impressed' by this element of the school's work. School documentation and lesson observations shows the school to be working well with outside agencies, to be implementing individual education plans effectively and supporting these pupils well in lessons.

One parent commented that 'Downley School...is an excellent school but somehow it seems to get better and better each year'. This is because the excellent leadership and management, with the very strong support of governors, evaluates its own performance, rigorously tackles any weaknesses and consistently places the well-being of all pupils as its highest priority. The overall effectiveness of the school is outstanding and it is very well placed to maintain high standards and to improve further.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Most children enter school with the skills expected for their age. They do very well and rapidly develop them further by the end of the Foundation Stage. They are very well prepared for Year 1. The children settle quickly and, as one parent commented, '...learn something new everyday'. They are currently learning about 'ourselves' and chatted to their teacher confidently about their special visitor (a skeleton). They know that the skeleton, '...makes you keep up!' Some children can already identify the skull and the spine. The teachers encourage independence, notably at snack time and provide a wide range of activities both led by adults and chosen by the children themselves.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure pupils have good opportunities to respond to the comments on their work and are more involved in setting, and assessing their progress towards, sharper improvement targets.

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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?	1
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?	1
The effectiveness of the Foundation Stage	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
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 the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

17 October 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Downley School, High Wycombe, HP13 5AL

This letter is to tell you about the findings of the recent inspection and to thank you for taking the time to talk to me about your school. You attend an outstanding school which is very successful in helping pupils to reach high standards.

Most of you behave extremely well. Some of you told me how much you enjoy school and that lessons are interesting. Others told me that you feel safe at playtimes and are very confident that the adults would help you if ever you had a problem. Some of you also said that the school provides a lot of interesting opportunities and I agree.

The teachers are helping you to achieve very well. They set out very clearly what they expect you to learn and mark your work carefully so you know how well you have done. Some, but not all of you, are able to respond to their comments. I have asked them all to give you opportunities, where it would help, to improve the work they have marked. I have also asked them to involve you more in setting targets and assessing your progress. The lessons I saw were well planned so that there was something to interest and challenge all of you. The teachers ask you some searching questions to which you give thoughtful answers.

The headteacher, governors and teachers are always looking at how well the school is doing so that it can continually improve. They have been very successful in helping you to improve your writing.

I hope that the school continues to help you to reach very high standards and is very successful in helping you to do as well as you possibly can.

Christopher Parker

Lead inspector