

Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 115119 |
| Local Authority | Essex |
| Inspection number | 311841 |
| Inspection date | 6 May 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | David Wynford Jones |

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

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| Type of school | Primary |
| School category | Voluntary controlled |
| Age range of pupils | 4–11 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number on roll | 266 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Mrs Jean Gains |
| Headteacher | Mr Stephen Southgate |
| Date of previous school inspection | 2–4 February 2004 |
| School address | Church Road Ramsden Heath Billericay Essex CM11 1NU |
| Telephone number | 01268 710387 |
| Fax number | 01268 711405 |

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|--------------------------|------------|
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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 the following issues: the effectiveness of teaching and the leadership and management of the school in improving pupils' achievement and raising standards. Evidence was gathered from observations of lessons, sampling of pupils' work, scrutiny of school documentation and discussions with pupils, staff and four governors. 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

The school is similar in size to most of its type. It serves a mixed residential area and socio-economic circumstances are favourable overall. Nearly all pupils are of White British background. None is learning to speak English as an additional language. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below average. With the exception of the youngest children, all pupils are taught in mixed aged classes. Very few pupils start or leave the school during the school year. The school holds the Investors in People, the Active Sports Mark and the Advanced Healthy School Award.

The headteacher was appointed in September 2006 and was previously the deputy headteacher at the school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This popular, oversubscribed school provides a good quality education. The local community rightly holds it in high regard. One parent wrote, 'The ethos of the school is one of caring, courtesy and consideration. There is an inclusive feel and respect is well earned by a hard working team.' Many parents endorsed this view and specifically mentioned the effective leadership of the headteacher.

Amongst the school's many strengths are the good level of care and provision for supporting pupils' personal development and well-being, which is good. Pupils feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Relationships between adults and pupils are good. Consequently, pupils behave well and are keen to take part in lessons. When asked how they would persuade others to join the school, one pupil said, 'Come to this school because the teachers are nice and friendly and they help you learn,' and others agreed. This positive attitude has led to above average attendance, which has improved since the last inspection. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of being healthy and make an excellent contribution to the school and the wider community. Members of the school council are keen to talk about their responsibilities in raising funds, which are used well for the purchase of playground equipment for the school, to sponsor the education of children in India and Africa and to support local and national charities. Pupils have a good understanding of being safe and fully appreciate the potential dangers of the extensive building work currently taking place on the school site.

Overall standards are above average. In 2007, standards at the end of Year 2 were above average in reading and average in writing and mathematics. In Year 6, they were exceptionally high in English and above average in mathematics and science. Following systematic analysis of the 2007 results, action has been taken to improve writing in Key Stage 1 and mathematics throughout the school. This has led to higher standards of writing in Year 2, particularly for the more able pupils, and in mathematics in Year 6. However, the strategies require consolidation and further development to ensure standards remain above average. Currently in Year 6, standards are above average in English and mathematics. In science, standards are average and sometimes better than this.

Achievement is good. Most pupils reach their targets. Pupils who find learning difficult make particularly good progress. This is because much of the teaching is good and pupils receive effective and well-targeted support. Teachers deal effectively with the two-year age range and the diverse range of abilities and levels of attainment in classes. Lessons are well planned, with opportunities for pupils to work alongside each other to develop their social skills and share knowledge. Good use is made of questioning to probe and reinforce understanding. Academic guidance is good. Teachers make good use of opportunities for pupils to assess their own and others' work. Marking in English is more rigorous and provides better advice on what pupils should do to improve, than in other subjects. However, pupils do not regularly refer to their literacy targets when writing in other subjects. As a result, these skills are not consistently reinforced throughout the day.

Pupils receive a broad curriculum that stimulates their learning. Overall, the curriculum is good, meets pupils' needs and prepares them well for their futures. Recent changes in mathematics, including the introduction of pupil/parent workshops, support learning effectively. Good cross-curricular links allow pupils to see the relevance of their learning. The pupils enjoy the theme or topic-based approach and opportunities to develop their information technology skills. A reasonable range of extra-curricular activities and visits enhance the curriculum and promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social, cultural and personal development well. The school rightly plans to make greater use of its grounds to support learning once the building work is completed. Plans include tree planting, the development of environmental areas and a 'trim' trail.

Capacity for further improvement is good because the headteacher provides effective leadership. Support by the leadership team, new since the promotion of the deputy to headteacher two years ago is good. The leadership team is particularly successful in sustaining the school's Christian ethos and valuing the contribution of all stakeholders. Consequently, the school has an accurate understanding of its effectiveness and there is shared understanding of strengths and areas for development. The school operates well on a day-to-day basis, complying with the latest safeguarding and health and safety requirements. It is calm and well ordered. Links with outside agencies, including the Church, other schools and parents are good. These effectively support pupils' learning. Parents appreciate the efforts made to keep them informed about their children's progress and other significant aspects of the school's work. The website displays good up-to-date and relevant information.

Governors provide a good balance of challenge and support. The Level 4 and 5 statutory targets in English and mathematics are challenging. Governors have worked hard in supporting the new leadership team and in securing the significant building developments to enhance the learning environment. The school development plan is clear and focuses on the key priorities for improvement. The school has improved since the last inspection. It provides good value for money.

Effectiveness of the Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Attainment on entry to the Foundation Stage is marginally above expectations. Children settle quickly because induction procedures are good and staff place importance on providing a good level of care. As a result, relationships are good. Children feel safe and develop positive attitudes to learning. They make good progress because the curriculum is well organised to incorporate all areas of learning and teaching is good. Assessment procedures are thorough and used well to plan future work. By the end of the Reception class, children's personal development is good and many are working above the levels expected in mathematical development, communication, language and literacy. This is because these skills are reinforced throughout the day. Their knowledge and understanding of the world, and their physical and creative development are broadly in line with expectations. Good opportunities are provided for the children to develop their independence by

choosing their own activities. These are well-planned and meet their needs effectively. Good use is made of the recently acquired outdoor area. However, the school has recognised the need to develop further this facility and to provide a greater range of outdoor equipment to support learning.

What the school should do to improve further

- Consolidate and extend the strategies to raise standards and improve pupils' achievement, particularly in mathematics.
- Ensure pupils make more reference to their literacy targets when writing in other subjects.
- Further develop the use of the outdoor provision for all pupils, and especially in the Foundation Stage.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| 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

| | |
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| 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 effectiveness of the Foundation Stage | 2 |
| The effectiveness of boarding provision | |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards reached by learners ¹ | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

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|---|----------|
| How good is 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 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| 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 | 2 |

The quality of provision

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|---|----------|
| 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 |

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.

Leadership and management

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| 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 tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 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



7 May 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, Billericay, Essex, CM11 1NU

Thank you very much for making me so welcome when I visited your school. I enjoyed my visit and talking to you. I was very pleased to hear that you like coming to school and to see your attendance is above average. Throughout the day, you behaved well and demonstrated that you are keen to take responsibility. You have a good understanding of healthy living and know about being safe. This really has been important with all the building work going on at the school. I was impressed by your excellent contribution to the school community and also by your fundraising to help children in Africa and India.

Your school provides you with a good education. You get off to a good start in the Reception class. By the end of Year 6, your achievement is good. The standards you reach in English, mathematics and science are generally above those reached in most schools. However, they could be a little bit higher, especially in mathematics and in writing. To help you, I have asked your headteacher and teachers to continue to make improvements to the mathematics curriculum and the way in which it is taught. I have also asked them to remind you to refer to your literacy targets when you are writing in other lessons.

I know that everyone is looking forward to the builders finishing the work so that you can have the school grounds back. I am sure that your headteacher, the governors and teachers will be looking to see how the outside areas can be used to support your learning. A good start has been made to the area outside the Reception class and some equipment has been ordered but more is needed if the area is to be used fully during lesson time.

I hope that you will continue to enjoy your education at Downham Primary.

With best wishes for the future.

David Wynford Jones
Lead inspector