

Downfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	117255
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	395363
Inspection dates	14–15 May 2012
Lead inspector	Terry Elston

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The registered childcare provision, managed by the governing body, was inspected under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	301
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Dave Spratt
Headteacher	Sarah Goldsmith
Date of previous school inspection	9 March 2009
School address	Downfield Road Waltham Cross EN8 8SS
Telephone number	01992 629598
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Email address	admin@downfield.herts.sch.uk

Registered childcare provision	EY276829 Meadows Pre-School
Number of children on roll in the registered childcare provision	43
Date of last inspection of registered childcare provision	9 March 2009

Age group	3–11
Inspection date(s)	14–15 May 2012
Inspection number	395363



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Introduction

Inspection team

Terry Elston

Additional Inspector

John Sangster

Additional Inspector

Fatiha Maitland

Additional Inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspectors visited 24 lessons taught by nine teachers. The inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and groups of pupils. They observed the school's work and looked at the tracking of pupils' progress, curricular planning documents, examples of the ways in which the school supports different groups of pupils, and evidence from the school's lesson observations. Questionnaires were analysed which were completed by 80 parents and carers, and by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

The school is a larger than the average-sized primary school, where over a third of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and a fifth speak English as an additional language. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, including those supported by school action plus and with a statement of special educational needs, is well above average. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is also well above average.

The school meets the current floor standard set by the government, which determines the minimum expectations for attainment and progress. It has recently gained the Investors in People and International Schools awards. There is specialist resourced provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties, as well as a pre-school centre managed by the governing body, on the school's site.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Downfield Primary is a good school. The unit makes good provision for pupils with speech and language difficulties, who make good progress. The positive views of parents and carers were summed up well by one who commented, 'The school really brings out the best in children, not only academically but in the way they are helped to develop into confident, well-adjusted individuals.' The school is not yet outstanding because not all pupils make the same rapid progress in writing and mathematics as they do in reading.
- By the end of Key Stage 2, attainment is broadly average in reading, writing and mathematics. This represents good progress from pupils' starting points.
- Teaching and learning are good. Teachers know their subjects well and are skilled at explaining new work. Lessons move at a fast pace and teachers are good at checking on pupils' progress throughout. Pupils enjoy lessons but while most find the work challenging, the more-able pupils sometimes find it too easy. The good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is clearly evident in the way they learn right from wrong and reflect on issues such as the need to care for the environment.
- Pupils' good behaviour is an important reason for them achieving well. The adults' high expectations of how pupils should act and consistent response to any unacceptable behaviour make this a school where all feel safe. Pupils have a deserved reputation in the community for their courtesy and eagerness to help others.
- Leadership and management are good. The headteacher leads well and is highly respected by all members of the school community. She has a very good awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses and works closely with the staff to manage performance and make improvements. The good systems for evaluating the quality of teaching provide teachers with helpful guidance on how their lessons could be improved.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' progress in writing and mathematics by ensuring that teachers routinely:
 - have higher expectations of pupils' writing in all subjects of the curriculum
 - give pupils more opportunities to write longer pieces of work
 - provide more practice at quick mental mathematics tasks
 - develop pupils' mathematical problem-solving skills
 - give more-able pupils consistently challenging work to enable them to attain the highest possible standards.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Achievement by pupils of all ethnic backgrounds is good and parents and carers are very pleased with the progress their children make. Pupils feel they do well at school and show a pride in their work. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage achieve well. Their skills entering the school are often well below those expected. The very good teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters represent) means that children learn quickly how to build sounds into words and use their reading skills in all areas of learning. For example, in one lesson they listened to a story about pirates and then wrote good descriptions of their way of life. This approach works well in all areas of learning; in their number work children read a story about a fierce wolf before exploring time using clocks. Despite their good progress, children' attainment by the end of the Reception year is below that typical of their ages.

In Key Stage 1, pupils make good progress and attainment by the end of Year 2 is average in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils enjoy books and have a reasonable knowledge of how to tackle new words. As well as working out the sounds, they use the story and pictures to help them. Pupils' writing is imaginative and they extend their vocabulary well by activities that include finding different words for 'happy' and 'sad'. In mathematics, they make good progress using their number skills to compile graphs of their favourite food or lessons, but sometimes struggle when asked to calculate quickly in their head.

Progress continues to be good in Key Stage 2. By the end of Year 6, pupils read with good expression and many show advanced skills when they skim texts quickly in books and on computers to gain information about their topics. They make their stories and factual accounts interesting for the reader and are good at writing persuasive letters. For example, Year 6 pupils wrote passionately about how zoos should be banned. Not all teachers provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to write long pieces of work and this affects their stamina as writers. Pupils have some

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good opportunities to write in other subjects but the quality of this work is not always as good as in their English books. In mathematics, pupils have a good knowledge of how to create complex graphs and are confident describing the properties of shapes. They make satisfactory progress developing their mental mathematical skills, but many still hesitate when a calculation is faced at them. This also affects their ability to solve problems as they try and work out which operation to use.

Disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs make good progress. They do particularly well in their reading because of the skilled teaching of how to build sounds into words and their use of a wide range of exciting books in the library. One pupil put it well when saying proudly, 'I used to find reading really hard but now I love it.' Pupils with speech and language difficulties benefit from effective teaching in the unit and make good progress. Extra support from speech therapists improves their speaking and listening skills well and this enhances their attainment in all subjects.

Pupils who speak English as an additional language make rapid progress because of the very good support and teaching as soon as they enter school. The views of parents and carers were summed up well by one who said, 'My child came here 18 months ago with no English and has made really good progress.'

Quality of teaching

The pupils, as well as all the parents and carers who responded to the inspection questionnaire, agree that teaching and learning are good. Teachers make lessons interesting by imaginative use of the interactive whiteboards to capture pupils' interest. For example, in a very effective mathematics lesson the teacher showed pupils a video about shapes that prepared them well for investigating the properties of rectangles and hexagons. Teachers mostly plan well to meet the needs of the different abilities in the class and this means that all groups do well. Occasionally, however, more-able pupils have work that is too easy and this restricts their progress. The effective teaching of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs means they make good progress. They are supported well in their learning while enjoying good opportunities to work independently. In the unit, the adults' specialist knowledge of pupils' difficulties and tightly focused work on improving their speech and language account for their good progress and growing confidence.

There is some outstanding teaching that inspires all groups of pupils to achieve their full potential. For example, Year 2 pupils made exceptional progress when researching the lifestyles of owls and bats. The teacher made excellent use of the interactive whiteboard to recap on pupils' previous work and give examples of their habitats. This prepared pupils very well for conducting their own investigations which were of high quality.

Teachers make good use of the curriculum to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy

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skills. From the Nursery onwards, regular phonics sessions help pupils learn the sounds that letters represent and how to build these into words. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to write interesting stories and place great emphasis on making their work interesting for the reader. When writing in subjects other than English, however, teachers sometimes accept work that is careless or too brief and this affects pupils' progress. The very good teaching of reading skills gives pupils confidence with their reading and has done much to raise attainment over the last year. In mathematics, teachers make the work fun with lots of practical work but do not always focus sufficiently on honing pupils' mental mathematics and problem-solving skills.

Teaching enhances pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are many opportunities for pupils to think deeply about issues, and one class showed great sensitivity when considering the moral dilemma of whether to build holiday hotels around beautiful beaches.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils, parents and carers say that behaviour is good and that pupils feel safe in school. In lessons, pupils listen carefully and concentrate well with their work because that is what all teachers expect. They are taught to be courteous and respectful to staff, visitors and each other. The curriculum provides them with clear guidance of how to avoid unsafe situations and the need to take care when using the internet. Older pupils, in particular, understand the potential harm caused by cyber-bullying. Pupils have benefited from good opportunities to discuss the impact of racism and bullying in regular class and whole-school events, and records show that acts of unacceptable behaviour and racism have decreased considerably over the last two years. There have been no recent exclusions.

Pupils take responsibility well. Members of the school council, for example, take their duties seriously and do much to improve their school while representing the views of others. The eco-committee helps pupils see the importance of conserving energy and the gardening club gives many pupils the opportunity to grow their own vegetables and fruit. These activities are good fun and do much to help pupils develop into responsible citizens. Pupils are punctual to school and attendance rates, though a little below average, are rising rapidly.

Leadership and management

The headteacher works closely with senior staff to track pupils' progress and gain an accurate picture of the achievements of all groups of pupils, including those from different cultural backgrounds and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. This provides a clear focus for school improvement towards very ambitious targets and exemplifies the strong commitment to providing equal opportunities for all pupils. All teachers feel part of this process and are held accountable for the achievements of pupils in their class. As a result, the school has done well since the last inspection and has the capacity to improve further.

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The headteacher leads the way in developing pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. She sets a good example by the sensitive way she communicates with pupils and staff and listens to their concerns. Pupils adopt these principles well, as can be seen when they share ideas with their 'talking partners' in class. The school has developed robust systems to tackle any form of discrimination that help make the school a place where all pupils feel secure. Leaders work closely with parents and carers, who value highly the many initiatives to inform them about school events and their children's learning.

The management of teachers' performance is good. The cornerstone is the rigorous system to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning that provides a clear focus for school improvement. For example, following recent lesson observations the leaders identified the need for teachers to make the next steps in pupils' learning clearer. Now, pupils have a secure knowledge of how to move up to higher levels. Leaders support teachers well with good opportunities for professional development. Recent training on the teaching of reading, for example, means that pupils benefit from consistent guidance on how to tackle unfamiliar words and this has raised attainment.

The school has developed a broad and balanced curriculum with a good focus on literacy and numeracy skills while also providing many opportunities for pupils to enhance their artistic talents. The curriculum benefits from a good range of visits and visitors to make learning interesting and an extensive range of popular clubs. Leaders have developed good partnerships with local schools that enhance provision and give opportunities to share expertise. The close links with local supermarkets provide pupils with good, first-hand experience of the world of work.

The governing body is rigorous in working with leaders to ensure that arrangements for safeguarding pupils meet government requirements and keep pupils safe. Members of the governing body share the leaders' ambitious goals for the future and have the skills to hold the leaders to account.

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The Early Years Foundation Stage delivered in the registered childcare provision

The provision for children in the pre-school setting is good. They enter from the age of two and attend either in the morning or afternoon. The provision is in temporary accommodation pending the move into the main school building later in the year. There are three qualified staff including the manager. Parents and carers are happy with the provision because their children look forward to attending and make good progress in their academic and social skills. Children enjoy many practical activities to enhance their learning and develop their knowledge of the world. One group, for example, learned much when exploring different fruits and vegetables and discussing their likes and dislikes. They develop their early reading, writing and number skills well through a balance of formal teaching and guided play. They work well independently but are not afraid to ask for help. Activities such as getting the children to register themselves when they arrive develop their independence further.

The adults have a good knowledge of children’s needs and plan a wide range of interesting activities. They use questions well to encourage children’s language development and make a point of valuing every answer. They assess children’s progress well and record their achievements in the comprehensive ‘learning journeys’.

The leadership and management are good. The manager has a clear picture of the provision’s strengths and weaknesses and has worked with other staff to produce a detailed plan for improvements.

These are the grades for the Early Years Foundation Stage of the registered childcare provision, inspected under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006

Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
Taking into account:	
Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage for the registered provision	2

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all 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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



16 May 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downfield Primary School, Waltham Cross, EN8 8SS.

Thank you for making the inspectors so welcome when we came to your school. We really enjoyed seeing you work so hard in lessons and play so happily outside, even in the rain. Those of you who were kind enough to speak to us or who filled in questionnaires said how much you enjoy your work. You say Downfield Primary is a good school and the inspectors agree.

We were impressed with how hard you work. You make good progress, but those of you who find learning easy could do even better. You behave well and you are kind to each other. You have a good knowledge of how to keep safe and live healthy lives. Even the youngest ones think a lot about people in the world who are poor and sad. Your headteacher and senior staff know how to improve things and make sure the school runs smoothly. You work hard at the activities provided and enjoy the many clubs at lunchtime and after school. We agree when you say your teachers make learning fun, and this helps you learn quickly. The staff work closely with your parents and carers to make sure they know how well you are doing at school. All adults at the school take good care of you and keep you safe.

The headteacher and your teachers are always looking for ways to improve. We have asked them to:

- make sure work is harder for those who find the work easy so that they make even faster progress – you can help by telling your teachers when the work is too easy
- give you more practice at mental mathematics and solving problems in numeracy lessons
- expect the same high standard of writing in all subjects as they do in English lessons and to expect you to write more.

We wish you well for the future.

Yours sincerely

Terry Elston
Lead Inspector

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