



Downlands Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 113659
Local Authority Dorset
Inspection number 289687
Inspection dates 14–15 February 2007
Reporting inspector Eileen Chadwick

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Blandford Camp
School category	Community		Blandford Forum
Age range of pupils	4–11		DT11 8BG
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01258 453348
Number on roll (school)	215	Fax number	01258 455286
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Russell Lucas-Rowe
		Headteacher	Alan Frame
Date of previous school inspection	24 May 2004		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This school draws very nearly all of its pupils from the military base on which it is situated. It is average in size but numbers in the school and classes vary throughout the year due to the frequent transfer of army families at short notice. There are very high levels of mobility in every year group. Most pupils are White British although a range of minority ethnic groups are represented. A small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. Many children joining the Reception class have limited basic skills and their speech is often not well developed for their age. Pupils joining the school in other year groups often have gaps in their curriculum knowledge. Since the previous inspection, the school has changed from a first school to a primary school and has grown year on year. There are Year 6 pupils at the school for the first time this year.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school where pupils thrive and achieve well. Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. The considerable numbers who join in different year groups are given excellent support and integrate very well. As one parent said, 'My children have easily adjusted to this school and everyone settles in very quickly.' This provides a springboard for pupils' learning. Parents are very pleased with the way their children develop. Good leadership by the headteacher has secured the school's successful change to primary status and promotes pupils' good achievement.

Pupils have often attended many other schools, sometimes in other countries, and have varied skills on entry. Staff rigorously check pupils' attainment when they join the school and quickly target those in need of extra support so they can catch up if necessary. This extra support is effective in helping to minimise the disruption to pupils' progress. As a result of good teaching, pupils make good progress from Reception to Year 2. Their progress in reading is very good. In Years 1 and 2 progress is generally good, but progress in writing is more variable. The more capable pupils make consistently good progress but progress for other pupils is sometimes too slow because they are given work that is either too hard or too easy. By Year 2 standards are above average in reading and average in writing and mathematics. The generally good teaching and progress continue in Years 3 to 6. The school's emphasis on developing the pupils' reading skills ensures their rapid progress in reading. Pupils quickly learn to write fluently for a range of purposes, but spelling is a weaker aspect of their written work. Pupils' vocabulary choices are not very imaginative and this too limits the quality of written work. By Year 6, overall standards are average in English and mathematics. From the pupils' starting points this represents good achievement.

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their lessons because the curriculum is good. It is broad, relevant to their interests and strengthened by a good range of outside visits and visitors. Links with parents and with the army are excellent; those with the army enrich pupils' experiences considerably, including in sport and information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their behaviour is good. The well established routines of daily life ensure that boundaries are clear. Care, support and guidance of pupils are good. Pastoral care is outstanding. Pupils say they feel safe, secure and happy. They take a pride in themselves and in their school and feel confident they have someone to turn to if they need help. Procedures for checking pupils' progress are good.

The school is well led and managed and improvement since the last inspection is good. Senior staff and governors know where further improvement is required. They have identified the right priorities for raising achievement and are well placed to move the school forward. However, the part played by some subject leaders in securing improvement is not as effective as it might be because monitoring of teaching in their subjects lacks rigour.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve pupils' progress in writing by giving more attention to vocabulary and spelling.
- Improve the rigour with which subject leaders monitor the quality of teaching and learning so as to pinpoint precisely where improvement is required to raise standards by making full use of subject leaders.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils' achieve well in relation to their starting points. Many pupils join the school with below average basic skill levels or gaps in their knowledge. Good teaching ensures that both boys and girls make good progress and catch up, so that by Year 6 they reach average standards in English and mathematics. Throughout the school pupils' progress is more even in reading and mathematics than writing because the school has focused on improving teaching and raising achievement in these areas.

Children make good progress in Reception and reach the standards expected in all areas except writing, although good progress is made. Pupils' progress in Years 1 and 2 is good overall and very good in reading. In writing progress is more variable, and is better in Year 2 than in Year 1, where progress occasionally slows for middle and lower attaining pupils when the work they are given is either too easy or too hard. By Year 2 standards in writing and mathematics are broadly average, matching the 2006 results in the national assessments. Standards in reading are above average.

In Years 3 to 6, pupils make very good progress in reading and good progress in mathematics. Progress in writing is satisfactory. Pupils write fluently for different purposes but their unadventurous vocabulary choices and weaker spelling prevent standards rising more rapidly. Teaching is not rigorous enough in these areas to make sure progress is more rapid.

Pupils' with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress. Thorough checks to identify pupils' previous attainment lead to effective intervention and support to help them catch up. The small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language are also well supported. They make rapid progress and their achievement is good.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and, as a result, their attendance is good. All pupils are given a warm welcome and excellent relationships promote their confidence and sense of well-being. They quickly establish new friendships and feel at home. The buddy system is very effective. It enables pupils to take responsibility for helping new arrivals settle quickly into school. This is important as, at any one time, there are many newcomers. Pupils feel secure, safe and free from prejudice and are confident that

any instances of bullying will be tackled firmly by staff. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils behave well in lessons, around the school and in the playground. They settle well to their lessons and work hard although their concentration occasionally wanders when their work is too easy or too hard. They contribute well to the school and the wider community. Members of the school council take their role seriously and are currently campaigning for hot school lunches. Pupils know how to keep healthy. Their good progress in literacy, numeracy and good teamwork skills prepare pupils well for their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching is good, particularly so in the Foundation Stage. Thorough planning ensures children of all abilities make good progress. Exciting practical work underpins learning in literacy and numeracy. Teaching in the mixed age classes in Years 1 to 6 is good with strengths in the teaching of reading and mathematics. Teachers use ICT resources well to facilitate learning. They manage their pupils well and use time effectively. Questions are challenging, new vocabulary is explained well and there are good opportunities for pupils to discuss their ideas. Teachers' thorough checks on pupils' attainment quickly establish what pupils already know from the moment they enter school, whatever their age. Teachers usually use this information well to provide the right level of work for pupils' learning needs and lessons are often challenging. However, there are a few occasions when the work is not matched to their requirements.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The Foundation Stage curriculum is well planned so that it enables children to make good progress. The curriculum in Years 1 to 6 is broad and stimulating and successfully focuses on developing pupils' basic skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Rigorous reading systems and catch up programmes for reading have a significant impact in raising standards and achievement. Plans for teaching spelling and enriching pupils' written vocabulary are not as effective as those for other aspects of English. Links with the army community are excellent. The army community's energetic involvement leads to some exciting and high quality learning opportunities, including in sport and ICT. A good range of visits, clubs and visitors also enriches learning. For example, at a 'street party' to celebrate VE day, pupils were addressed by a representative from the on-site Royal Signals Museum. Several clubs, such as the football club, are organised with the support of parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral support is outstanding. The school is very effective in ensuring the many new entrants quickly develop friendships and feel secure. Thorough systems for checking and quickly responding to the needs of newly arrived pupils are major reasons why pupils settle so quickly and achieve well. Strong links with outside agencies help staff to provide very good support for vulnerable pupils. High quality systems for welcoming parents enable them to be true partners in the educative process. Close links with the playgroup on site ease the transfer to Reception. Child protection and health and safety procedures are thorough and pupils say they feel safe. Marking and target setting make clear to pupils what they have to do to improve. Most pupils can say what they have to do to reach their targets. However, the use of assessment to provide well matched work is not always secure for writing.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher, in close teamwork with other school leaders, has successfully managed the progression from a first school to a primary school. The excellent links the headteacher has established with the community, including parents, make a significant contribution to the children's learning and personal development. Parents overwhelmingly appreciate the school's very welcoming ethos and the progress their children make. The headteacher has introduced effective systems for measuring pupils' achievement and evaluating the impact of the school's provision on this. Self-evaluation is good and has resulted in setting clear priorities for raising standards, achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Staff and governors are fully involved in this process.

In the last year, the thorough programme for monitoring mathematics lessons has led to pupils making more even progress in this subject. Monitoring by subject leaders in other subjects, including writing, is not as well established and lacks the rigour required to be really effective in raising standards in all classes. For example, it does not show well enough how teaching impacts on learning for different groups of pupils. Governors' roles have developed significantly since the last inspection. The chair leads the governing body very well and governors are both supportive and challenging. They bring a good range of expertise to the school. Most are in the army and subject to regular postings but a system of 'shadow governors' is very effective, ensuring transition is smooth. Computer resources have improved substantially since the last inspection and governors bring much ICT expertise to the school.

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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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
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

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 behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the 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

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 performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for very much for your friendly welcome when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed talking with you and seeing you at work and play. Your parents think your school is a good one and we agree.

These are some of the good things about your school:

- You make good progress in English and mathematics.
- All adults take superb care of you and ensure that you are safe.
- You behave well, get on very well with each other and try hard with your work.
- Good teaching makes your lessons interesting and you really enjoy school.
- You have good opportunities for learning sports.
- You welcome new children and really help them to feel at home.
- Your headteacher, teachers and school governors are working hard to make the school even better.

Here are a few things we are asking the school to change:

- Make sure your progress in writing is as good as in reading.
- Help teachers in charge of subjects to be more involved in checking up on how well you are learning.

You can help your teachers by working hard to improve your spelling and thinking up ideas for using interesting words in your writing. Thank you again for your help and for being so friendly.