

Downfield Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117255
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326556
Inspection dates	9–10 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Michele Messaoudi

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	235
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	25
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Wendy Thompson
Headteacher	Mrs Liz Hurrion
Date of previous school inspection	7 December 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Downfield Road Cheshunt Hertfordshire EN8 8SS
Telephone number	01992629598
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Age group	3–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Downfield Primary is an average-sized school where pupils are taught in single year groups. The school serves a changing and diverse community that includes many different cultures and faiths. A large number of pupils join and leave the school other than at the usual times. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above the national average. The proportion of pupils who have learning difficulties is very high. Their main needs are moderate learning difficulties related to literacy, behaviour, social and emotional problems and speech and language difficulties and disorders. The school has a Speech and Language Base for 10 pupils in East Hertfordshire.

The provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage includes a Nursery that offers five morning sessions per week and a Reception class. The school also provides pre-school education for children aged two to three, five mornings a week. In addition, the governing body manages a lunch club for the Nursery children and the three-year-olds who attend the pre-school.

The school has been awarded the Hertfordshire Children's Trust Extended School Award, Activemark 2007, Eco Schools Silver, Healthy School and Investors in People awards. It is recognised as a centre of good practice by the National Association of Professional Teaching Assistants.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Downfield Primary is an outstanding school that enables its pupils to achieve extremely well and leave as confident and well rounded pupils. 'Downfield provides an excellent learning environment in which my children have had the opportunity to exceed expectations,' is a parent's view expressed by many. The excellent leadership of the headteacher provides sharp focus on raising the standards of all pupils through rigorous evaluation of all aspects of the provision, commitment to the training of staff at all levels and a thorough understanding of the local community. The school commands a highly respected position in the community and works extremely hard to provide a broad range of services that benefit the local families. In particular, the popular 'Meadows' pre-school gives children a good head start to their education.

As a result of the early identification of pupils' needs, excellent care guidance and support, and rigorous use of very challenging targets to raise standards in specific areas of learning, pupils make outstanding progress. From starting points that are exceptionally low, children make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The excellent gains which they make in their personal and emotional development enable them to build successfully on their learning in Years 1 and 2. Although there are pockets of satisfactory teaching throughout the school, the presence of much good and some outstanding teaching, coupled with some very high quality marking and an exciting curriculum ensure pupils progress at an exceptionally fast rate from Years 1 to 6. Standards have risen constantly since the last inspection and this year, pupils are on course to attain standards above national average in English, mathematics and science in both key stages, well in excess of very ambitious targets.

The school is highly successful in responding to pupils' emotional needs and their personal development and well-being are outstanding. The introduction of yoga for all pupils in September 2007 contributes very effectively to their spiritual development. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils show a keen awareness of right and wrong and respect the views of others. Their enjoyment is reflected in their outstanding behaviour and good attendance. They demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to keep fit, healthy and safe. The excellent provision of school meals plays a central part in developing pupils' healthy eating habits. Pupils feel free from bullying and racism. They make very important contributions to the community. Community cohesion is promoted very effectively. The school is a harmonious community where pupils, staff and parents from a wide range of ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds get on well together. Pupils' awareness of global and European matters is enhanced very effectively through the learning of French from Key Stage 2 and the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) themes centred on different areas of the world.

The outstanding curriculum is very well planned to meet the needs of all pupils and it contributes extremely well to pupils' personal development. It is enriched by a wide range of clubs and educational visits, as well as violin tuition for Years' 4 and 5 pupils. The innovative IPC curriculum familiarises pupils with global as well as local issues whilst providing very good creative links between subjects. Robust safeguarding arrangements and excellent partnerships with parents and external agencies ensure outstanding day-to-day care.

Outstanding leadership and management underpin the success of the school. The senior leadership has greatly benefitted from the new deputy headteacher who takes the lead in rigorous analysis of assessment data. The staff work very well as a cohesive team focused on securing improvements. Subject leadership is good and developing in IPC subjects where new

assessment systems are being put in place. The tracking of pupils' progress is used extremely effectively so that pupils know how well they are doing and have clear targets to help them improve their work. Governors are closely involved in evaluating the provision. The school's excellent performance reflects its outstanding capacity for further improvement.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 2

Staff promote children's welfare extremely well. They are very attentive to children's emotional needs and form excellent relationships with them. Consequently, children settle quickly into school life and make outstanding progress in their personal and social development, which enables them to flourish in Years 1 and 2 despite their extremely low starting points. Their behaviour is outstanding and they are keen to learn because they are well managed. They develop independence by self-registering and selecting resources to initiate their own activities. Children from all backgrounds play happily together. They learn to adopt healthy lifestyles very effectively because they are encouraged to eat a balanced diet and take frequent exercise.

Pre-school, Nursery and Reception staff work together very closely to plan the curriculum with a strong emphasis on communication, language and numeracy skills. They develop children's speaking, listening and thinking skills well by asking them open-ended questions and making frequent use of role play, for example around the 'pirates' theme. In the Nursery class, children thoroughly enjoy free movement between the indoor and outdoor areas. Adult-led sessions prepare them well for more formal learning in Reception. Despite good teaching, children enter Year 1 with skills that are below expectations and well below in knowledge and understanding of the world. This is because the outdoor areas are not used fully. However, some creative initiatives support indoor learning very well, especially in the Nursery. Assessment is rigorous and identifies children's next steps. Booklets successfully record children's learning journeys. Whereas these are well established in the pre-school and Nursery where they are shared very effectively with parents, they have just begun in Reception. The leadership of this stage of education is good, based on careful self-evaluation.

What the school should do to improve further

- Continue to develop the assessment systems in IPC subjects.
- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, make fuller use of the outdoor areas in both classes, especially to enhance children's understanding of the world around them.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve outstandingly well to reach standards that are above average by the end of Year 6 from exceptionally low starting points. The constant rise in standards over the last three years reflects the school's focus on specific areas and the success of support strategies. For example, although standards overall were broadly in line with the national average by the end of Year 2 in 2007 and 2008, a drive to extend the more able pupils has resulted in pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics for the first time in the last two years, particularly in writing. In 2008, standards by the end of Year 6 were above average overall and pupils performed extremely well in science. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in English has risen sharply over the last four years and all pupils are on course to at least meet their challenging targets. Pupils who find learning difficult made outstanding progress and most reached above average standards owing to the excellent care and support they receive.

Pupils who attend the Speech and Language Base made outstanding progress owing to the excellent provision made for them, both in the Base in the mornings and in the main school in the afternoons.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils achieve outstandingly well to reach standards that are above average by the end of Year 6 from exceptionally low starting points. The constant rise in standards over the last three years reflects the school's focus on specific areas and the success of support strategies. For example, although standards overall were broadly in line with the national average by the end of Year 2 in 2007 and 2008, a drive to extend the more able pupils has resulted in pupils reaching the higher levels in reading, writing and mathematics for the first time in the last two years, particularly in writing. In 2008, standards by the end of Year 6 were above average overall and pupils performed extremely well in science. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels in English has risen sharply over the last four years and all pupils are on course to at least meet their challenging targets. Pupils who find learning difficult made outstanding progress and most reached above average standards owing to the excellent care and support they receive. Pupils who attend the Speech and Language Base made outstanding progress owing to the excellent provision made for them, both in the Base in the mornings and in the main school in the afternoons.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching is underpinned by excellent relationships and thorough knowledge of pupils' prior attainment and needs. Lessons are very well planned to match the needs of individual pupils closely. Staff share clear learning objectives with pupils and specific success criteria against which pupils of varying ability can evaluate their successes. In the best lessons, teaching combines excellent knowledge of pupils' aptitudes with very high expectations and pupils achieve very well as a result. The use of open-ended questioning that makes pupils think, helps them refine their understanding and keeps them actively engaged is a strong feature of most teaching. All staff provide excellent support in lessons for pupils who need it. On occasion, teaching is satisfactory when pupils spend too much time sitting on the carpet working on introductory tasks, which restricts the time they have to work on their main task or to consolidate their learning at the end of the lesson.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

Significant elements of the school's curriculum are exemplary. It serves all learners very well and enables them to make outstanding progress in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. The work pupils do is very well planned and activities are varied with enough time given to all subjects. Computers are used effectively to enliven and support pupils' learning. The school has worked successfully to establish links between different subjects and provide pupils with increasing opportunities to write in several subjects. The creative links between subjects are good and developing as the IPC is being embedded. The curriculum is suitably adapted so that pupils who have English as an additional language can access it fully. An active programme

for gifted or talented pupils is successfully linked to local secondary schools. Pupils enjoy a wide range of clubs and an excellent programme of activities and visits that enrich the curriculum outstandingly well. The school very effectively promotes pupils' personal, social and health and citizenship education through lessons and the elected school council.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Parents feel strongly that staff take exceptionally good care of their children and that they praise their achievements, and inspectors agree. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and pupils with speech and language needs is outstanding owing to excellent pastoral care and academic guidance, highly personalised learning and focused support. Excellent links with outside agencies and parents, enables these pupils to participate fully in school life. Academic progress is tracked rigorously and teachers use the information they have about pupils to set challenging personal, literacy and numeracy targets. Pupils know and understand their targets and are clear that these 'help to remind you of what you need to do to get better'. As new assessment systems are being put in place in IPC subjects, the academic guidance given to pupils in these subjects is good but not as rigorous as in literacy and numeracy. Whilst most marking is of excellent quality and shows pupils exactly how to improve, there are pockets of satisfactory marking that does not sufficiently develop pupils' understanding of what to do next to improve. Marking in Year 6 is outstandingly skilful in extending pupils' learning by focusing sharply on the next steps that will lead them to exceed their targets. The school has robust systems for safeguarding children, recruiting staff and ensuring health and safety. It monitors attendance and punctuality rigorously and works very hard to develop regular patterns of attendance. Excellent induction arrangements enable pupils to settle quickly into school life. Pupils experience a smooth transition to their next stage of education owing to very good links with other schools.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The headteacher's excellent leadership is very well supported by the senior leaders and the coordinator for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Staff make excellent use of exceptionally challenging targets to raise standards, both at school and pupil level. Subject leaders fulfil their role well and are developing further their monitoring skills, particularly in IPC subjects. The school's evaluation of its performance is accurate and leads to sharp identification of priorities. The school development plan has improved in clarity since the last inspection and governors use it well to support and challenge the school. Whilst many governors demonstrate outstanding commitment to their roles and support the school's work very well through frequent visits, a small minority fulfil their responsibilities with less regularity. The school successfully brings parents and children of diverse backgrounds together through a very broad range of family learning opportunities. Funding is used very effectively to develop teaching expertise, ICT resources and the outdoor environment. The school is rightly acknowledged by outside agencies and parents as taking a strong lead locally to promote community cohesion and remove barriers to learning. For example, the wide-ranging family learning opportunities it provides have a high take-up from families of diverse cultural, faith and economic backgrounds, which brings communities together very successfully and impacts

very positively on pupils' standards. Links with the global community are good and developing further through links with IPC schools worldwide.

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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 capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	2
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	2
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	2
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	2

Achievement and standards

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

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are 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
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

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?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

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	2
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 eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	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	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**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

11 March 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downfield School, Cheshunt, EN8 8SS

Thank you for being so helpful and making us feel so welcome when we visited your school recently. I am writing to let you know what we found out.

We think that you go to an outstanding school and we understand why so many of you like everything about it. You achieve extremely well and reach above average standards by the time you leave at the end of Year 6. It was very pleasing to hear how much you like coming to school and enjoy learning. You are confident, friendly, polite and considerate. You behave outstandingly well and you know a lot about keeping healthy, fit and safe. You enjoy excellent relationships with others based on mutual respect. The teaching is good and staff take exceptionally good care of you and keep you very safe. The school teaches you an outstanding curriculum and there are plenty of things to do in the after-school clubs and other activities to help you develop a broad range of skills and pursue new interests. Members of the school council and the eco-committee take their responsibilities seriously, as do those who help in other ways. You make a very good contribution to the life of the school and the local community.

We have asked your teachers and senior leaders to monitor your progress in all subjects of the International Primary Curriculum as well as they do it in English, mathematics and science. We have also have asked the Nursery and Reception staff to make fuller use of the outdoor areas, especially to help young children make more sense of the world around them.

Mrs Hurrion, the staff, governors and your parents want the school to become even better and we hope you will play your part by continuing to work hard and doing your best.

I wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Michele Messaoudi

Lead inspector