

Inspection of a good school: Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

Church Road, Ramsden Heath, Billericay, Essex CM11 1NU

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 September 2021

Outcome

Downham Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils say the adults at this school are 'amazing' and that pupils are 'kind and respectful'. They say it feels like being part of a family. Older and younger pupils get along well. Strong relationships between pupils exist across the school.

Pupils feel safe. They enjoy coming to school and are supportive of each other. If they were lonely at playtime, they are confident that another pupil would come and ask them to play.

Pupils have been taught about bullying. They know that there can be different types of bullying but say it does not happen at their school. If anything did ever happen that worried them, they are certain that an adult would help quickly.

Staff have high expectations for pupils. Pupils are expected to behave well and they do. They listen well in lessons, let others learn without disruption and help create a positive, calm environment.

Pupils reflect the school vision of 'WINGS'. They are considerate of each other and like to make sure everyone is included. They also celebrate each other's success and want to do their very best.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have recently made some changes to the curriculum. These changes have been carefully considered and chosen to make the curriculum even better. Those in charge of subjects think carefully about what and how pupils will learn. Leaders are committed to ensuring that all groups of pupils have access to a broad, relevant and exciting curriculum.

Leaders make sure that staff are appropriately trained to deliver the curriculum well. Pupils benefit from whole-school approaches to teaching. For example, staff use consistent language and actions to teach pupils to read. In French, staff focus on speaking and listening in Years 3 and 4, and developing writing skills with the older pupils.

Some of leaders' recent improvements have not yet been used by teachers. While the changes are ambitious in design, leaders have not at this stage had the opportunity to ensure they work as well as intended.

Leaders are supportive of staff. They think carefully about staff's well-being. They understand that a happy, well-supported staff team directly benefits the pupils. Leaders give teachers time to check pupils' work and plan what to teach next. Teachers are not hindered by unnecessary, burdensome administrative tasks. Teachers check how well pupils have learned and adapt their teaching daily.

Leaders use the motto 'keep up, not catch up'. They make sure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and disadvantaged pupils, do not get left behind. For example, if a pupil is finding reading more of a challenge, immediate support is put in place. The difficulty is quickly addressed so pupils can move on confidently with their reading.

Pupils new to reading receive an intensive, high-quality reading curriculum. The curriculum makes sure that pupils gain knowledge quickly. Pupils practise and revisit the sounds that letters make so they can become fluent, confident readers.

Behaviour is exemplary. Pupils learn in calm, purposeful classrooms without any disruption. Around school, pupils conduct themselves impeccably. They are considerate of each other and show respect towards staff.

Pupils enjoy learning. Teachers make it fun and exciting. Pupils share a collective responsibility for success. They want everyone to do well.

Leaders provide a range of activities beyond the school curriculum. Pupils appreciate the opportunities that are on offer. The curriculum encourages pupils to debate and discuss what they are learning. In classrooms, there is frequently a buzz of meaningful chat where groups talk about the subject they are learning. This teaches pupils how to talk and listen respectfully to others who may have a different opinion.

Governance is a strength of the school. Governors share the vision of senior leaders and play an important role in the life of the school. They provide strategic support by, for example, ensuring money is spent effectively. They have also supported the school with recent changes at senior leadership level. This has included facilitating the appointment of co-headteachers in liaison with the local authority.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide appropriate training so all staff know how to identify any pupil who may be at risk of abuse or harm. All staff know that safeguarding is their responsibility. They are informed by senior leaders of any changes to safeguarding legislation and of current priorities. They are vigilant about these.

Leaders work in close partnership with external agencies so that pupils receive the support they require. Leaders, including governors, make sure that pupils are kept safe by ensuring that any reported incident is recorded and monitored. The designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs) are alerted immediately via the school's reporting system if there is a concern. Leaders can then act swiftly if required or monitor the situation. Staff know what and how to report to DSLs.

The named safeguarding governor provides quality assurance to the work of the DSLs, by checking records and registers.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have made some changes to the curriculum. Some aspects of the curriculum are not fully embedded across the school. Leaders need to make sure that all aspects of the curriculum are fully implemented and their impact checked.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good on 28 and 29 June 2016.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	115119
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10193974
Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Linda Wright
Headteacher	Susan Crace & Gill Marion
Website	www.downhamschool.org
Date of previous inspection	28 and 29 June 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized primary school.
- The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan is in line with the national average.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in the evaluation of the school.
- The inspector did deep dives in the following subjects: early reading, mathematics and French. The inspector spoke to leaders about the curriculum and met with teachers from the lessons visited. The inspector looked at pupils' work and spoke to pupils.
- The inspector listened to a range of pupils read from different year groups.
- The inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator and members of the local governing body, as well as speaking to a representative from the local authority.
- The inspector looked at the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks and spoke to leaders, teachers, governors and pupils about safeguarding.

- The inspector considered the 83 responses made by parents to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including 83 free-text responses. The inspector also considered the 23 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

David Milligan, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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