

Inspection of The Downs Primary School and Nursery

The Hides, Harlow, Essex CM20 3RB

Inspection dates:	20 and 21 May 2025
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

The headteacher of this school is Rob Calderwood. This school is part of The Passmores Co-operative Learning Community, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Vic Goddard and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Neil Lawson. There is also an executive headteacher, Emma Bloomfield, who is responsible for this school and three others.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who attend The Downs Primary School and Nursery are polite and respectful. Staff model these qualities effectively so that pupils respond positively to what is expected of them. Staff know pupils well and build positive relationships. This helps pupils to feel safe and happy.

The school has high expectations of pupils' behaviour and learning. Pupils study a broad and balanced curriculum. Staff make learning interesting for pupils. Pupils are encouraged to work hard. They are generally attentive and engaged in their learning. This helps them to achieve. Pupils behave well in lessons and during social times. They play well together in the playground using the range of games and activities on offer. Playleaders support younger pupils to play games appropriately.

Pupils have a deep understanding of the diverse world they live in. They know how they can make a positive contribution to society. Pupils have a range of leadership roles and responsibilities such as house captains, play leaders and subject ambassadors. The school has ensured these roles are meaningful. This allows pupils to have a positive impact in the areas they lead.

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

The school has developed a coherently planned, broad and balanced curriculum. It has identified the key knowledge and skills pupils need to learn from early years to Year 6. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. Teachers present information in clear and concise ways. Pupils have regular opportunities to revisit prior learning. This supports teachers to identify gaps in learning and enables pupils to retain more knowledge over time.

A significant number of pupils join the school mid year. This means they do not benefit from studying the school's curriculum from the start of their formal education. Staff work hard to resolve this issue, so that pupils achieve from their starting points at the school. Therefore, outcomes in national tests for 2024 did not accurately reflect the education this school provides.

The school has prioritised reading. Consistent, high-quality phonics teaching means that pupils quickly learn to read. The school regularly checks what pupils know and remember. It uses this information to plan effective reading interventions. Consequently, pupils can keep up and catch up with their phonics learning.

The school ensures that pupils are involved in all parts of school life. It has taken swift action to improve the provision and support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has a clear vision and unwavering drive for all pupils to have the support they need. However, for some pupils, their individual plans do not always reflect the precise support they need in their learning.

Children in the Nursery get off to a good start. Staff ensure that the classroom and outdoor areas are calm, engaging and interesting. This helps children to learn the early

years curriculum effectively and be ready for the Reception Year. In the Reception classes there is a well-planned curriculum in place. However, sometimes staff's expectations are not high enough. This means that, occasionally, children lose focus and do not learn as much as they could.

Typically, pupils attend regularly. A significant number of pupils join the school part way through the year. This can make identifying barriers to better attendance challenging. However, the school has robust systems to check pupils' attendance and support families where attendance is a concern. Where this is done, pupils attend more regularly over time.

The school is rightly proud of the wider opportunities offered to pupils, for example bringing the community together to celebrate Victory in Europe day, taking pupils to sing, and welcoming visitors, such as the local rabbi. Trips, visits, assemblies and whole-school themed events support the enrichment of the curriculum. The school provides ample opportunities to develop well-rounded pupils.

School and trust leaders, the local governing body and external advisers have been integral to the rapid progress of the school. Governors fulfil their statutory duties with fidelity. They work collaboratively with the school, regularly reflecting and evaluating their work. This supports school leaders and holds them to account.

The school engages effectively with staff and parents. For example, it provides useful and timely training to help staff improve. Useful strategies to manage well-being and workload are appreciated by staff, who say they value being part of the school's strong community. Similarly, regular engagement and communication means that parents and carers recognise the strength of the school and are rightly positive about their children's experiences.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's approach to supporting pupils with SEND is not consistently effective, because pupils' individual plans do not reflect their needs well enough. This means that pupils with SEND are not supported consistently well in lessons. The school should ensure that the individual plans for pupils with SEND identify their needs precisely so that staff can meet them consistently in lessons.
- Occasionally, the expectations of staff when implementing the early years curriculum could be higher. This means that sometimes children are not as engaged in their learning as they should be. The school should ensure that staff have consistently high

expectations of children when learning in the early years so that children achieve even better.

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.

Further information

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

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146157
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10378580
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	437
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Neil Lawson
CEO of the trust	Vic Goddard
Headteacher	Rob Calderwood
Website	www.downsschool.com
Dates of previous inspection	10 and 11 January 2023, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There is before-school childcare for pupils attending the school. It is run by school staff and managed by school leaders.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with leaders, including the chief executive officer, executive headteacher, headteacher, deputy headteacher, early years lead, special educational needs coordinator, Passmores Co-operative Learning Community strategic lead for early years, Passmores Co-operative Learning Community strategic lead for special educational needs, the chair of the local governing board, three governors and a school improvement adviser engaged by trust leaders.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, physical education and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited sample lessons, spoke to staff, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. The lead inspector also listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors also looked at some foundation subject books from Year 6 pupils and talked to the pupils about their learning.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors reviewed a range of other school documentation and policies, including minutes of trust board and local governing board minutes, the school self-evaluation, the school development plan and external visit notes.
- To gather views, inspectors spent time observing and speaking to pupils.
- Inspectors took account of responses to the staff and pupil surveys, as well as the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Nina Kemp, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Rachel Kirk	Ofsted Inspector
Sally Nutman	Ofsted Inspector

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