

Inspection of Downs Infant School

Ditchling Road, Brighton, East Sussex BN1 6JA

Inspection dates:	24 and 25 September 2024
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

Children learn and play together very happily at this warm and nurturing infant school. The school takes great care to get to know each child and their family. Parents and carers are unanimously positive about the school. Every pupil feels valued and welcomed in the school community. The school designs wider opportunities, such as sports day, with the needs of every pupil in mind. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One parent described the school as a 'beacon of inclusivity'.

Most pupils achieve well academically. However, the school recognises there is more to do in some areas of the curriculum to ensure success for every child. The school has high expectations for behaviour. All pupils learn about their emotions. They are taught how to stay regulated so that they are 'ready, respectful and safe'. Pupils are kind and value difference and diversity. When pupils need additional support to manage their behaviour, the school plans this carefully and effectively.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Most attend very well. A small number have, over time, attended less well. The school has worked hard to build positive and nurturing relationships with the families of these pupils. Though this work is at an early stage, it has already had a very positive impact on the attendance of individual pupils.

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

The school has developed the curriculum very carefully, with the needs of young children at the heart of its decision-making. Staff help all children to settle happily into Reception. Communication and language development is a top priority from the moment children join the school. Reception staff have been carefully trained so that they know how to extend children's language and vocabulary. Children are provided with ongoing opportunities to listen to and practise retelling stories. However, children do not always get enough time to practise some key parts of the curriculum, including spelling and handwriting. The school is not always quick enough to identify when younger children fall behind in key areas of the curriculum. This has an effect on some children's writing fluency and their wider ability to access the curriculum as they move into Year 1.

Those pupils who have acquired all the necessary foundational knowledge in early years typically make strong progress through the school's curriculum. In a number of subjects, such as physical education (PE), pupils learn the curriculum very well. Some pupils may have lower starting points or fall behind. Typically, when this happens, teachers check what pupils know and identify specific gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teaching is then targeted to address these gaps and help pupils make progress through the planned curriculum. The school is very inclusive of all pupils, including pupils with SEND. However, teachers do not adapt the curriculum consistently well to ensure that pupils with SEND achieve the best possible academic outcomes. The school is in the process of addressing this.

There is a strong culture of reading across the school. In the summer term, before children join Reception, they are invited to attend a weekly story session in the school's

library. Reading aloud plays a vital role every school day. The school uses a phonics programme to support pupils to learn to read. Pupils learn how to decode words in lessons. They have opportunities to apply the phonics they have learned to reading stories. However, some staff have less expertise in the teaching of reading. As a result, not all pupils develop their reading fluency as quickly as they might.

The school has a very clear vision for a personal development programme that enables pupils to learn about themselves so that they can develop into positive members of the school community. The curriculum for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is comprehensive. Pupils learn about regulating their emotions. In this way, pupils are supported to recognise when they might be becoming overexcited, for example, and how to calm themselves down. The school ensures that children in all year groups have ample opportunity for high-quality play during the school day. This begins in early years but continues through key stage 1. Play is very carefully resourced so that pupils can continue to develop in areas such as physical development. Pupils enjoy the clubs on offer at the school, including 'Rainbow Club', which is the school's newly opened wraparound care.

Pupils behave very well in class. The school is careful to build on the curiosity that children develop in Reception. It provides time during the school day for pupils in key stage 1 to direct their own learning. This is linked to what they have been learning about with their teacher. Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-control and motivation at these times. Between lessons, some pupils find it harder to move around the building sensibly. At times, staff have to ask pupils more than once to follow an instruction.

The school is determined that every pupil gets the support they need to achieve the best possible outcomes. Staff feel very well supported through a careful programme of professional development. The school's governing body has a wide range of expertise that enables them to carry out their roles effectively.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff lack the expertise they need to support the weakest readers, including those with SEND. This slows the rate at which these pupils develop their reading fluency. The school should ensure that all staff who support pupils at the early stages of learning to read have the training and expertise they need.
- The school does not consistently intervene quickly enough when pupils, including pupils with SEND, are not learning key foundational knowledge and skills. These pupils find it harder to keep up with the expectations of the curriculum over time and are not as well prepared for their next steps. The school should ensure that it spots children who are falling behind quickly and provides effective support.

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	114367
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10341314
Type of school	Infant
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4 to 7
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	321
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Tony Fallowfield
Headteacher	Lisa Walker
Website	www.downsinf.brighton-hove.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	26 and 27 June 2013, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The governing body appointed an interim headteacher in January 2024, who was made substantive headteacher in March 2024.
- The school appointed a new chair of governors in September 2022.
- The school operates before- and after-school care for pupils.
- The school does not use any 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.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the assistant headteacher and the special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector met members of the governing body, including the chair of governors. The lead inspector discussed the school with a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science and PE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils’ work. For the early reading deep dive, the lead inspector listened to a sample of pupils reading. Inspectors discussed the curriculum for early years with leaders. They also reviewed the curriculum in other subjects and looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- Inspectors considered pupils’ behaviour and attitudes throughout the inspection. They discussed the school’s analysis of records relating to behaviour and attendance with leaders.
- Inspectors considered personal development through all deep dives. They met with leaders to discuss the school’s personal development programme, including the curriculum for PSHE and relationships education. Inspectors talked to pupils about PSHE and other aspects of the school’s personal development programme.
- 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.
- Inspectors spoke to parents at the school gate and considered the views of 201 parents who responded to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View. They also considered responses to the online surveys for staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

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His Majesty’s Inspector

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