

Downlands Community School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	126087
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	381186
Inspection dates	19–20 January 2012
Lead inspector	Christine Jones HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1032
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs D Hunt
Headteacher	Mrs R Hetherton
Date of previous school inspection	30 November 2006
School address	Dale Avenue Hassocks West Sussex BN6 8LP
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Age group	11–16
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Introduction

Inspection team

Christine Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector

Grace Marriott

Additional inspector

Haydn Evans

Additional inspector

Howard Dodd

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 27 teachers teaching 27 lessons, of which four were joint observations with members of the senior team. In addition, inspectors made short visits to 11 lessons where students were receiving extra support. Meetings were held with groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body and other governors as well as school staff, including senior and middle managers. The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a number of documents, including the school development plan, the safeguarding and equality policies, and minutes of the governing body meetings. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. Also, they analysed 399 questionnaires returned by parents and carers and others completed by students and staff.

Information about the school

This school is larger than the average-sized secondary school. It is a non-selective school serving the local area. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is well below average. Most students are from White British backgrounds and the proportions of students from minority ethnic groups or who speak English as an additional language are very small. The proportions of students with special educational needs and of those with a statement of special educational needs are in line with the national average.

The school population is very stable, with the proportion of students entering or leaving the school other than at the usual times below the national average for secondary schools. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has taken up post and very few other staff changes have taken place. The school meets the current floor standard.

The school has gained a number of awards including Eco school status 'Green-Flag' award, International School status and Travel Mark 2. The school received re-designation for specialist status in science and mathematics in July 2010. The school and its sports complex are used extensively for local community activities.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- Downlands is a good school that is determined to keep improving and make sure that all students achieve as well as they can. The students, parents and carers have positive views of the school and would recommend it to others. Students reach high standards and, in 2011, almost three quarters of Year 11 gained five or more A*-C grades at GCSE including English and mathematics. Students make good progress overall. While progress in English is outstanding, students do not achieve as well in mathematics. Overall, standards in mathematics are high, but some students, particularly those of middle and higher ability, do not make the progress they should.
- Teaching in the majority of lessons is good, with some that is outstanding. In the outstanding lessons, students are excited by their learning, know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students do not make as much progress when teachers do not plan well enough to meet the different learning needs of the students. Assessment is not always used well enough to give students enough feedback on how to improve their work. The school provides very good individual support for disabled students and those with special educational needs and these students make good progress.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. In their responses to the inspection questionnaires, students, as well as parents and carers, were confident that behaviour around the school was good. A small minority of parents and carers expressed concerns that their children's lessons were disrupted by bad behaviour. Evidence from inspection lesson observations did not support this view beyond occasional examples of inattention and chatting.
- The headteacher and senior staff know the school's strengths and areas for improvement. They use performance management well to support teachers in developing their practice. This is closely monitored and linked to outcomes for students to keep a strong focus on improving achievement. The governing body is very supportive of the school and the senior leadership.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Ensure all students make outstanding progress in mathematics through:
 - matching tasks in lessons more closely to the needs and abilities of the students
 - reinforcing learning through rigorous marking and assessment of students' work so that they understand clearly the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve.
- Improve the use of assessment by teachers in all subjects through:
 - disseminating the outstanding strategies used by some teachers to all staff
 - monitoring of the use of assessment by teachers closely to ensure consistency of experience for students both during individual lessons and over time.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students enter the school with standards that are above those found nationally and they make good progress to reach above average standards at GCSE. In 2011, the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades at GCSE, including English and mathematics, was the highest at the school for the last three years and was well above national outcomes.

Students' progress is good overall and improving. This includes the small numbers of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those from minority ethnic groups. Parents and carers were largely happy with the progress their children make in the school, with very few expressing any concerns. Inspection evidence showed that students make the most progress in lessons where they are given every opportunity to think issues through for themselves and engage with a variety of interesting and stimulating activities. The best learning was seen when teachers made the aims of the lesson very clear to the students and these aims underpinned the learning throughout the lesson. Students were clear about what they were going to learn and, at the end of the lesson, both the teacher and students could judge how successful the learning had been. This process is supported by regular and effective use of assessment information both by teachers and students as part of everyday teaching and learning practices.

Disabled students and those with special educational needs achieve at least as well as their peers. They made good progress in the lessons observed due to the good-quality targeted support they received. In many lessons, individual targets were used well to ensure these students made good progress, especially where class teachers had planned for appropriate use of learning support assistants.

Quality of teaching

The quality of teaching is good overall and improving. Parents and carers agreed that their children are taught well at this school. Outstanding lessons, some of which

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were observed during the inspection, are characterised by a fast pace that engages the students, with no opportunities for them to lose interest or drift off task. The best lessons are focused sharply on learning driven by clear, explicit and shared objectives. All students, including those with special educational needs, are fully involved and participating in the learning activities planned to meet their individual needs. Relationships between teachers and their students are excellent, with good humour and mutual respect evident. Social and moral development is promoted through well-structured group work and opportunities for students to discuss their own ideas. Learning is consolidated through rigorous curriculum planning that ensures continuity and creates strong links between individual lessons. Curriculum planning capitalises also on the school's international school status to promote students' spiritual and cultural development.

Where the teaching observed by inspectors was no better than satisfactory, learning is over-directed by the teachers, who talk too much and allow activities, for example watching a video, to go on for too long. The pace of these lessons is too slow and students lose interest, although most still try to behave as well as they can. These lessons do not give students enough opportunities to develop key skills such as interpreting and analysing information. Planning in these lessons does not cover the needs of students in the class with a range of different abilities, as was seen in some mathematics lessons.

Evidence gathered from a review of some of the students' exercise books across a range of subjects showed that students' work is usually marked frequently and regularly. This was not always the case, for example in mathematics, where some books had not been marked for far too long. The quality of feedback given to the students regarding the standards they are reaching and how to improve was variable across different teachers and subjects, including mathematics. There are some examples of outstanding assessment practice that is embedded into curriculum and lesson planning, for example in child development. In this subject, grade and assessment criteria are clear and unambiguous. Students and teachers using this information could readily assess performance and know how to improve.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are confident and happy, both around the school and in lessons. They get on well with each other and with their teachers. Students are certain that they feel very safe in school and that any issues they might have are dealt with quickly. For example, a group of Year 7 students were clearly happy and felt well cared for. They said the school had taken a lot of trouble to help them settle in and that the transition from their primary schools was 'very smooth'. The inspection found little evidence to support the concerns about behaviour in lessons raised by a small minority of parents and carers. The students who were interviewed indicated that poor behaviour or low-level disruption in lessons were not a major problem and did not disrupt their learning.

Potentially vulnerable students are supported well by the school. The work of the

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behaviour learning mentor has made an outstanding contribution to supporting those students identified as needing support with developing their social skills. Students enjoy coming to school, as evidenced by their attendance, which is above average, and their punctual arrival to school and lessons. Exclusions are rare and the school works hard to support those students who move to Downlands from other schools where they may have had problems. Incidents of bullying are unusual and students say it is not a problem in the school. Students are confident that, where bullying does occur, it is dealt with promptly by staff. Students are aware of the different forms bullying may take and understand how this may affect them. They have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and of what might constitute an unsafe situation.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, senior leadership team and staff have focused very successfully on the areas for development identified at the previous inspection. Attainment has improved and students are making better progress. A good approach to monitoring the quality of teaching and learning gives the senior leadership team a largely accurate view of strengths and weaknesses. Performance management of teachers is linked closely to their professional development and this is having a good impact on improving the quality of teaching in many subjects. The school has successfully established 'learning communities' through which staff training can focus on identified priorities. This training is aimed at improving the quality of teaching so that students have a consistent experience in all lessons. Senior leaders are well aware that there is potential for more effective dissemination of the best practice in teachers' use of assessment, as well as more focused monitoring of this aspect to ensure greater consistency across teaching groups.

The school takes very good care of the students. Robust procedures are in place to ensure their safety and all current safeguarding requirements are met. Potentially vulnerable students are well supported and learning mentors have had a significant impact on improving their achievement. The good curriculum is successful in meeting a wide range of students' needs and interests. Many staff contributed to the full review of the curriculum that took place in 2010. As a result, Key Stage 3 is now covered in two years, allowing scope for a wider range of subjects and courses to be introduced into Key Stage 4. Curriculum planning has a strong emphasis on developing resilience and independence in learners and this makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is promoted further by other aspects of the school, such as its international school status and the extensive role of the school in the local community.

The governing body has a very positive relationship with the school and its input is appreciated, especially by the senior leadership team. It is effective in holding the school to account and challenging the senior leadership team about students' achievement. Its work is supported by a strong committee structure that covers all aspects of school organisation and school improvement. The close links and good communication between school staff and the governing body secure a firm

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commitment to equal opportunities and ensure that any form of discrimination, should it arise, is tackled promptly. Students work with the governing body also, particularly through the very successful 'environmental working party committee'. This meets twice a term and includes governors and members of the senior leadership team, along with 20 students from all year groups. The success of its work was acknowledged through the recent award of the Eco-Schools 'Green Flag'. The school is determined that all students will achieve as well as they can and this drive to ensure all students reach their full potential secures good capacity for improvement.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	46	46	8	0
Primary schools	8	47	40	5
Secondary schools	14	38	40	8
Special schools	28	48	20	4
Pupil referral units	15	50	29	5
All schools	11	46	38	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 August 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



23 January 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Downlands Community School, Hassocks BN6 8LP

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed meeting you and being in your lessons. We were impressed with the pride you take in your school. This letter is to tell you what we found.

- Downlands is a good and improving school.
- Your achievement is good; you make good progress and reach high standards by the end of Year 11. You make better progress in English than in mathematics.
- Many of your teachers plan lessons that keep you interested and help you to learn successfully. Some teachers do not always plan lessons that are suitable for your needs or tell you enough about the standard of your work and how to improve.
- You tell us you feel very safe in school and learn a lot in your lessons when they are lively and interesting. You enjoy school, attend regularly and on time.
- You told us that bullying is not a problem in your school and, on the rare occasions where it does happen, you know what to do and that the school will deal with the issue promptly
- You behave well in lessons and around the school although some of you can talk too much in lessons where teachers let the tasks go on for too long.
- The good curriculum gives you many opportunities to take interesting courses, especially in Key Stage 4.
- The headteacher and her staff are committed to making sure you are always well cared for and able to fulfil your potential.

We have asked the school to look at the following areas to help you improve:

- ensuring you make as much progress in mathematics as in your other subjects by planning lessons that are suitable for your needs and giving you clear advice in your books on how to improve your work.
- making sure all teachers make good use of assessment to tell you how well you are doing and how you can reach higher standards.

You can help by listening to your teachers and acting on the advice they give you.

Good luck and best wishes for the future,
Christine Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector (on behalf of the inspection team)

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