

Ofsted  
Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234  
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Mrs Georgina Keily-Theobald  
Headteacher  
Downland School  
Downlands Road  
Devizes  
Wiltshire  
SN10 5EF

Dear Mrs Keily-Theobald

### **Short inspection of Downland School**

Following my visit to the school on 19 March 2019 with Gill Hickling, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in October 2014.

### **This school continues to be good.**

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

You ensure that the school's aim to help pupils to 'aspire, achieve and thrive' is at the heart of all you do. You continually challenge yourself and your staff team to look for ways to improve aspects of the school. You are supported well by governors. They are rigorous, using the information that you provide to look for trends, patterns or weaknesses to appropriately challenge you and your leadership team.

Because of this strong leadership, expectations are high. Pupils appreciate the solid subject knowledge that their teachers share with them. Lessons are interesting and challenging. Staff are skilled at helping pupils to grow in confidence and self-esteem. As a result, pupils become increasingly resilient and aspirational for their future.

You and your staff team consider every part of the school day as a chance to develop new skills. Breaks and lunchtimes are full of positive interactions between pupils and staff. Everyone gets involved and there is lots to do, whether it's scooters, table tennis or basketball. Snack and mealtimes are organised very well. Staff help pupils to learn to look after themselves, for example in trying new and healthy food.

These social times also help pupils to grow their social skills and to make

meaningful friendships. Pupils are proud to be at the school and there is a strong sense of belonging and achievement. Younger pupils describe how they look up to older pupils for guidance.

At the previous inspection, the school was asked to ensure that there were more opportunities for staff to share their practice. Local leaders and an adviser commissioned by the local authority make frequent checks on the quality of teaching and learning. You use information from these visits, alongside your leadership team's monitoring, to identify the professional development needs of staff. All staff who expressed a view agreed that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support their improvement.

### **Safeguarding is effective.**

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. Pupils say that they feel safe and any bullying is quickly sorted out by staff. Leaders have ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Daily staff briefings help to keep safeguarding high on the agenda for everyone. Staff know pupils very well and any concerns are reported and followed up rigorously. Close partnership working with parents ensures that should pupils have long periods of absence, staff are able to keep in contact and provide additional support as needed. Recruitment processes are secure, and the governor who has responsibility for safeguarding makes frequent visits to check through the processes.

### **Inspection findings**

- During the inspection, we looked at your work to ensure that pupils attend and behave well. Improving attendance is a focus in the school improvement plan as, for some pupils, attendance issues remain a key barrier to moving forward. Many pupils arrive at the school with a previous pattern of high absence. You use a wide variety of strategies to engage with pupils and their families. Pupils appreciate the rewards and incentives. You can show successes where pupils' anxieties have been reduced and improvements have been made to their attendance as a result.
- Leaders analyse attendance patterns across the school and this helps those with very poor attendance to be identified and supported. However, actions to target attendance which have been agreed with staff for pupils are not checked often enough, and therefore it is not clear whether pupils are improving their attendance quickly enough.
- While in school, pupils generally engage well with activities during lessons. Engagement during the school day has been a focus this year and you can show that improvements have been made. However, there remain some pupils who still choose to leave their lessons occasionally. Pupils are observed by staff and are therefore kept safe during these periods, but it does mean that learning time is lost.
- You promote a positive, nurturing approach which emphasises tolerance, understanding and listening to pupils. 'The Downland Way' describes in detail to staff how to put this philosophy into practice. You and your leadership team act

as role models and use every opportunity throughout the day to reinforce the simple and clearly defined rules and limits. As a result, fewer pupils have behaviour incidents that result in exclusions than in previous years.

- We explored how effectively the curriculum, particularly for reading and writing, is planned to meet the needs of pupils. The curriculum is planned carefully to ensure that learning is relevant, interesting and active. Learning happens outside as well as inside school, with frequent trips as well as learning in the forest school. Whenever possible, pupils study accredited courses that suit their interests and abilities. For the past two years, all pupils leaving the school at Year 11 have moved on to successful education, training or employment.
- Pupils make progress and gain skills in reading and writing, as seen in their reading assessments and the writing in their English books. However, there are too few opportunities to apply and improve their reading and writing skills in other subjects. Therefore, some pupils do not reach the higher standards of which they are capable.

### **Next steps for the school**

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- pupils are expected to use and apply their reading and writing skills across subjects more often
- there is a more robust approach to improving attendance for individual pupils
- work to maximise pupils' engagement during lessons continues.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wiltshire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

### **Information about the inspection**

We agreed the areas to focus on during the inspection. Both inspectors observed learning across the school alongside senior leaders. Inspectors also observed the start of the day, breaks and lunchtime. We had several meetings with senior leaders, and together we looked at a sample of pupils' work and their learning plans. We met with small groups of pupils to gather their views. We also spoke to a small number of parents on the telephone and took the seven views on Parent View into account. We talked informally with staff and considered the 21 views provided by staff on an online survey.

An inspector met with the school improvement partner who supports the school, and spoke to a representative from the local authority. There was also a meeting with the chair and vice-chair of the governing body. Inspectors checked safeguarding procedures, including the recruitment of staff. A range of school documents was looked at, including the school development plan, assessment information and leaders' analysis of attendance and behaviour.