



Downlands Community School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 126087
Local Authority West Sussex
Inspection number 293464
Inspection date 30 November 2006
Reporting inspector Jacqueline White HMI

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

| | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Type of school | Secondary | School address | Dale Avenue |
| School category | Community | | Hassocks |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 | | BN6 8LP |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | Telephone number | 01273 845892 |
| Number on roll (school) | 969 | Fax number | 01273 846358 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body | Chair | Di Hunt |
| | | Headteacher | Walter Clarke |
| Date of previous school inspection | 1 March 2002 | | |

| | | |
|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Age group | Inspection date | Inspection number |
| 11–16 | 30 November 2006 | 293464 |

© Crown copyright 2006

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Downlands Community School is an average-sized, very settled school with specialist status in science. It is oversubscribed and benefits from strong parental support. Most students are from White British backgrounds and very few have English as an additional language. In comparison to the national context, most students' economic circumstances can be described as broadly average. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below average, as is the percentage with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Key for inspection grades

| | |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding |
| Grade 2 | Good |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate |

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Downlands Community School provides a good education for its students. It is a vibrant place of learning where students enjoy and make the most of the opportunities available to them. Outstanding personal development helps students to mature as citizens with a sense of responsibility for the wider community. Staff have high expectations for all students and encourage a culture of success. There is a drive to raise standards and ensure that students achieve their potential. Good teaching is based on strong relationships. Teachers know students well and most use assessment information effectively to plan lessons. However, expertise in evaluating and building on students' progress in lessons is not shared by all teachers and teaching assistants. Students are set challenging targets and in Years 10 and 11 they are very clear about what needs to be done to improve. Some younger students are not so confident. Nearly all students make good progress and reach standards that are above average by the time they reach Year 11. The views of parents, students and other stakeholders are regularly sought and influence developments within the school. For example, cycle routes are being identified to improve safety to and from school. Student attitudes are very positive, as demonstrated in their very good attendance and eagerness to take part in the excellent range of extra activities offered. One parent commented 'My children can't wait to get to school. They enjoy going and get lots out of it.' Students are given the confidence to express their individuality. Good care, guidance and support ensure they feel valued and have a strong sense of belonging. The good curriculum is flexible and tailored to students' needs. Extended provision which includes breakfast and homework clubs enables students, many of whom have to travel long distances to school, to maximise learning time. The school's specialism in science contributes to the high quality of provision. Students are very well prepared for life beyond school and the vast majority make a successful transition into the world of work, further training or higher education. Leadership and management are good. The very good leadership of the headteacher is complemented by an effective senior team that is fully involved in, and accountable for, the implementation of the school improvement plan. The consistency of subject and pastoral leaders adds to the good capacity to improve. Together, leaders set a clear direction for the school. Evaluation of performance is accurate in nearly all instances. The established systems for reviewing the work of the school identify the right priorities and actions taken to resolve any problems are effective. However, they are not always sufficiently preventative. Appropriate plans to put lesson observations at the heart of strategies to improve teaching practice from good to outstanding will counteract this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that the system for setting targets is as well established in Key Stage 3 as it is in Key Stage 4 so that all students receive clear guidance about what they need to do to improve.
- Develop teachers' and teaching assistants' expertise in evaluating and building on students' progress in lessons.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

When they join school at the age of 11, students' primary test scores are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, the proportion of students gaining Level 5 or more is above average in English, mathematics and science. Provisional results for 2006 show a particularly strong performance and results in English have improved significantly compared to 2005. National data for 2005 shows that students made good progress from their starting points in mathematics and science, but satisfactory progress in English. A small number of students who joined the school with low levels of prior attainment did not make as much progress as their peers. The unvalidated 2006 results indicate good progress in all three core subjects. GCSE results have been consistently above average for a number of years. The proportion of students gaining 5 A* - C grades including English and mathematics is well above the national average and reflects the school's commitment to providing students with the best possible foundations for future study or employment. In 2006, provisional results show that, whilst the percentage of students gaining 5*A - C was below the school's targets, the overall proportion of A and A* grades gained in the school was well above average.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

The personal development of students is outstanding and reflects the school's aim to provide an all-round education. A real strength is the wide range of extra activities on offer, including sport, music and drama, with a very high proportion of students participating. The school is highly successful in developing positive attitudes towards sport and exercise, both now and for the future. Healthy lifestyle initiatives have been strongly supported by students and parents. A few students and parents commented that the healthy food options could run out if you were not early enough in the queue. Regular surveys of students and parents show that students feel safe in the school and that measures taken to prevent bullying, such as peer mediators and anti-bullying assemblies, are effective. Students are very supportive of the school. Year 11 students were especially complimentary, praising both the quality of teaching and the choice of extra activities. Attendance is significantly above average and the overall standard of behaviour is good. The school provides excellent openings for students to take on responsibility within the school and the local community. Links with local employers are excellent and well used to give students meaningful experiences of the world of work. These opportunities help to broaden students' education and contribute very effectively to the social and moral aspects of personal development. Spiritual and cultural education are also well provided for. A combination of good standards in examinations linked with the high priority given to careers advice and guidance gives students an excellent preparation for their next steps in education and the world of work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Good teaching and learning are founded on strong relationships and teachers' excellent subject knowledge. Most lessons are well planned and include a good range of activities and resources to make learning enjoyable. There are instances where learning objectives are not precise enough and are confused with tasks and activities. Following a review of teaching and learning policy, this issue is being tackled effectively. However, expertise in evaluating students' progress in lessons is not sufficiently shared. Throughout the school, students are encouraged to be actively involved in lessons. Questioning is used well to engage students and develop their speaking and listening skills. Students have good opportunities to work collaboratively. They are supportive of each other and participate confidently. The most successful lessons create a step by step sequence to learning giving students a strong sense of progression and purpose.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of students well. Up to 90% of students choose to continue education post-16. The 14-16 curriculum is enhanced by some well planned specialist vocational courses which are delivered in conjunction with other local schools and the tertiary college. Parents increasingly appreciate the value of this provision, to the extent that demand now outstrips what can currently be offered. There are also a small number of vocational courses offered in the main school curriculum, with good plans for further expansion. The extensive range of enrichment opportunities, including residential activities, cultural visits, productions and concerts, broadens the curriculum and contributes well to students' wider personal development. There is well planned provision for students who are identified as having particular talents in each subject, which together, allow a broad range of students to benefit. Students appreciate the additional time that teachers give to provide revision clubs or individual help. The school has made improvements to the curriculum offered in religious education and information technology for older students and now meets statutory requirements.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school provides a good standard of care, guidance and support for students. Robust safeguarding arrangements are in place. Both students and parents say that the school is a safe environment and events such as school trips are well organised. 'Safe havens' are provided for vulnerable children to help make them feel at home in the school. Induction procedures for new students are very good. The strong pastoral system plays a key role in ensuring that students are well known as individuals, and receive very good levels of support when the need arises. The school has good systems

to help students make choices at GCSE level, and later at 16+, with a helpful combination of information evenings and individual guidance as necessary. Older students are well aware of the target grades they are aiming for in their GCSE examinations and also have a good awareness of what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. For younger students, these systems are not so well established. In English, some good work is now addressing these issues, and has helped to contribute to the recent rise in standards in national tests. A recent audit of provision for students with learning difficulties has resulted in an improved system for monitoring their academic progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's clear vision of success for the school and his unflagging commitment to realising it ensure that the school is always moving forward. The school has made good progress since its previous inspection. The curriculum now meets statutory requirements, is reviewed regularly and is responsive to the needs of students. The environment for learning and the facilities available to students and the wider community have been greatly improved. Good continuous professional development ensures that leadership is successfully cultivated at all levels. Consequently, teamwork is effective and a strength of the school. Governors know the school well. They are fully involved in evaluating the work of the school and setting its strategic direction. They are equally dedicated to supporting and challenging those who, day to day, make the difference for students. The school is very well placed to continue improving. It knows where it is going and it knows how to get there.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Inspection judgements

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
|---|-----------------------|

Overall effectiveness

| | |
|--|-----|
| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |

Achievement and standards

| | |
|--|---|
| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress | 2 |

Personal development and well-being

| | |
|---|---|
| How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners? | 1 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | 1 |
| The behaviour of learners | 2 |
| The attendance of learners | 2 |
| How well learners enjoy their education | 1 |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles | 1 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community | 1 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 1 |

The quality of provision

| | |
|---|---|
| How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs? | 2 |
| How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners? | 2 |
| How well are learners cared for, guided and supported? | 2 |

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

| | |
|--|-----|
| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 2 |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2 |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, your school was recently inspected. This letter is to tell you about our findings. However, first, I would like to thank you for your openness and cooperation during our visit. We enjoyed meeting some of you and appreciated your comments and opinions. The inspection found that yours is a good school that is well led. There is a good range of courses available to you. You appreciate and make effective use of the before and after school clubs. We agree there is an excellent choice of extra activities that help you to develop as well-rounded, confident young people. You enjoy your lessons, most of which are well planned and help you to learn to the best of your ability. You are set challenging targets and most of you make good progress towards them. Your attitudes to your learning are very positive. Staff and governors care about you and give you effective support. Relationships between you are strong and you say you feel safe and valued. You are rightly proud of the achievements of the school but, of course, you play a very important part in making the school such a purposeful and supportive place. Your school is always striving to improve. To this end, staff agree the system of setting targets that works well for older students needs to be equally as effective in helping younger students to improve their work. In addition, we want your teachers and teaching assistants to develop their expertise in assessing and building on your progress in lessons. Finally, we want you to know that we were impressed with your maturity and readiness to take responsibility. You make an essential contribution not only to the success of your school but to the advancement of the wider community, too. Keep up the good work!