

# Downs Park School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique reference number</b>	114685
<b>Local authority</b>	Brighton and Hove
<b>Inspection number</b>	378906
<b>Inspection dates</b>	24–25 January 2012
<b>Lead inspector</b>	Anne Duffy HMI

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community Special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	4–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	77
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	David Keegan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jackie Brooks
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	28 April 2009
<b>School address</b>	Foredown Road Brighton BN41 2FU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01273 417448
<b>Fax number</b>	01273 439619
<b>Email address</b>	admin@downspark.brighton-hove.sch.uk

---

<b>Age group</b>	4–16
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	24–25 January 2012
<b>Inspection number</b>	378906



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

[Piccadilly Gate](#)  
[Store St](#)  
[Manchester](#)  
[M1 2WD](#)

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2012



## Introduction

Inspection team

Anne Duffy

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter Hare

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 10 teachers teaching 11 lessons; four of these were joint observations with members of the school's senior team. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. In addition, inspectors joined other activities, such as assemblies and lunchtimes, and heard younger and older pupils read in class. Discussions were held with pupils, members of the governing body, including a parent governor, and with school staff, including senior and middle managers. Inspectors looked at the school's work and considered a number of documents, including the school development plan, arrangements for safeguarding and equality, and details of the curriculum. They also analysed 24 parental and carers' questionnaires and others completed by pupils and staff.

## Information about the school

Downs Park is an average-sized special school for pupils with a range of learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum condition. All pupils attending the school have a statement of special educational needs. There are around twice as many boys as girls. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is above average. Pupil groups are organised by National Curriculum key stages and include a very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils join the school within any key stage and throughout the school year. Where appropriate, they also transfer to local mainstream schools. The school's outreach service supports pupils with complex needs in mainstream schools within the local authority area.

The school has recently become part of a federation with two other special schools, with one governing body. There is an executive headteacher for the federation and a headteacher for the school. Two assistant headteachers have taken up post in the school since the last inspection.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety of pupils</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>

## Key findings

- This is a good school. It has improved well since its last inspection. Pupils, parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and appreciate the improvements that have taken place in behaviour and teaching over the past two years.
- Pupils make good progress in their learning as well as in their behavioural and social skills and achieve well. All groups of pupils make similar progress overall, although there are some individual differences. Some pupils make outstanding progress. The school's focus on improving skills in mathematics, reading and communication and other life skills is very effective.
- Teaching is mainly good and some is outstanding. Some teachers are very new or have new subject responsibilities and this is currently contributing to a variation in teaching across the school. The styles of planning and assessment also vary. The school provides high-quality individual support for pupils who have social or emotional needs so that they are motivated to participate in all lessons.
- Pupils respond very well to the safe and orderly atmosphere of the school. They are considerate and respectful to one another in lessons, although occasionally less so during more informal parts of the school day. They learn to manage their behaviour well over time and generally enjoy school and the very good relationships that exist.
- The headteacher, executive headteacher and senior staff know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They have used performance management well to improve the quality of teaching and support. Staff morale is very high and this enhances the extremely positive atmosphere in the school. Changes to the curriculum mean that it is tailored well to the needs and aspirations of the pupils. The newly formed governing body of the federation has had little opportunity to have great impact so far but is very ambitious for the school's future.

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon the inclusive atmosphere and positive climate for learning to improve the progress made by pupils further, by:
  - making use of the very strong teaching, which exists in all parts of the school, to support continuing professional development, particularly of teachers who are new or have changed subject responsibility
  - improving the consistency of planning to ensure that pupils working at all

- levels are consistently given tasks and activities which challenge them to achieve as well as they can
- making full and consistent use of assessment to check that pupils are making the best possible progress in all lessons.

## **Main report**

### **Achievement of pupils**

Two Year 11 students summed up their view of the school, saying, 'Downs Park School is fun and good for learning.' Pupils make good progress overall, and some make outstanding progress, through the P levels and the early levels of the National Curriculum. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, children also make good progress in their learning. As they move through the school, pupils' good achievement is supported well by the development of work-related skills and an appropriate focus on the key areas of literacy, numeracy and communication. By the end of Key Stage 1, pupils show a real interest in books and stories; by the time they reach the end of the next key stage, many are able to tackle new vocabulary with confidence. Students are able to gain accreditation for other life skills, such as the Jamie Oliver BTEC award in Home Cooking Skills. Older students benefit from individually planned courses and work successfully towards Entry Level certificates at levels 1, 2 and 3.

Progress against long-term targets is tracked in careful detail by the senior leadership team. As a result of this evaluation, initiatives to accelerate the progress for any individuals seen to be falling behind show good impact. For example, pupils with reading difficulties, identified as making less progress than others, make noticeable progress as a result of successful intervention. The school's careful analysis shows that there is no significant difference between the progress made by boys and girls or between those with different backgrounds or needs. Very few parents or carers express concern about their children's progress.

In lessons, pupils generally make good progress and, when challenged to try different tasks independently, make outstanding progress. They respond well to opportunities to evaluate how well they have done in lessons and older pupils are also able to identify what they need to do to improve. The best learning takes place in lessons where teachers utilise a range of techniques, such as role play or practical activities, to build up pupils' knowledge and consolidate learning. As a result, the pupils enjoy these lessons more and are more actively involved. For example, students who were making chilli con carne made full use of their literacy, numeracy and independent skills to create and evaluate their individual meals. Other pupils enjoyed taking the part of investigative police officers in order to practise and improve their questioning skills in drama.

### **Quality of teaching**

Pupils benefit from the very good relationships that they have with the teaching and support staff. As a result, they demonstrate increasing resilience, confidence and independence when tackling new activities. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly appreciative of the good teaching that their children receive. The varied curriculum

engages pupils well. Although a few teachers are new to the school or are teaching a new subject, teachers generally use their subject knowledge well to plan effectively and set challenging tasks. They know their pupils very well and this helps them to match tasks and activities to the needs and interests of the class. However, sometimes, lessons are pitched at the whole class rather than at the individual abilities of pupils. As a result, while all pupils enjoy and benefit from the teaching they receive, some are not provided with the extra level of challenge or task which would enable them to achieve of their very best. Pupils make the most progress when they can work independently or in small groups for all or part of a lesson. For example, a group of younger pupils enjoyed reading a story as a whole class. They then moved with great excitement to writing their own personalised versions, with well-planned resources and support tailored to their needs and abilities. This supported their progress in literacy very well. Other pupils, challenged individually to move to the next level in French, rose well to the task, with one exclaiming, 'I've got to Level 2 – that's amazing!'

Teaching consistently adds to pupils' knowledge and understanding, and allows them to develop a range of skills, including communication, reading, writing and mathematics, across the curriculum. Pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong. Opportunities to reflect on their own and others' achievements enhance their spiritual, moral and social development. Topics based around the literature and lives of people from other countries capture their interest and enhance their cultural awareness well. Teachers, rather than senior leaders, are now involved in setting realistic and aspirational targets for their pupils. Teachers assess pupils' progress regularly and use a variety of methods to help pupils know how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. School leaders acknowledge that the variation in approaches can be confusing for some pupils who would be helped by more consistency. The type and amount of continuous assessment used by teachers in lessons is also variable. This makes it more difficult for teachers and senior leaders to gain the most information about how well pupils have achieved in individual lessons, or series of lessons, and make improvements where necessary.

### **Behaviour and safety of pupils**

Although some pupils find behaving well at all times difficult, behaviour is generally good in lessons and around the school. Although a small number of parents, carers and pupils feel that behaviour could be further improved, the very large majority feel that the school's strategies are effective. Pupils are tolerant and very supportive of one another in their classes. They are occasionally less so in more informal sessions, such as lunchtimes, but there are marked improvements in behaviour over time for individuals with particular needs. Instances of bullying, including any racist or gender-based comments, are taken very seriously and are rare. Pupils have a good awareness of the different forms of bullying and, where they are able to, take active steps to prevent it from occurring: 'Bully Busters' speak proudly of the work that they have done and other pupils endorse this. Pupils have trust in the adults working with them to manage behaviour well so that they feel very safe.

Those pupils who have particular social or emotional needs are supported very well. For example, pupils with attachment difficulties are provided with the level and type of support that they need to become more resilient, both in lessons and at social

times of the day. As one pupil said, 'It is a brilliant school. Even though we've all got different needs it helps us not to feel bad about ourselves.' Good contact is made with external agencies, as well as parents and carers, to provide support for pupils both in and out of school. The school has worked hard to raise attendance levels but a few pupils still do not come to school as often as they should.

## **Leadership and management**

The school's vision of 'learning for life' is evident in all aspects of its work. Increasingly detailed analysis of the progress made by groups and individuals means that the school's evaluation of the good progress made by pupils is secure. Well-focused professional development has strengthened the quality of teaching and support considerably since the last inspection. The school is now well placed for continuing development to be enhanced by the sharing of good practice across the school, rather than reliance on external advice.

Changes to the curriculum, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4, mean that pupils are provided with a range of learning experiences that are well suited to their needs and aspirations and promote their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development. The school works very effectively with local services and a range of other external partners to provide pupils with a rich mix of in-school and out-of-school opportunities. Older students in particular benefit from link courses and taster days at local colleges as well as well-planned work-related placements and visits.

Arrangements for safeguarding are secure. Well-tailored travel and mobility training develop independence skills very well so that school leavers are able to approach the next stage of their lives with increased confidence.

The progress made since the last inspection reflects a clear and shared ambition to succeed which is now being widened by the school's membership of the new federation. The strong commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in the way in which the school champions the needs and rights of all its pupils. Staff and members of the governing body are rightly proud of the school and share both the headteacher's and executive headteacher's determination for its continuing development. The governing body, although new, is well placed to add a further level of rigour and accountability. As a result, the school has strong capacity for further 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](http://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.**



26 January 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Downs Park School, Brighton, BN41 2FU**

Thank you for helping us to learn about your school. We really enjoyed our visit. It was good to meet so many of you and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

Downs Park School is a good school which helps you to make good progress in your learning. You seem to enjoy school; you are safe and very well supported, and this helps you to grow into mature young people. There are many interesting things for you to do in and out of school and those of you who also go to other work placements or to college clearly enjoy these opportunities.

Many of you told us that you think behaviour is mostly good in school. We agree with you, and think that those of you who have worked hard to improve your communication skills and behaviour have a right to feel very proud.

Teachers work hard to plan lessons that will help you to make as much progress as you can in many different ways. We have asked them to give some of you even more interesting and challenging work so that you can make even more progress. You can also help your teachers by working with them to decide how much you have learnt in your lessons.

The headteacher, the executive headteacher and all the staff want to make Downs Park School as good as it can be. Those of you who have been at the school for a while told us that it has already improved. I am sure that you will all continue to try your best so that it can be even better in the future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy  
Her Majesty's Inspector

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234**, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).**