

Downs View Special School

Inspection report

Unique reference number	114680
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	378904
Inspection dates	13–14 June 2012
Lead inspector	David Marshall

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	39
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Co-Chairs	Linda Harmer-Strange and Jill Sawyer
Headteacher	Adrian Carver
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 May 2009
School address	Warren Road Woodingdean Brighton BN2 6BB
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Age group	4–19
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Introduction

Inspection team

David Marshall

Additional inspector

Joanna Jones

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors visited 21 lessons delivered by 14 teachers, of which many were joint observations with members of the senior staff, and undertook short visits to lessons to consider students' behaviour and progress. Inspectors met with staff, including senior and middle managers, groups of students from Key Stages 3 and 4, and spoke to representatives of the governing body. Inspectors took account of the responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) in planning the inspection. They observed the school's work, looked at the school's self-review and planning documents, policies, minutes of the governing body, school performance data, safeguarding procedures and the work of students in lessons. They considered the results of 48 parental questionnaires and 31 staff questionnaires.

Information about the school

Downs View is an average size special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties who have very complex needs including sensory needs, autism spectrum conditions (ASC) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The number of pupils with ASC is proportionately larger than those with other needs. All pupils have statements identifying their special educational needs. There is post-16 provision at the link college on a separate site. It caters for students in Years 12, 13 and 14. The school provides for a very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. A larger than average proportion of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. Nearly a third of pupils are looked after children. The school has a small proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key findings

- Downs View is an outstanding special school which is extremely effective in meeting the complex and diverse needs of its pupils. The sixth form, known as the Link College, is also outstanding. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. One parent summed up the views of all: ‘Every child, whatever their challenges, achieves their potential at Downs View.’
- Pupils make exceptional progress helped by exemplary care, guidance and support, which parents and carers assert is extended to the family as a whole. Pupils’ excellent progress is demonstrated in vast improvements in communication skills, mobility and, for those for whom it is appropriate, outstanding improvement in behaviour.
- Teaching is unfailingly at least good and outstanding overall as a result. Teachers plan comprehensively to meet the individual needs of pupils and deploy additional adults in the classroom expertly enabling all pupils to flourish. The school has developed a range of assessment data so that the pupils’ outstanding progress is very clearly demonstrated.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding and pupils show first-rate attitudes to their learning. The outstanding curriculum and exceptional promotion of spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness leads to pupils’ exemplary personal development and well-being.
- The senior leadership team works exceptionally well together and has a very clear understanding of the school’s strengths and areas for improvement. The rigorous management of teachers’ performance and excellent use of assessment information enable action on identified development areas to be prompt and effective, ensuring that all groups of pupils make equally strong progress. Since the last inspection the school has developed very strong middle management. These lead teachers have pioneered innovative approaches to enable pupils to make outstanding progress through fully engaging in their learning, which they plan to roll out across the school to enable even further improvements for all pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- In this academic year, implement and embed the outcomes of the lead teachers' work to provide pupils with further high level engagement.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils' attainment on entry is very low compared with other learners of the same age because of their special educational and complex needs. From day one, pupils participate in full in all learning activities. Observations of lessons during the inspection confirmed that, throughout the school, all groups of pupils make outstanding progress, including students in the Link College, those with sensory needs, ASC and PMLD, and those who speak English as an additional language. The extensive school data, and inspection findings, show pupils performing at a very high level when compared nationally with pupils in similar circumstances. The outstanding outcomes are shown by external accreditation, for example NOCN accreditation in independent living skills, and in entry gained by pupils to local further education colleges for courses in music workshops for young children, and catering.

Pupils' exemplary behaviour and the skills they acquire in working independently or cooperatively with their classmates help to create the wonderful climate for learning that was evident in all classes. The excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 classes is firmly based on meeting individual pupils' needs and sharing best practice. This is built on outstandingly well in the older classes.

The pupils make excellent progress with skills to prepare them for adult life, as the outstanding curriculum provides an extensive range of opportunities to develop these skills, for example through off-site visits and visitors to school. The school's many links with mainstream schools also provide many excellent opportunities and promote pupils' outstanding progress. It was very telling that when the Reception class children visited a local primary school during the inspection, they blended in with the other children at a moment's notice and thoroughly enjoyed the valuable experience. The many work experience activities for Year 13 and 14 students, in catering, homes for the elderly, charity-run dog walking, recycling and playgroups, show the excellent progress made and how successful these links are throughout the school.

Parents and carers strongly agree in their responses to the Ofsted questionnaire that their children are achieving very well. As one parent wrote, 'The school has managed to get my daughter to eat school meals, sitting at a table with the school to do so. This in itself has made a significant difference to life at home – just wonderful!'

Quality of teaching

Outstanding teaching is enabling all pupils to make excellent progress. As all lesson observations, both in the main school and the Link College showed, staff work together as a highly cohesive team. The very full planning enables all students,

including those with sensory needs, ASC and PMLD, to move forward rapidly. The work of teaching assistants is outstanding and they give careful, sensitive and skilful support to pupils in lessons. Lessons are always conducted in a peaceful and industrious atmosphere and learning moves on at a fast pace. Teachers always give clear instructions and explanations and make particularly good use of signs and symbols to involve students and to make their meaning clear.

The curriculum and the excellent promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral and social development have a significant impact, being exceptionally well matched to individual needs. Inclusion is central to all planning. Creativity and multi-sensory activities across all departments promote pupils' enjoyment and communication skills. Typical of this was an exciting activity in which students with PMLD in the Link College were involved in sensory cooking. Not only did they fulfil part of the independent living skills qualification, they enjoyed the smoothies they had made. Another lesson where the quality of teaching was outstanding, in a lower junior class, was based on pupils learning about capacity and the different textures and feel of materials. The joy and understanding seen when switching from water to sand was unforgettable for all involved. The curriculum gives emphasis to everyday skills such as communication, empathy for others and working together. Links with the wider community are extremely well developed. The Link College's focus on appropriate external accreditation is exceptional and promotes equality of access to the next stage of education at college or in training.

Guidance for students' academic support is exceptionally strong. The detailed tracking of their progress ensures understanding of individual next steps. This was very clear in an outstanding literacy lesson for Years 12, 13 and 14 students, where this understanding, and excellent teaching, led to some students writing whole sentences accurately and others successfully using visual signs very well to recall the story. Pupils' challenging targets reflect the school's high expectations. Full understanding of individual needs means that pupils with ASC, PMLD and severe learning difficulties are all appropriately challenged. The careful planning, focused on these targets, is implemented with enthusiasm and exemplary care. The targets prepared relate both to National Curriculum requirements and pupils' own specific needs. It was clear that whenever possible pupils fully understood and shared their targets. Parents are also aware of these targets and one wrote, 'Downs View is superb. There is a wonderful rapport between staff, students and families. Every member of staff I deal with is genuine, caring and considerate of all our needs.'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Parents and carers fully agree with inspectors' judgements. The school places a high level of importance on pupils being able to focus on their own learning and they show this, for example, by their commitment to group work based on their individual timetables. Pupils respond extremely well to encouragement to maintain a healthy lifestyle in relation to diet, exercise and emotional development. Pupils maintain high levels of self-esteem and dignity due to the excellent relationships they have with adults and the sensitive way in which their needs are met, as when specific care or medical support are provided. It is clear that all pupils enjoy learning at the school. As one parent or carer wrote, 'My son leaves home with a smile and comes home with a smile; he has never done that before.'

Incidents of poor behaviour are extremely rare and any that occur are dealt with very well. Staff, pupils, parents and carers report that behaviour is handled very effectively in all lessons and bullying of any type is unheard of. Pupils agreed that they feel safe all of the time. Pupils gradually acquire an understanding of how to take care of themselves and one another. The use of exclusions both internally and for fixed periods is unknown in the school. Attendance is above average and pupils are punctual despite the distance that some travel.

Leadership and management

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership, drive and ambition to keep the school moving forward. This, in partnership with the senior teachers, ensures that complacency is not tolerated and there is equality of opportunity for all. Teamwork is excellent and everyone, including the administrative team and caretaking staff, are considerable assets to the school and are very much appreciated by all concerned. Staff are focused relentlessly on further improvement and they work very cohesively. As one staff member wrote, 'Downs View is a school to be proud of and working here is a joy.'

Robust and accurate evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses ensures that action planning and staff training are sharply focused on improving the academic and personal outcomes of all the students. This, together with the outstanding overall effectiveness of the school, demonstrates its continuing capacity to consolidate and improve further.

The outstanding governing body is fully involved in this improvement process, challenging decisions and requesting explanations where necessary. It holds the school to account in a challenging but supportive manner. The introduction of the lead teacher structure since the last inspection has led to pioneering work with pupils with ASC and disengagement issues. The innovative research work to help pupils engage fully in their learning, for example the use of colour zones and records of engagement indicators, has had a hugely beneficial impact on the progress of a number of pupils and this work is at the point of being rolled out across the school. The curriculum is outstanding and the pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is a significant strength of the school. Through this emphasis the school fully realises its aims to enable 'Dignity, Respect, Challenge and Fun'.

Excellent attention is paid to ensuring the highest quality of safeguarding for the pupils. Pupils' safety and well-being are paramount at all times, ensuring that the school feels a very safe and supportive place for pupils. The senior leaders and governors, supported well by all staff, have excellent systems in place to make sure there is no discrimination and to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils across all aspects of the school's work. This is strongly evident in the excellent progress of all individuals in the school.

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.



16 June 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Downs View Special School, Brighton BN2 6BB

I am writing to thank you all for making us so welcome when we came to the school recently. We did enjoy our visit. Yours is an outstanding school with many strengths, and we agree with what everyone told us – it is a really great place to learn. Here is a list of some of the things that we think are really good.

- The school looks after you extremely carefully and you all achieve exceptionally well by the time you leave the school.
- You behave really well, get along with each other and feel very safe in school.
- Some of the older students have very good ideas about how to make things better.
- You find lessons interesting and really enjoy school.
- There are plenty of exciting things for you to do, in school, on visits and in clubs.
- The headteacher and staff manage the school extremely well.

Even in excellent schools, some things can be made better. We have asked that the work of some teachers that has helped some of you to learn even better is offered to all of you, as the school has planned, as we are sure you would all benefit.

We wish you well in the future and keep trying your best.

Yours sincerely

David Marshall
Lead inspector

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