

Downland School

Downlands Road, Devizes, SN10 5EF

Inspection dates 8–9 October 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Students achieve well because they are well taught by teachers who keep careful checks on their progress.
- Student achievement improves from low starting points as a result of a wide variety of opportunities. The exciting curriculum prepares them well for their next stage in education.
- The curriculum across the school is adapted well to meet the individual needs of students, with a good emphasis on the basic skills of reading, writing and number.
- Teaching is almost always good, and sometimes outstanding. Students not only make good progress in English and mathematics but also in many other subjects.
- The management of behaviour has been successfully and rapidly improved. The behaviour of students is good. Students and staff get on very well together.
- Students report that they feel safe and happy, and enjoy being in school. Their attendance is above average for this type of school.
- The acting headteacher has introduced many new and effective innovations in the last year. These very successfully make the most of the school's existing systems to improve the quality of learning.
- The acting headteacher and senior staff regularly monitor the quality of teaching and its impact on students' achievement. This ensures that improvement is on going across the school.
- The governing body has a good grasp of the school's strengths and remaining areas for development. Governors provide significant challenge to, and support for, the school's leaders. They ensure safeguarding procedures are maintained to the highest standards.
- The local authority offers the school good support.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not consistently outstanding and so does not always enable students to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Teachers' marking is not always effective in telling students how they can further improve their work.
- Staff do not share best practice enough as a means of improving teaching further.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 14 lessons, and made a number of brief visits to other lessons. Many of these observations were made with members of the senior leadership team.
- Discussions were held with the acting headteacher, other senior and middle leaders, teaching staff and a representative from the local authority.
- The lead inspector met with the Chair of the Governing Body.
- There were too few responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, to take them into consideration in planning the inspection. However, the inspectors received an email from a parent and talked to some parents during the inspection.
- The inspectors took account of the 19 staff questionnaires returned.
- The inspectors looked at students' work and heard students from different year groups read.
- The inspectors observed the school's work and looked at a range of documentation, including information about students' performance and progress, the school's raising achievement plan, procedures for safeguarding students, the governing body's minutes of meetings, school policies and curriculum planning documents.

Inspection team

David Marshall, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Kaye Palmer-Greene

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Downland is smaller than the average-sized special school for up to 69 boys aged 11 to 16.
- All students enter school with a statement of special educational needs due to behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many have associated disabilities including autism and Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- Students are drawn from a wide area, including parts of other counties.
- Most students are from White British backgrounds and all speak English as their first language.
- The proportion of students supported through the pupil premium, which is additional government funding for students who are known to be eligible for free school meals and those looked after by the local authority, is well above average.
- The boarding provision which the school used to offer closed in February of this year.
- Students attend alternative provision at times during the week. This is at Wiltshire College or The Springfields Academy.
- The school has been led by an acting headteacher since January of this year.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching from good to outstanding by ensuring that:
 - teachers' feedback to students, especially through marking, is effective in showing them how to improve their work
 - opportunities for coaching teachers, especially through the sharing of outstanding practice already evident in the school, are extended.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Under the outstanding leadership of the acting headteacher the school has improved, making particularly rapid progress over the past year. Senior leaders have made the most of initiatives established at the time of the last inspection.
- The curriculum is well planned so that it is relevant to students' needs. Senior leaders ensure that students have equality of opportunity and that their progress is carefully checked. Teachers' planning is then successfully modified to take into account what students need to learn next.
- The way that students are motivated to learn through the range of recently introduced curriculum opportunities has, in their words, 'turned them round'. To see students in catering bashfully acknowledging their prowess in producing chocolate éclairs, with all the complicated mathematics involved, is testament to this success.
- The curriculum contributes strongly to students' good and improving behaviour, as well as their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, especially through visits to places of interest. It prepares them well for life in modern Britain. Any bullying is swiftly dealt with and staff effectively ensure no one is discriminated against.
- The impact of support for students in the sessions that they attend at local colleges is carefully checked in terms of behaviour, safety and their academic progress.
- Career guidance for students in Years 10 and 11 is well managed.
- Staff are well managed and make an effective team. Teaching and support staff report that, as one member of staff put it, 'In the last year the school has returned to the strong effective team it was. With an SLT (senior leadership team) working together to ensure we are all working as a team again.' Such positive attitudes provide an excellent role model for students.
- Senior leaders are well supported by middle managers. Together with the governors they have come to an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. New initiatives are welcomed and systematically checked. Although it is too soon to measure the impact on students' progress in some cases, inspection evidence indicates that the school is continuing to improve..
- The quality of teaching is examined effectively and information is used successfully as part of performance management. Weaker aspects of teaching have been largely addressed. Staff are well aware of their accountability in terms of students' achievement. Plans are in hand to develop the ways in which teachers can share and make use of the good practice that is well established in the school, but these are in their infancy and have yet to be fully developed .
- Relationships with parents are good. The school seeks to involve them in checking how well students are getting on and this is clearly welcomed. A typical parental comment was, 'Downland is a very good school, my boy has come on in leaps and bounds.'
- Through regular visits and meetings, the local authority provides the school with effective support, for example in curriculum development and staff training.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors demonstrate a keen commitment to moving Downland towards being an excellent school. They use their own professional skills very effectively, for example in identifying strengths and weaknesses, checking staff performance and ensuring finances are efficiently used for appropriate purposes. Pupil premium funding is used effectively to close any attainment gap with other students nationally.
 - Governors are well informed about the quality of teaching and how improvements can be made. They have a good system for rewarding success within the confines of teacher pay scales. They make good links between the success of teaching and students' progress.
 - Safeguarding has a high priority. Procedures and arrangements meet requirements and are regularly scrutinised. The school site is well maintained.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good**Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students is good. As a result of the careful, constant attention from all staff, the school is a calm and purposeful place in which to learn. The introduction and consistent implementation of 'The Downland Way' provides a welcoming and respectful environment. The balance of academic and personal care extended to the students is seamless and impressive.
- Staff, parents and students confirm that behaviour has continued to improve across the school since the last inspection. They show positive attitudes to learning and work. Students are courteous and considerate to adults and other students.
- When comparing their achievements at Downland with their progress and experiences in schools elsewhere, students are proud with the improvements they have made. Taking turns at being school councillors encourages students to act responsibly and shows that they can be very good role models.
- Students are well aware of the school's high expectations of their behaviour. They respond well to the reward system which the staff manage effectively and fairly.
- There are occasional lapses in the students' behaviour, particularly when students first arrive at the school. Highly effective out-of-class support from the pastoral team is available for those whose behaviour gives cause for concern. A range of choices as an alternative to exclusion from lessons enables students to continue learning even when they are not in class. Staff are well aware of students' individual needs and prepare them fully for lessons.
- Students' attendance improves remarkably on joining the school. Overall, it is now above average when compared with other schools. School records show that exclusions from this school have become extremely rare.
- Students report that they are pleased with the variety and quantity of opportunities of trips and visits. They enjoy working in other settings. Their good behaviour and safety when engaged with these alternative providers, such as the local colleges, are ensured through regular checks by school staff.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Students understand that it is important to keep themselves safe and are aware of how to do so. They are especially well informed about internet safety. There are very effective, and frequent, sessions on keeping safe from bullying. All aspects are covered diligently, including homophobic and racist bullying.
- Attendance levels rose well over the last year and are now above average for this type of school. The amount of poor attendance has decreased significantly.

The quality of teaching is good

- The standard of work in students' books and their improving rates of progress show that teaching is typically good. Staff work well together. They develop excellent relationships with students that help to foster their good attitudes to learning.
- Teachers are adept at helping students to settle in. They readily show students that they value their suggestions and opinions, and that everyone has the right to be listened to. Social and concentration skills have a high priority, with staff setting a very good example. As a result, students soon begin to share their ideas and quickly develop their language skills.
- Good use of students' progress information means teachers' expectations of what students can do are generally accurate. The progress of students is rapid where teachers check regularly how much their students have learnt and promptly adapt activities to increase challenge or provide additional support where needed.
- Support staff are highly skilled. They enhance students' learning and manage behaviour effectively. Students make good progress because these additional adults are used well to support many different groups of learners.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders have focused on improving the quality of feedback students receive from teachers. Although most staff are skilled at providing verbal feedback, this varies in its effectiveness. There is now a whole-school approach to marking. However, occasionally written comments are not helpful to students as they are either too complicated or too general. When feedback is effective, students respond well verbally and to teachers' marking. Students increasingly provide feedback to one another.
- Staff teach literacy, including reading, and mathematical skills well across the school. The school's work to

develop the use of computing and other technology has led to strong improvements in achievement. Students are able to write their own programs, create websites and advertisements, and tell stories.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- As a consequence of students having complex social and emotional needs their attainment when they first join the school is significantly below the national average. Leaders consistently good use of additional funding supports a very high proportion of students' complex social or emotional needs well.
- Many students enter the school with very low reading and writing abilities. The school's programmes and whole-school approach to improving 'the basics' are effective in enabling students to make sustained progress in developing literacy skills.
- Progress is typically good. This is because teaching is good and staff carefully check students' personal and academic achievements.
- Of the 13 school leavers last year, 11 went into further education colleges and two into employment. This profile is testament to the school's success in preparing students for further study and future work.
- Attainment at the end of Year 11 has been improved year on year since the last inspection and is now in line with the national average when compared with similar schools. This has been achieved through the use of target setting to show students what the next steps of learning are, as well as teachers being effective in tracking the success of individuals.
- The high proportion of students who are entitled to support derived from additional funding make good progress. This is because the school makes efficient use of funds to ensure students are well supported. For example, in 2014 these students achieved GCSE scores which were broadly in line with other students in the school for English and mathematics. These results were higher than for other eligible students nationally.
- In English, mathematics and the use of information and communication technology (ICT), students make good progress. They benefit from being well supported and from good quality teaching.
- The school makes good provision for the most able students across a whole range of subjects. In the 2014 GCSE examinations, a small minority of students did particularly well gaining high grades. The school does not enter students early for GCSE.
- The focus on high achievement goes beyond English and mathematics. The standards achieved by students in art and design, sport, and design and technology are all above average and progress is good.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	126550
Local authority	Wiltshire
Inspection number	447971

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	66
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Paul Webb
Acting Headteacher	Georgina Keily
Date of previous school inspection	14 June 2012
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