

# Inspection of Downlands Community School

Dale Avenue, Hassocks, West Sussex BN6 8LP

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Inspection dates: 4 and 5 October 2022

**Overall effectiveness** **Good**

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The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

This school was last inspected six years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Learning is at the heart of all that Downland's Community School does. Leaders have high expectations for learning and behaviour and pupils work hard to live up to these. Pupils share warm and trusting relationships with staff. They receive strong pastoral care and speak highly of the staff, who help them when they are worried.

Pupils and staff are proud to be a part of the school community. Pupils enjoy coming to school to learn and see their friends. Levels of attendance are high as a result. Pupils look after their environment and behave well during lessons and at social times. They regulate each other's behaviour on the rare occasions unkind comments are made. Pupils know that staff will act quickly on the rare occasions that bullying does occur.

Leaders plan many opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their good character and leadership skills through the 'Downland ROCKS' programme. For example, pupils run working parties such as the 'Global Ambassadors' and 'Eco Club' to raise awareness of issues that are important to them. Pupils promote inclusion and diversity through pupil led LGBTQ+ and faith clubs.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

Leaders have had a sharp focus on improving the curriculum, so that it is ambitious for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They have worked closely with staff to ensure that the curriculum is well sequenced, so that pupils build securely on their knowledge over time. Pupils in all key stages successfully use previously learned knowledge to understand new information. For example, Year 11 pupils use their deep knowledge of trigonometry and bearings to answer more complex questions. Pupils in Year 7 can apply their learning about plastic pollution in the oceans when explaining the importance of sustainability.

Teachers have expert knowledge in the subjects that they teach. They systematically plan activities which allow pupils to recall previously learned knowledge and vocabulary. Pupils expect this in all lessons and say that they find it helpful to check what they know well. Teachers frequently assess the depth of pupils' learning through tests and skilful questioning. They adapt their plans and lesson activities to ensure that any gaps in learning are addressed swiftly. Overall, teachers provide effective support for pupils with SEND, who access the same curriculum as their peers. However, sometimes adaptations for these pupils could be more precise to meet their needs fully.

Pupils are attentive and respectful towards their teachers in lessons. They engage in their learning and whole-class discussions with enthusiasm. Teachers respond effectively to low-level disruption on the rare occasions it occurs.

Most pupils are confident and fluent readers. They read for pleasure in school frequently as the school promotes a love of reading. However, leaders do not yet have effective systems in place, beyond Year 7, to identify and support those pupils who find reading more difficult.

Leaders have created an effective personal development programme, which prepares pupils well for the future. For example, they learn about how to resolve conflict and manage relationships in an age-appropriate way. A wide range of clubs, such as art, cooking, and basketball, are very well attended by pupils who are excited to take part. Leaders have worked hard to ensure that those who might benefit most are encouraged to join. Pupils develop their teamwork skills through participation in the forest school and the 'capture the flag' competition across the school.

The careers programme is effective in supporting older pupils to make informed choices about their next steps. They receive independent and impartial advice. However, the careers curriculum is currently less well developed for pupils in Years 7 and 8.

Leaders think carefully about how to develop their staff best. They provide many opportunities for staff, including those who are new to teaching, to enhance their knowledge and skills. Governors ask questions of leaders to assure themselves that decisions are made in the best interests of the pupils. Leaders have ensured that there are strong line management systems in place, so that the views of staff are heard and considered. As result, staff are happy and feel well supported by leaders.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff receive appropriate training, so that they know how to identify and report safeguarding concerns. Leaders make referrals to agencies in a timely way, so that pupils and their families get the help that they might need quickly. Leaders make the right checks, so that they know staff and volunteers are safe to work in the school. Governors are knowledgeable about their safeguarding responsibilities. They ask leaders questions to check that safeguarding procedures are robust. However, safeguarding record keeping is not always as effective as it should be.

Pupils feel well looked after in school and know who to report serious concerns to. They learn how to keep themselves safe online and identify harmful relationships through the curriculum.

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

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The systems in place for identifying and supporting pupils who find reading difficult are not secure beyond Year 7. This means that some pupils may struggle to access the curriculum as terminology and vocabulary becomes more complex. Leaders need to ensure that continuous identification and intervention takes place, so that pupils get the specific support they need to become fluent and competent readers.
- Safeguarding record keeping is not as well organised and effective as it could be. This means that key documentation cannot always be found quickly when it is needed. Leaders must ensure that systems for recording safeguarding concerns and updates are improved, so that safeguarding leaders can continue to do their jobs effectively.
- Adaptations for some pupils with SEND are not always made as consistently as they should be. This means that a small number of pupils with SEND have difficulty accessing the curriculum in some subjects. Leaders need to ensure that they strengthen the training that is already in place for staff, so that they know the needs of pupils with SEND well and adapt their teaching appropriately.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	126087
<b>Local authority</b>	West Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	10249535
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1227
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Diana Hunt
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mark Wignall
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://downlands.w-sussex.sch.uk/">http://downlands.w-sussex.sch.uk/</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	29 and 30 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 11 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not use alternative provision. There is an inclusion unit on the school premises, which is known as the 'Restorative Learning Centre'.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID 19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- The inspection team completed deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, geography, physical education and Spanish. To do this, they met

with subject leaders, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at pupils' work.

- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, a selection of subject leaders, teachers, and support staff.
- Inspectors met with a group of governors, including the chair and vice chair.
- The inspection team reviewed the arrangements for safeguarding by scrutinising records and through discussions with staff and pupils.
- The views of pupils, parents, and staff were considered through discussions and a review of Ofsted's surveys.

### **Inspection team**

Zoë Harris, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Eliot Hodges	Ofsted Inspector
Steve Baker	Ofsted Inspector
Andy Johnson	Ofsted Inspector
Rupert Prutton	Ofsted Inspector

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