

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Downend School

Westerleigh Road, Downend, Bristol BS16 6XA

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 October 2024

Outcome

Downend School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Linda Ferris. This school is part of Castle School Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), William Roberts, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Simon MacSorley.

What is it like to attend this school?

There is a strong sense of community at Downend School. The school's 'PRIDE' values are well known to all. These values inform leaders' decisions and influence how pupils conduct themselves in school. Pupils feel safe and well cared for. They have trusted adults they can talk to if they have any concerns.

The school has developed an ambitious curriculum for pupils. Staff have high expectations of all pupils. Most pupils consistently meet these. Pupils are successful in public examinations. Pupils and sixth-form students appreciate the school's enrichment opportunities and the support they receive from staff. They feel well prepared for their next steps.

Pupils respect those from different backgrounds. They are actively encouraged at the school to treat everyone equally. Bullying rarely happens, and staff address it effectively if it occurs. Behaviour in lessons is focused and purposeful. Pupils are rewarded for demonstrating the school's 'PRIDE' values. They understand and appreciate the consistent approach to behaviour.

The school offers many extra-curricular opportunities to develop pupils' interests, including science club, badminton and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Pupils talk with enthusiasm about the recent production of 'Noughts and Crosses'. There are many

leadership opportunities. These include being a peer mentor, a race and religion ambassador or a member of the newly formed student council.

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

The school has thoughtfully designed an ambitious curriculum. This provides pupils with a broad and balanced education. The school has carefully considered the best order to teach the content. As a result, pupils gain the knowledge they need and achieve well. The school's work to increase pupils' appreciation of diversity is woven into the curriculum. For example, in library lessons, pupils read texts together. These books have been carefully selected to build pupils' understanding of different backgrounds.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) learn the same curriculum as their peers. They receive support in the classroom to help them meet leaders' high expectations. Teachers know pupils' needs well. They know how to adjust their teaching to meet individual needs. Teachers ensure that pupils review their learning. They do this by routinely recapping the most important content. This helps pupils remember the most important information.

The curriculum is taught well with high levels of consistency. Teachers are passionate experts in their subjects. They are skilled at using questioning to check pupils' understanding. These thorough checks identify and close gaps in pupils' learning effectively. This means pupils and sixth-form students learn the curriculum well, including the more vulnerable groups. However, the school has not consistently considered the key knowledge that pupils often misunderstand and why this is so. This means that common misconceptions continue to occur.

The school has a consistent focus on building pupils' vocabulary. The key vocabulary in each subject is carefully selected and taught to pupils. This strengthens pupils' spoken and written language, which helps them learn effectively. The school quickly identifies pupils who are still learning to read. These pupils are then given support to improve their reading ability. Teachers reinforce these reading approaches in each subject area.

There is a strong pastoral system that supports pupils. Pupils and sixth-form students speak highly of the atmosphere and work ethic at the school. The school's expectations of pupils' behaviour are clear. Pupils experience consistent routines and common approaches to teaching. Consequently, pupils engage positively in their learning. They know that staff deal with behaviour fairly. Pupils' attendance is broadly in line with the national average. However, the number of disadvantaged pupils who miss school frequently remains high. This means these pupils miss out on the high standard of education the school provides. While action is being taken, this has not yet improved these pupils' attendance.

The school has designed a comprehensive programme to support pupils' personal development. Pupils and sixth-form students learn about healthy relationships and consent in an age-appropriate way. They receive expert guidance on careers. Staff teach pupils about other faiths and beliefs. Pupils enjoy the many high-quality extra-curricular opportunities they experience, including the annual enrichment week. The school ensures

that these opportunities are accessible to all pupils. There are regular events to celebrate different cultural events. Pupils value these opportunities and feel well prepared for their lives beyond school.

Staff feel valued as professionals. They appreciate leaders' support for their workload and well-being. Leaders at all levels are committed to the school's continuous improvement. They make decisions in the best interests of pupils at the school and are reflective in their practice. The trust provides constructive support and accountability. The members of the community council are highly committed. They are knowledgeable about the school and its position within the community. Parents hold the school in high regard.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not systematically identified the common misconceptions within subject areas. Therefore, teaching does not always address misconceptions until after they arise. The trust should ensure that the curriculum has considered the essential knowledge that pupils often misunderstand.
- Leaders' work to improve pupils' attendance is not fully embedded and has not yet led to increased attendance for disadvantaged pupils. As a result, these pupils miss out on valuable learning. The trust should continue to work closely with pupils and their families to improve the attendance of these pupils so they can benefit from the academic and pastoral support available to them.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding,

behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good for overall effectiveness in September 2014.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	139345
Local authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	10344656
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,432
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	179
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Simon MacSorley
CEO of the trust	William Roberts
Headteacher	Linda Ferris
Website	www.downend.com
Date of previous inspection	9 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Castle School Education Trust.
- The school uses one registered alternative provision and two unregistered provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- An inspector met with the CEO of the trust, trust leaders, a trustee, and members of the community council.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, curriculum leaders, teachers and pupils.
- An inspector spoke to some of the alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's staff survey. They also considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text messages.

Inspection team

Frances Bywater, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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