



# Downend Comprehensive School

Inspection Report

**Unique Reference Number** 109321  
**LEA** South Gloucestershire  
**Inspection number** 278184  
**Inspection dates** 8 February 2006 to 9 February 2006  
**Reporting inspector** Nick Green HMI

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

|                                    |                    |                           |                  |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Type of school</b>              | Comprehensive      | <b>School address</b>     | Westerleigh Road |
| <b>School category</b>             | Community special  |                           | Bristol          |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>         | 11 to 18           |                           | BS16 6XA         |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>            | Mixed              | <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01454 862300     |
| <b>Number on roll</b>              | 1497               | <b>Fax number</b>         | 01454 862301     |
| <b>Appropriate authority</b>       | The governing body | <b>Chair of governors</b> | Mr Paul Trevatt  |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b> | 27 March 2000      | <b>Headteacher</b>        | Mr Ray Lockey    |

|                              |   |                                    |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| <b>Age group</b><br>11 to 18 | <b>Inspection dates</b><br>8 February 2006 -<br>9 February 2006 | <b>Inspection number</b><br>278184 |
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one HMI and four Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Downend School is a large mixed comprehensive school and takes pupils from a mainly prosperous area. It has had Technology Specialist College status since 1999. The school works in partnership with a consortium of local schools to provide post 14 courses. The great majority of pupils come from a White British background. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is slightly above the national average and, of these, 32 have statements of special educational needs. The majority of pupils enter the school with broadly average attainment.

Previously a split site school, since September 2005 it has operated on a single site consisting of many new buildings. The school has had an acting headteacher since September 2004.

## Key for inspection grades

|         |              |
|---------|--------------|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding  |
| Grade 2 | Good         |
| Grade 3 | Satisfactory |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate   |

## **Overall effectiveness of the school**

### **Grade: 2**

This is an effective and improving school that provides good value for money. Pupils are making good progress throughout the school. Standards are currently above the average. The capacity of the school to improve further is strong. The school's specialist status contributes positively to attainment.

The school is successful in many respects. In particular, it effectively promotes pupils' personal development and well-being through the care, support and guidance it provides. Pupils are happy and enjoy coming to school, they contribute much to the school's positive ethos and orderly, harmonious environment. Their moral and social development is particularly strong and they make good contributions to the wider community.

The quality of teaching is good. Pupils are attentive learners, they respond positively to the effective teaching they receive and work very well together. The curriculum serves all pupils' needs and is outstanding in the sixth form. It provides a very wide range of academic and vocational options between Years 10 and 13. The guidance pupils receive to achieve high standards is generally good but they are not always set regular homework in the lower school or receive consistently clear advice on how to improve their work from all teachers.

The headteacher's outstanding leadership is the key to the school's growing success. He has inspired the teaching and support staff at all levels to work together to raise pupils' standards and achievement. Effective systems to monitor the performance of the school and the progress of the pupils have been developed but their implementation in all subjects is not yet consistent. However, the school's self-evaluation procedures are accurate in assessing its effectiveness.

## **Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form**

### **Grade: 2**

The quality of education provided for sixth form students is good and improving, in keeping with the school's own view. While standards were below national averages in 2005, pupils' achievement was satisfactory as they made the progress they were expected to. However, this year, effective teaching, close monitoring of students' work and an outstandingly broad and relevant curriculum are enabling them to make good progress and achieve higher standards. Students are provided with beneficial support and guidance and they work well with their teachers. Nearly all students who start a course complete it successfully. Students are articulate and confident and contribute much to the life of the school. Leadership and management of the sixth form are strong, particularly the proficient organisation of the partnership arrangements with other local schools and colleges.

## What the school should do to improve further

- Set homework more regularly in Years 7 to 9 and ensure all teachers give pupils consistently effective advice on how to improve their work
- Ensure that systems to monitor the performance of the school and the progress of the pupils are applied consistently

## Achievement and standards

### Grade: 2

Pupils are achieving well and standards are above average. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. In 2005, at the end of Year 9, and in Year 9 mock tests this year, pupils' results were above the national average and their achievement was good. Most pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities, make good progress, particularly in English. Boys and girls achieve equally well. This year, standards and achievement in the mock tests were even better in mathematics and science than in 2005. This continuing improvement is partly contributable to the effective 'booster' classes the school provides both before and after the school day for pupils who require more help.

Pupils' standards at the end of Year 11 in 2005 were a little below national averages but a significant improvement from 2004. Pupils' achievement in respect to their attainment on entry to the school was satisfactory. Girls attained more A\*- C GCSE passes than boys though their overall performance was not significantly different. Pupils performed well above national averages in design and technology and art and design. This year, the results in mock GCSE examinations and in modular external examinations already completed, indicate that pupils' progress and achievements are good. This was reflected in the standards of pupils' work seen during the inspection, which were above average. These improvements result from the school successfully identifying pupils who need additional support and providing a range of strategies to raise their performance. In 2005, while results at A-level were below national averages, students' achievements were satisfactory relative to their attainment on entry to Year 12. Currently, sixth form students' progress is good and standards are now above average because effective teaching and suitable courses motivate them successfully and they respond well to the monitoring and support they receive.

In 2005, the challenging targets set for pupils and sixth form students were not quite met, except for in English in Year 9, in which the target was exceeded. Pupils are currently making the progress needed to meet the even more challenging targets set for 2006.

The school's specialist status contributes positively to attainment. It has promoted the effective use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school.

## **Personal development and well-being**

### **Grade: 2**

Pupils and students in the sixth form are enthusiastic about school and enjoy each other's company as demonstrated by their regular and improving attendance. The caring ethos of the school promotes their personal development well and their moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory but does not enjoy a high profile in the school. Similarly, pupils' awareness of life in multicultural Britain is only satisfactory as the school does not systematically plan opportunities to extend this.

Relationships between pupils are very harmonious, especially in classrooms, which are usually very orderly. They turn to one another for assistance and to discuss their work as a matter of routine. Pupils behave courteously and with consideration and they report very little bullying. Pupils say they feel safe at school and that all staff are friendly and helpful. The school council gives pupils opportunities to take responsibility and influence the school. Members have been involved in consultations over a range of issues around the move to the single site including uniform, times of the school day and lunchtime arrangements. They are involved in all external staff appointments. The ability of students in the sixth form to take much responsibility for their development is enhanced considerably by an effective sixth form council.

The development of healthy lifestyles and personal safety is good. Pupils know the importance of well cooked fresh food and understand the importance of keeping fit. Many attend after school sports and other clubs. Pupils contribute effectively to the community, for example, raising large sums of money for a hospital for terminally ill children. They are gaining improving levels of competence in the skills needed for their future economic well-being.

## **Quality of provision**

### **Teaching and learning**

#### **Grade: 2**

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers provide articulate explanations, use questioning well and combine different activities effectively to engage pupils and encourage them to learn. Imaginative use is made of interactive whiteboards to make lessons stimulating. On rare occasions, when work set for pupils is too easy and the pace too slow, pupils' progress is limited. A strength of pupils' learning is their readiness to concentrate attentively and to listen and to help explain things to each other when required. Behaviour in lessons is consistently good. Pupils comment on how teachers treat them respectfully and a strong rapport between them was evident.

Teachers assess pupils' work accurately and are beginning to use assessment data effectively to plan lessons, to set realistic targets and to match work to pupils' levels. Some departments, such as mathematics and technology, are doing this very well. The regularity and quality of homework and marking have improved since the time of the

last inspection, though they are still variable across and within subjects. Pupils do not receive consistently clear comments on how to improve their work from all teachers.

## **Curriculum and other activities**

### **Grade: 2**

All pupils are served well by the good curriculum provided by the school. In Year 7 to 9 it is carefully planned, building successfully on the work pupils do in their primary schools. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and those who are particularly talented are enabled to progress and develop well; higher attainers in Year 8 take the national test in mathematics one year early.

The curriculum in Year 10 and 11 effectively meets the needs of all groups of pupils. It offers a wide range of vocational subjects, alternative courses and enrichment opportunities. These provide sufficient choice and flexibility for pupils with different interests and abilities. Lower attainers, for example, follow a course which includes work experience and half a day at a local college, preparing them well to pursue vocational courses. The school is receptive to new ideas that will further match pupils' aspirations and interests; it is planning to trial specialist diplomas in Years 10 and 11. However, personal, social and health education is better in Years 9 to 11 than in Years 7 and 8 because of the limited amount of time given to it in the latter.

The sixth form curriculum is outstanding. A very wide choice of academic and vocational courses and subjects is offered through its proficiently organised partnership with other schools and colleges. The timetabled enrichment available is also impressive and includes a critical thinking component within a general studies course and a weekly personal challenge programme. The number and range of extra-curricular activities and residential trips is good, especially in sports and music. Many pupils take the Duke of Edinburgh Award. They are well prepared for their future studies and work, for example, all Year 11 follow an ICT course and their literacy and numeracy skills are developed well. Through initiatives developed as a result of its specialist status, the school enables pupils to contribute very well to the community, for example, through imaginative link activities with primary schools in design and technology, mathematics and ICT.

## **Care, guidance and support**

### **Grade: 2**

The school takes good care of all of its pupils. They know that they can turn to teachers, especially form tutors, as well as other adults in the school for help and advice. Parents' comments are appreciative of how well pupils are looked after. Guidance to help pupils with subject and career choice at 14 and 16 is thorough. Year 11 pupils benefit from individualized mentoring and this is helping to boost their achievement in GCSE examinations. However, while in some subjects pupils are set clear and helpful targets, academic guidance for pupils about what they need to do to improve their work is not consistent or precise enough across all subjects.

This is an inclusive school. It offers great help to vulnerable pupils who may need extra assistance and encouragement. Very effective support is given to all those with learning difficulties and disabilities, including the few pupils who speak little or no English. Good liaison with many outside agencies contributes to high standards of care. Arrangements for child protection are efficient. Close attention is given to assessing and minimizing risks to ensure pupils' safety.

Sixth form students' academic progress is carefully monitored by subject and sixth form staff. Students are kept well informed about their achievements. They appreciate the guidance and support they receive in an atmosphere of very good relationships with their teachers.

## **Leadership and management**

### **Grade: 2**

Leadership and management are good at all levels. The headteacher provides clear vision and direction for the school. On appointment, he clearly analysed its weaknesses and developed suitable strategies to address them. At the same time, he gained the confidence of the staff so that the measures he introduced were effective. These included changes to the structure of the senior team and clarifying roles and responsibilities. Middle managers were empowered to take responsibility to a much greater extent than formerly and have responded well. They are supported and developed successfully by the effective senior leadership team and external consultants, and are provided with individual mentoring support where appropriate.

All the staff fully share and support the headteacher's drive for raising standards. Effective systems to monitor and improve the professional performance of teachers have been developed though implementation in all subjects is not yet consistent. Similarly, the systems to track the progress of the pupils operate well and have had a good impact, for example in identifying underachieving pupils, though they are not being used consistently by all teachers.

The school's self-evaluation procedures take good account of the views of pupils, staff, parents and the local education authority and result in accurate identification of strengths and areas for development. Whilst the great majority of parents are supportive of the school and feel they are consulted, a small minority are concerned about pupils' behaviour and say that the school does not seek their views or those of their children. However, inspectors judge that the school does take good account of parents' and pupils' views and behaviour is good.

The school's leaders are effective in promoting equality of opportunity and the personal development and well-being of all pupils. Governors work effectively to fulfil their responsibilities, and provide good support. The school has developed excellent links with other providers; for example, the successful sixth form partnership with other institutions has impressive arrangements to control the quality of the provision. The issues raised in the last inspection report have been addressed well and leadership and management provide the school with good capacity to continue to improve.



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## Inspection judgements

|  |                       |              |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|
| <i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i> | <b>School Overall</b> | <b>16-19</b> |
|--|-----------------------|--------------|

### Overall effectiveness

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b> | 2   | 2   |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?  | 2   | 1   |
| The quality and standards in foundation stage  | NA  | NA  |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation  | 2   | 2   |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements  | Yes | Yes |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection   | Yes | Yes |

### Achievement and standards

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>How well do learners achieve?</b>   | 2 | 2 |
| The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners   | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress                              | 2 |   |

### Personal development and well-being

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>                           | 2 | 2 |
| The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development                                     | 2 |   |
| The behaviour of learners   | 2 | 2 |
| The attendance of learners  | 3 |   |
| How well learners enjoy their education   | 2 |   |
| The extent to which learners adopt safe practices   | 2 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles   | 2 | 2 |
| The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community                                    | 2 | 2 |
| How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being | 2 | 2 |

### The quality of provision

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?</b>          | 2 | 2 |
| <b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b> | 2 | 2 |
| <b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>   | 2 | 2 |

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

**Leadership and management**

|  |     |     |
|--|-----|-----|
| <b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>                                       | 2   | 2   |
| How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education | 2   | 2   |
| How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review      | 3   | 2   |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can                     | 2   | 1   |
| How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money  | 2   | 2   |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities  | 2   | 2   |
| The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected  | Yes | Yes |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy</b>  |     |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily  | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise  | Yes |
| Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse   | Yes |
| Learners are educated about sexual health   | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe</b>   |     |
| Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements                                   | Yes |
| Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place  | Yes |
| Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism                                | Yes |
| Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them   | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which learners make a positive contribution</b>  |     |
| Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships   | Yes |
| Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them                   | Yes |
| Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community | Yes |
| <b>The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being</b>                           |     |
| There is provision to promote learners' basic skills  | Yes |
| Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams                                  | Yes |
| Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form          | Yes |
| Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy               | Yes |

## **Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

We would like to thank you for your contributions to the recent inspection of your school. We enjoyed meeting members of year groups and we learned a great deal from our discussions with many of you in lessons and around the school.

Overall, your school provides you with a good education. The standards reached by most of you this year are above average; currently you are making good progress and your achievement is good. All groups of students, including those who find learning difficult, have their needs addressed well. The teaching and learning we saw were good, though we feel you could be set homework more regularly and the helpfulness of the comments you receive from teachers on how to improve your work could be more consistent. In many respects, your school is successful. We were impressed by the way it fosters your personal development and well-being through the care, support and guidance it provides. You say that you enjoy coming to school and we judge that you contribute much to the school's positive atmosphere and orderly environment. Your moral and social development is particularly strong and you make good contributions to the wider community. The work of the school council, particularly in the sixth form, shows you assume responsibilities well and take much responsibility for your development.

The curriculum you are offered is good in Years 7 to 11 and outstanding in the sixth form. It provides a very wide range of academic and vocational options and opportunities to enrich your knowledge and understanding. The number and range of extra-curricular activities and residential trips is also good.

Your headteacher's outstanding leadership is the key to the school's growing success. He has inspired the teaching staff at all levels to work effectively to raise your standards and achievement. Good systems to monitor the performance of the school and your progress have been developed, though we have suggested that their use across subjects needs to be more consistent.

We wish you the best for your studies in the future.