



Downs View Special School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 114680
LEA Brighton and Hove
Inspection number 279430
Inspection dates 23 May 2006 to 24 May 2006
Reporting inspector Jacque Cook AI

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

Type of school	Academy	School address	Warren Road
School category	Community special		Woodingdean
Age range of pupils	4 to 19		Brighton, East Sussex BN2 6BB
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01273 601680
Number on roll	108	Fax number	01273 699420
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mrs Jenifer Barton
Date of previous inspection	18 September 2000	Headteacher	Mr Adrian Carver

Age group 4 to 19	Inspection dates 23 May 2006 - 24 May 2006	Inspection number 279430
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Downs View is a school for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder. Of the 133 on roll, 54 are aged over 16. There are 32 vulnerable and looked after children. About 14 per cent of the pupils are from ethnic minorities. There is a department for pupils with severe or complex autistic spectrum disorder.

In April this year, students aged over 16 from the school, including those from the autistic spectrum department, moved to new purpose-built premises. This is called the Link College. It is four miles from Downs view and is attached to a pre existing sixth form college. Students and staff from another local special school also joined the Link College. This included a group of students with profound and multiple learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The school's effectiveness is good, in keeping with its own view. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and their achievement and progress are good. The outstanding direction provided by the headteacher and senior management team ensures that there is a good capacity for the school to improve further. They have a good record in raising standards. Work on improving the accuracy of judging levels of work, for example, is currently being developed. Value for money is good.

The pupils' attitudes are outstanding and the behaviour of most is exemplary. Their moral and social development is excellent and the care, welfare and guidance provided by the staff are of a very high quality. The good curriculum is enriched by a broad range of activities including excellent opportunities for pupils to work with pupils in other schools. The strong relationships that staff form with pupils ensure learning is effective and contributes to the good, and at times outstanding, teaching and learning. However, some staff do not use strategies such as signing and symbols consistently enough to help pupils to communicate more effectively. Targets on individual education plans are not always achieved, and this needs closer checking by senior staff to ensure they are set at realistic levels. The provision for children at the Foundation Stage is good and, as a result, they make good progress.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The effectiveness and efficiency of the Link College are good, in keeping with the school's view. The move of the four groups of students to the outstanding new building in April was planned and managed extremely well. As a result, even the most vulnerable have settled very well in a relatively short time. The curriculum is being developed further for September to provide appropriate courses and qualifications for all the students. They make good progress on their courses at present. The direct link to the mainstream sixth form college is very beneficial and there are plans to provide even further opportunities for students from both colleges to work together.

What the school should do to improve further

- monitor the quality of individual education plans more rigorously to ensure that that targets are achievable
- ensure all staff use appropriate strategies to support pupils' communication skills.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils join the school with low and often very low levels of attainment. From this low base they make good progress and achieve well. A significant number of pupils make very good progress, including many with autistic spectrum disorder. These pupils respond extremely well to the routine and structure of their lessons and learn

effectively. A few pupils make outstanding progress which leads to their transfer to a school for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. Children of Reception age make good progress towards meeting the early learning goals. Many make very good gains in their personal development and in their creative skills. Most pupils make good progress towards achieving the challenging targets that are set. However, in a few cases, the targets are too difficult to be fully achieved. Due to recent improvements, there are many instances where pupils are making very good progress in the important subjects of English and mathematics. Year 11 pupils make good progress towards gaining qualifications including the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) Transition Challenge. Vulnerable and looked after children and those from ethnic minorities make similar progress to their peers.

Students at the Link College make good progress towards gaining qualifications. These include: the ASDAN Towards Independence, the Silver and Gold Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Inclusive Learning Programme. The latter was developed by the school for the Open College Network.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. Their attitudes to learning are excellent and the behaviour of most is of a very high standard. Those with behavioural difficulties make excellent progress towards learning to conform to the expectations of staff. Pupils are very eager to participate and show they really enjoy learning. Those who become anxious rarely stay so for very long as they have confidence in the adults who support them.

Attendance is good and pupils say they enjoy coming to school or to college. They learn how to stay safe extremely well and are very clear that they are not bullied. They develop an excellent understanding of a healthy lifestyle, and are keen to participate enthusiastically in physical activities. Improvement in the food served at lunchtime helps them to eat healthily.

Pupils' moral and social development is outstanding. They have an excellent understanding of right and wrong and form strong friendships with pupils from other schools. Their spiritual and cultural development is good.

Pupils are keen to be involved in decision making about their future and are confident to talk about their views and wishes. Their contribution to the community is excellent. They suggest charities that they want to support and are involved in fundraising for national and international causes. Community service is a successful part of their work on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Their workplace skills and knowledge of careers are developed well. They successfully take part in residential trips and vocational courses.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good and in a significant number of lessons it is outstanding. Over the last 12 months, teaching and learning have improved dramatically due to the extensive programme of monitoring and the support provided, particularly to the newly appointed staff.

In the best lessons, there is a good sense of pace so that the pupils do not have an opportunity to be bored. Lesson plans are detailed, showing how different groups of pupils within a class will learn effectively. A strength of teaching and learning is the outstanding quality of the relationships that staff build with the pupils. This, together with a great deal of praise and encouragement, helps pupils to comply with requests and strive to meet the high expectations that are established. Although in some lessons, such as circle time, pupils are expected to talk with each other, there are instances where they talk mainly with adults. As a result, opportunities are missed to develop important communication skills further. Appropriate strategies such as the Treatment and Education of Autistic and Related Communication Handicapped Children (TEACCH) and the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) are used to support the learning of pupils with autistic spectrum disorder extremely well. However, signing, symbols and objects to support communication are not consistently used by some staff. This is currently a focus for development in the school.

Staff are skilled in choosing subjects and lesson content that suit the age of the students at the Link College. They enjoy activities such as yoga, dressmaking and gardening and achieve well. Most staff, on both sites, use assessment strategies well and make regular records of pupils' progress and understanding.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum is effectively tailored to the needs of the different ages of pupils in the school. At the Link College, students are rightly continuing to work on their existing courses from their previous schools. An overall curriculum review is scheduled for September and further courses leading to qualifications are due to be introduced.

Subjects studied help pupils to achieve both academically and in terms of their personal development. Work-related learning and the programme of personal, social and health education and citizenship are excellent. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in work experience or to learn about the world of work.

A major strength of the curriculum is the experiences that pupils and students have to work and socialise with their peers from other schools and from the local sixth form college. Parents are very pleased with the opportunities provided for inclusion.

The enrichment of the curriculum is outstanding. There are many initiatives such as visits abroad and links with schools in other countries. A daily after school club and a

weekly drumming club are attended by pupils from local primary schools as well as from Downs View. At the Link College, students were very keen to explain about how they had learnt to abseil and take part in other exciting activities on the recent residential trip.

Pupils benefit from further expertise provided by visiting specialists such as dance movement therapists, music therapists and trainee sports leaders.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The guidance, care and support provided are outstanding. The highest priority is given to safety and safeguarding arrangements are rigorous. This is reflected in the pupils' outstanding trust in the teachers and support staff.

Excellent opportunities are provided for older pupils to receive guidance about college and possible future careers. They discuss and make contributions to decisions about their future. Staff set the pupils challenging individual targets, but they do not always record the specific support that is needed to achieve the target.

There are extremely good arrangements in place for pupils and students to confidently make the transition from school to college and beyond. This worked extremely well when students from different provisions transferred successfully to the Link College partway through the school year. Those with autistic spectrum disorder in particular have settled in very well indeed.

The school is very proactive in ensuring that a wide range of outside agencies and professionals work with it to support both the pupils and their parents. For example, parents appreciated and made good use of the counselling service which they said helped them in caring for their child.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The leadership and management of the school are good. This is due to the excellent direction provided by the headteacher and senior management team who involve staff well in decision making. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and of good quality, and provides a firm basis for improvement. The very positive views of parents, pupils, schools and colleges are well represented.

Much has been achieved to improve standards. The good quality monitoring, followed up with training and support, where appropriate, has improved the teaching and learning. As a result, pupils' achievements are also improving. Careful examination of data revealed inaccuracies in the process of setting targets due to a lack of clarity about the level descriptors. Following intensive work, this process is becoming more precise. The new Link College has been established in outstanding accommodation. This has been a major undertaking and the school is justifiably proud of the facilities available for the students. All the issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully. New specialist accommodation in school has helped to raise standards

in subjects such as science and art and design. This track record clearly shows the good capacity that the school has to improve further. Indeed, progress on current school improvements is very good. However, the monitoring of pupils' individual education plans needs to be more rigorous to ensure that their targets are achievable.

Effective changes have been made to the way the governing body operates and they are now well placed to monitor improvements through the school improvement plan.

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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>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1	2
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	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

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
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	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1	
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	2	
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ 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

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

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
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
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
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
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
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
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
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

Thank you very much for making my colleague and I feel so welcome when we visited recently. We very much enjoyed looking at your work, seeing you in lessons and talking with you.

This is what we liked about the school:

you are making good progress in your work your attitudes and your behaviour are excellent the headteacher and staff know what they want to do to make the school even better and have made a lot of very good improvements the staff look after you extremely well and you trust them there are lots of times when you are able to work with pupils from other schools

the new Link College building is outstanding those of you who moved to the Link College were given a lot of help to prepare for the move and, as a result, have settled in very well.

This is what we have asked the school to do now:

make sure that the targets on your individual education plans are able to be met make sure that all staff use additional ways to help you communicate.