

Downland School

Inspection report

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| Unique Reference Number | 126550 |
| Local Authority | Wiltshire |
| Inspection number | 315581 |
| Inspection date | 30 September 2008 |
| Reporting inspector | Charles Hackett |

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

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| Boarding provision | |
| Social care URN | |
| Social care inspector | Debbi Flint |

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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| Type of school | Special |
| School category | Community special |
| Age range of pupils | 11–16 |
| Gender of pupils | Boys |
| Number on roll | |
| School (total) | 61 |
| Appropriate authority | The governing body |
| Chair | Philip Evans |
| Headteacher | Phil Beaumont |
| Date of previous school inspection | 4 July 2005 |
| School address | Downlands Road Devizes SN10 5EF |
| Telephone number | 01380 724193 |
| Fax number | 01380 728441 |

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|--------------------------|-------------------|
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector, working alongside a social care inspector responsible for making judgements on the quality of the boarding provision.

Description of the school

Downland is a secondary special school for boys with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many have other learning disabilities and/or difficulties, including specific learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorders. The school offers an extended school day by providing a range of activities at the end of the school day. The school has a weekly residential facility used by up to 22 pupils each evening.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Downland is a good school with outstanding features, which includes the exemplary quality of care provided within the boarding provision. The headteacher and his senior team provide clear vision and direction for improving the school's effectiveness. This has led to staff having a greater belief in themselves and their work. Improvements to the behaviour management system have created a positive learning environment. As a result, the school has very good links with the local community and plays a vital part in the local authority's provision for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school knows its strengths and weaknesses well, because of the rigorous monitoring systems it has in place.

Understandably, standards are close to the national average or a little below. However, pupils achieve well, with many making much greater progress than in their previous schools. Evidence of good achievements include the many pupils making very good progress in reading and some Year 11 pupils passing GCSEs in a wide range of subjects. Appropriately, the school is seeking to extend the opportunities pupils have to gain recognition for their efforts by offering a wider range of external accreditation for many of the additional curricular activities available to some groups of pupils. Data is collected on pupils' achievements, but the school acknowledges that the systems for this are not fully effective in tracking pupils' progress and making use of the information gained to set challenging targets for future achievement.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding and reflects the outstanding efforts of staff to ensure all aspects of the 'Every Child Matters' agenda are fully addressed. For many, if not all pupils, aspects such as behaviour, attendance and relationships with others were significant problems prior to joining the school. Since being at the school, almost all have made excellent improvements in these areas. For example, the school's attendance figures are above the national average for schools of this type. There are mutually respectful relationships between staff and pupils, which results in very high standards of behaviour throughout the school. These improvements to pupils' behaviour are having an important impact on their ability to engage in learning. It means they settle well in class and enjoy completing their work. This enables teachers to focus on pupils' learning rather than on controlling their behaviour. Pupils state that they like the school and, although the school council is a recent development, pupils feel consulted with regard to all aspects of life within the school. The introduction of a new school uniform is an example of this.

Teaching is consistently good. Typically planning of lessons is thorough, ensuring good coverage of each subject and keeping pupils busy. Classrooms and corridors feature good displays of pupils' work. Their work is well marked, with very helpful comments written to assist pupils to know what they need to do to improve. Lesson planning is inconsistent because on occasions teachers plan what activities pupils will do rather than what they expect them to learn by the end of the lesson. The activities and experiences on offer to pupils cover the National Curriculum and many other topics. The school must be commended very highly for its very proactive approach in seeking to run courses that will engage pupils, especially those in Years 10 and 11, who are at risk of failing to complete their education. These pupils are offered an alternative, more practical and off-site curriculum either for each afternoon or for the full week. These arrangements include college courses, work experience and activities such as photography and cycling. These arrangements for the curriculum are new and the challenge for the school is to ensure that all pupils have opportunities to access these courses, as some pupils feel they are missing out. The introduction of an extended school day is very successful in increasing pupils'

experiences and is very popular as it is now accessed by more than half of the school population. The participation in many of these activities provides pupils with good links with the local community.

The quality of care, support and guidance given to pupils is exemplary and a major strength of the school. The staff know individual pupils very well and ensure that all feel safe through rigorous safety checks. Those pupils who access the residential facilities receive an outstanding quality of care that has a very positive impact on their personal development. Both day and residential pupils enjoy very healthy lifestyles. Excellent relationships are maintained with parents and carers, and open evenings are very well attended. The school has, also, developed very good partnerships with other children's agencies and these are used well to provide support for pupils.

The school has maintained its outstanding residential facility since the previous care inspection and improved the quality of its provision since the previous education inspection. It is now well placed to improve even further.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The quality of boarding at Downland School is outstanding and the school meets all key National Minimum Standards. The school's efficient management structure and the well-established staff team contribute effectively to the protection and promotion of pupils' welfare. There are clearly written policies and procedures which underpin the school's excellent care delivery and practice.

There is outstanding provision at the school for identifying the diverse health needs of boarding pupils. The school has a good working relationship with a local surgery, should there be a need to consult a local doctor, and the school ensures that there are always qualified first aid staff on site. There are also strong links with other health care professionals such as a school nurse, a psychologist and a paediatrician. Clear procedures are followed for the management and administration of medication and accurate records are kept. The school also ensures that all pupils receive healthy and nutritious meals with several options available to ensure freedom of choice. Meals are both social and orderly occasions.

There are strong and robust procedures in place to safeguard pupils and boys state that they feel safe at the school. Pupils' privacy is respected and they have good access to public phones and the use of their mobile phones. Helpline numbers are prominently displayed on notice boards around the school. There is also a user-friendly complaints policy and boys state that they know how to complain. All complaints are thoroughly investigated and recorded. The school has comprehensive child protection policies and procedures and all staff have received training in child protection. Young people enjoy mutually rewarding relationships and reported incidents of bullying are low. Boys state that any incident of bullying is always promptly dealt with and resolved. The school has a robust set of risk assessments in place to safeguard the boys and rigorous fire procedures ensure fire safety across the site.

The school has fostered and nurtured strong relationships between education and care staff and these result in a holistic and integrated care delivery. Means of communication include unit meetings, daily residential school meetings and a recently formed school council. Leisure provision is outstanding and includes a wide range of opportunities such as archery, tennis, gym, football, swimming, horse riding, badminton, softball, art, music, picnics, cinema, bowling and many other activities.

Boarding provision is of a good standard, with all boys having their own room. Accommodation is smart, modern, comfortably furnished and well maintained. All rooms have desks and facilities for private study. All units have separate showers and bathrooms and there are comfortable and spacious common rooms where boys can relax and enjoy TV, the play station and DVDs. There are good facilities for laundering on site and the school has a sewing room. Good written guidance is available for staff with regard to maintaining boys' privacy in residential units.

The school's organisation is outstanding. The head of care and the deputy head of care give strong and effective leadership to a well supported and very well established team of care staff. Levels of staffing are appropriate at all times of the day and night, and pupils state that staff are always there for them. Staff state that they are very satisfied with the training on offer to them which includes first aid, child protection, food hygiene, team-teach and other essential training. All care staff receive formal supervision on a half-termly basis. Domestic staff state that they do not yet receive formal half-termly supervision but feel well supported and state that they can always approach a senior staff member when necessary.

There is good provision for the effective monitoring of boarders' welfare. This includes internal monitoring by the school's head and deputy head and regular visits by a person visiting the school on behalf of the governing body.

What must be done to secure future improvement to the boarding provision? Recommendations
To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

develop a system of formal supervision for domestic staff (NMS 30.2)

What the school should do to improve further

- Refine the systems to track pupils' progress and use the information gained to set even more challenging targets.
- Ensure the planning of lessons has more focus on what pupils are expected to learn.
- Provide all Year 10 and 11 pupils with equality of access to the optional courses available.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

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| Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate | School Overall |
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Overall effectiveness

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| How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners? | 2 |
| Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection | Yes |
| How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being? | 1 |
| The effectiveness of boarding provision | 1 |
| The capacity to make any necessary improvements | 1 |

Achievement and standards

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| How well do learners achieve? | 2 |
| The standards ¹ reached by learners | 3 |
| How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners | 2 |
| How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress | 2 |

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

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| How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners? | 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 leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards | 2 |
| The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation | 2 |
| How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated | 2 |
| How well does the school contribute to community cohesion? | 2 |
| How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money | 2 |
| The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities | 2 |
| Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements? | Yes |
| Does this school require special measures? | No |
| Does this school require a notice to improve? | No |

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

3 October 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downland School, Devizes SN10 5EF

Thank you for making Mrs Flint and myself so welcome when we visited your school recently. We both very much enjoyed meeting you and seeing the work of the school and the residential facilities. We have written a very positive report about the school, judging it good, with some outstanding features. These outstanding features include the boarding, your personal development and the quality of care, support and guidance the staff provide for you.

The headteacher and his senior colleagues lead and manage the school very well. They have helped the school become a settled environment where you all feel safe and valued. We know many of you make good progress, for example, by improving your reading. You also do well in improving your attendance and behaviour. The boarding is well organised and helps many of you get the best out of school.

Teaching is good and classrooms are good learning environments. The curriculum is good, especially the many activities that form part of the extended school day. We know you enjoy taking part in these. The support you receive is clearly helping so many of you to feel good about yourselves and achieve well.

- We have suggested a few improvements that may help to make your school even better. These are:
- Improve how staff check on your progress and use information gained to set targets for you to do even better.
- Plan lessons with more of a focus on what you will learn.
- Make sure you all have equal chances to follow all the courses available.

Good luck with your studies and your efforts to support the staff to make your school even better.

Charles Hackett

Lead Inspector