

Downend Comprehensive School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109321
Local Authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	324949
Inspection dates	4–5 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Kenneth (Ken) Bush

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1520
Sixth form	203
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jackie Meech
Headteacher	Tamryn Savage
Date of previous school inspection	1 February 2006
School address	Westerleigh Road Downend Bristol BS16 6XA
Telephone number	01454 862300
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by five Additional Inspectors

Description of the school

Downend is a larger than average comprehensive school. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is below that found nationally. The percentage of students identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities is also below the national average. The great majority of students are of White British origin with a very small proportion whose first language is believed not to be English. The school has had specialist technology college status since 1999. It is a member of the Kingswood Partnership, providing shared courses for students aged 14 to 19 in the local area.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Downend Comprehensive School provides its students with a satisfactory but improving standard of education. Improvement since the last inspection was limited until recently, and as a consequence the progress made by students, especially at Key Stage 4, has been too slow. However, the strategies put into place by the senior leadership team are beginning to have a more rapid impact and the progress made by the students is now satisfactory. The palpable improvements made so far and the growing strength in leadership and management, including governance, indicates that the capacity to improve further is good.

The standards reached by students by the end of Year 11 are broadly average. An increasing proportion of students leave school with at least five GCSE passes and in 2008 every student gained at least one GCSE pass. This reflects the school's strong commitment to valuing every student. The rate of students' progress over time, however, has not been fast enough and too many have not achieved as well as they should have done to ensure good progress. The school is now beginning to address this more vigorously through a quicker and more effective response to underperformance, but this has not yet had a clear impact upon achievement overall, which is satisfactory.

Teaching and learning are beginning to improve more rapidly as a result of better monitoring and evaluation by senior and middle leaders and through significant investment in professional development, but remain satisfactory despite some good practice. Assessment systems are in place to enable good tracking of students' progress, but too many lessons lack challenge and do not take sufficient account of students' individual capabilities or encourage independent learning. Also, quality of marking and feedback generally varies considerably across the school. The curriculum is broad, balanced and matches students' needs and capabilities well. School leaders and managers are becoming increasingly proficient in responding creatively to local and national initiatives and the Kingswood Partnership is an example of outstanding practice which has significantly extended students' options in the 14–19 curriculum.

Good care, guidance and support of students is a strength of the school and creates a positive learning environment; support for lower attaining and vulnerable students is particularly good. Parents are generally supportive and endorse the measures that the headteacher and the senior team are taking to move the school forward. One parent commented: 'My daughter really enjoys Downend School and is doing really well. The positive atmosphere and community spirit are obvious to all. Well done Downend School!' However, a small minority of parents expressed views that the school's communication with parents could be better, and also that students' behaviour was not always as good as it should be. Inspectors found behaviour to be satisfactory overall, but variable. In general, students have a high regard for their school, enjoy their education and appreciate the variety of opportunities on offer to them, both within the curriculum and beyond. They are developing a good range of personal skills that are preparing them well for their education and employment after school.

Technology college status has had a generally positive impact on standards, although there is considerable variation between the specialist subject areas. The specialism has contributed significantly to improved resources which have benefited other areas of the curriculum and recruitment into the sixth form. Its contribution to improving the school's links with the community is good, especially with regard to enriching links with primary partners and through the provision of enrichment courses.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Students are supported well in their studies and guided clearly towards their future careers. Progression rates to university are significantly above those found nationally. Students much enjoy sixth form life, as shown in their good attendance and excellent relationships with staff. They are considerate to others and have extensive opportunities to show leadership and participate in many enrichment activities. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Most lessons have good features but too few are outstanding as most teachers do not take advantage of the excellent behaviour and attitudes displayed by the students during lessons to promote more active learning. As a result, students' progress in relation to their average attainment on entry is satisfactory overall. Results in the sixth form in 2008 improved and were close to those found nationally, although standards in vocational subjects were better than those at A level. The sixth form curriculum provides a good range of traditional and vocational subjects as well as the AQA Baccalaureate and is flexible in adding new courses to meet demand. Students' increasing satisfaction with what the sixth form can offer has resulted in a significant rise in applications for 2009. As a consequence of accelerating rates of progress and outstanding outcomes in terms of students' personal development, leadership and management are judged to be good.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that lesson activities consistently challenge students of all ability groups to make better progress and develop their independent learning skills, especially at Key Stage 4.
- Improve the quality and consistency of assessment across the school to ensure students know how to move forward in their learning.
- Ensure subject leaders consistently contribute to raising achievement, particularly through further improving the quality of teaching and learning.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter Downend with levels of attainment which are broadly average. By the end of Year 9, standards remain in line with national expectations and progress overall is satisfactory. In 2008, the proportion of Year 11 students gaining five good GCSEs rose, although the school did not meet its targets overall. Attainment in both English and mathematics declined compared with national averages but in science, the proportion gaining two good passes exceeded the national figure. Success in improving performance is most evident in design and technology, where the school's specialist status is making an impact upon standards, notably with the most able students.

Although achievement at the end of Key Stage 4 has been satisfactory, it has declined in recent years. However, evidence gathered during the inspection showed early indications that the rate of progress is starting to increase due to improving teaching and more effective intervention with underperforming students. As a consequence of well focused and timely support, the progress of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and other vulnerable groups

does not differ significantly from that of their peers. Therefore, achievement overall is satisfactory, but improving.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Personal development and well-being are good. The school's specialism is effective in contributing to and enhancing the promotion of healthy eating. Students understand and are encouraged to adopt healthy lifestyles, as evidenced in the high levels of participation in the extensive extra-curricular physical education programme. The school provides a safe environment which enables students to feel secure. Incidents of bullying are rare, and when they do occur they are taken seriously and dealt with through an effective anti-bullying policy. Students describe the school as a 'safe place to be'. They speak well of their school and are appreciative of the support given to them by their teachers. Behaviour in lessons is satisfactory, although some instances of pupils being too boisterous were seen during the inspection.

Attendance is satisfactory but on an improving trend due to a strong and clearly focused emphasis on tackling persistent absence. Students' moral and social development is good and is promoted well across the curriculum. There is clear evidence of good practice within a well structured programme, including religious education and personal development immersion days. Information and communication technology (ICT), literacy and numeracy are making a sound contribution to students' future economic well-being, and the well structured diploma and work-related learning programmes are especially effective in contributing to students' development in this area. Students make good use of the range of opportunities to contribute to the school community and to enhance their leadership skills, through mentoring younger students, taking an active part in the school council and contributing to local partnership activities such as the Green Car Challenge. Students give generously of their time in supporting local and global charities, although they are less involved in community activity beyond the immediate school context.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

In good lessons, teachers know their subjects well, plan effectively and use a wide range of activities and strategies to support learning. Strengths in teaching include good use of resources, including ICT, and positive relationships between staff and students. School records show that there is good and improving practice in many areas of the curriculum, and this was confirmed by the inspection team. However, there is generally not enough really challenging teaching across the school to ensure that students make consistently good progress in their learning and therefore develop the confidence and ability to work independently. Where teaching is less effective, planning does not take sufficient account of students' different capabilities and starting points, and is too teacher-directed. Teachers do provide some clear, detailed and useful written feedback, but this is inconsistent across the school and does not always give specific advice about what students need to do to improve their work - a problem which persists since the last inspection.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum has been recently reviewed to incorporate the new national requirements at Key Stage 3 and an increasing number of vocational courses at Key Stage 4, giving students a wide range of choices to meet their individual needs. These are taught both within the school and across the local Kingswood Partnership. The school has embraced the development of new diplomas and has delivered Functional Skills to students in Year 10 and Year 9. Well conceived plans are in place to embed Functional Skills in the Principal Learning element of the diploma in the future. The school supports individual needs well, including the provision of alternative curriculum arrangements with local colleges and work experience placements with local businesses. Good immersion days add variety to the curriculum, where the whole school goes off timetable to take part in activities on mapped themes including citizenship, healthy schools and anti-bullying.

There is a strong transition programme in place with good links with local primary schools. When students visit for their induction, they take part in 'learning to learn' activities and begin the first day of the autumn term with a day of team-building activities that help them to feel more comfortable in their new school and build friendships to support the transition process. Extra-curricular provision is good with a wide range of popular activities provided for students. Resources for learning are good and reflect the school's specialism in technology.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Students are confident individuals and are guided onto appropriate pathways as a result of the good support they receive. Their welfare is foremost in the school's priorities and promotion of their personal development and well-being is good. Recent improvements to the tracking and monitoring of students' achievement have led to effective intervention and support this year, particularly for those students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. The pupil inclusion centre provides a safe zone for the most vulnerable students and encourages them to integrate back into their normal classes.

The most vulnerable children, including those who are looked after and those from minority ethnic groups and who speak English as an additional language, are well supported. The curriculum for these children is well chosen and enables them to succeed in their studies. Work-related support and advice for all students is particularly strong and allows them to feel confident about career opportunities. Students are given good guidance on how they can improve their health and safety. The school works closely with the Youth Service to give those for whom work experience is inappropriate a range of activities that enhances their life skills. Safeguarding and child protection arrangements are securely in place.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The good leadership of the headteacher has led to the development of plans to enable sustained improvement for the school and the raising of aspirations for students and staff. Monitoring and evaluation procedures are gradually becoming more robust and, as a result, there is now a clearer sense of what is required to take the school forward. Systems for setting challenging

targets and tracking students' progress are now firmly in place and are beginning to lead to improving levels of achievement. Whilst leadership is good in some areas, subject leaders are not directing improvement consistently enough to ensure that high standards are embedded across the school.

Governors discharge their responsibilities well and are developing their function to become increasingly effective in holding the school to account to complement their role as 'critical friends'; governance is a strength of the school. Productive partnerships with other educational providers have been forged which have broadened students' curricular choices both at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Equality of opportunity is appropriately promoted and the school rightly prides itself on its welcoming and inclusive ethos. The school is making a satisfactory contribution to community cohesion, and has identified clear and appropriate steps for developing this further.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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?	3	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

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

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

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	3	
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	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3	3
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?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	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**

6 March 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Downend Comprehensive School, Bristol BS16 6XA

Thank you for the very warm welcome you gave to the inspection team when we visited your school recently. We enjoyed being in your lessons, meeting with you and were impressed with the pride most of you have in your school.

These are the main findings of the inspection:

- Downend is a satisfactory and improving school.
- Students reach broadly average standards in terms of attainment, and the rate of progress is satisfactory.
- Teaching is generally satisfactory and is improving.
- You have a good curriculum, which the headteacher and the senior team are working hard to improve still further.
- Your personal development is good in the main school and outstanding in the sixth form.
- Staff at the school care for and support you well, but the guidance that you are given about how to improve your work and meet your targets is an area that should be better.
- Your school is satisfactorily led and managed and your headteacher has good plans for how it can get even better.
- The school's specialist status makes a positive contribution to your education.

The headteacher agrees with the inspection team that your achievement could be greater and we have asked that:

- lessons consistently provide challenge for all groups of students so they make faster progress, especially at Key Stage 4
- teachers improve the quality and consistency of assessment through better marking and feedback across all subjects
- all of the subject leaders contribute fully to raising achievement, particularly through further improving the quality of teaching and learning.

You can do your bit to help by continuing to work as hard as you can and some of you could improve your concentration in lessons. On behalf of the inspection team, the very best of luck with your studies in the future.

Yours faithfully

Ken Bush

Lead Inspector