

Downs View Special School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114680
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	326052
Inspection dates	18–19 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Timothy Feast

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	117
Sixth form	54
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Jennifer Barton
Headteacher	Adrian Carver
Date of previous school inspection	23 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Warren Road Woodingdean Brighton BN2 6BB
Telephone number	01273 601680
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Age group	4–19
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

Downs View is a special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties who have very complex needs including sensory needs, autistic spectrum conditions (ASC) and profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD). The number of pupils with ASC is proportionately larger than those with other needs. There is post-16 provision at the link college on a separate site and it caters for students in Years 12, 13 and 14. The school provides for a very small number of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Nearly a third of pupils are looked after children. The school has a small proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Downs View is an outstanding special school which is very effective in meeting the complex and diverse needs of its pupils. Parents are overwhelmingly positive in their views of the school. One parent commented: 'My children have flourished at Downs View as a result of the hard work, care and commitment of all staff to the needs of individuals.' This was typical of nearly all of the comments received. Pupils progress extremely well at the school, demonstrating considerable improvements in their communication skills, improving their mobility and, for those for whom it is appropriate, showing considerable improvement in their challenging behaviour. Children in the Reception Year get off to an excellent start and make similarly outstanding progress.

Pupils make exceptional progress as a result of the exemplary care, guidance and support that they receive, which parents comment is extended to the family as a whole. Pupils benefit greatly from a wide range of therapeutic and medical strategies to meet their additional needs, from physiotherapy sessions in the 'Blue Room' to support from speech and language specialists. Teaching is unfailingly good and, in many instances, is outstanding. Teachers plan comprehensively to meet the individual needs of pupils and they deploy additional adults in the classroom expertly so that all pupils can flourish at a level that is appropriate for them. The school is continuing to develop its use of a range of assessment data so that the pupils' progress across a variety of complex needs can be more systematically demonstrated. Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent and reflect staff sensitivity to the dignity of the pupils. Where pupils require specific medical support, this is provided for extremely well, while patient confidentiality is well respected. The outstanding curriculum supports pupils in continuing to develop their life skills, partly as a result of the extensive range of opportunities provided through off-site visits and visitors to the school.

As a result of this outstanding provision, students' personal development and well-being are exemplary. Many parents commented on how much their children enjoy coming to school and this is reflected in their positive attitudes in lessons and around the school. The school has a strong emphasis on the implementation of thorough and practical behaviour plans. As a result, the behaviour of pupils improves considerably, particularly the behaviour of those with autistic spectrum conditions. Given the number of medical conditions some pupils have, their attendance overall is good.

The school has continued to improve since the last inspection and demonstrates an excellent capacity to continue this improvement at all levels of leadership. There is a clear vision for the school which leaders effectively translate into reality. Leaders at all levels are challenged to meet aspirational targets. There is a culture of continuing improvement which is supported by high quality professional development. Resources are expertly deployed. Governors and school leaders have an excellent understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school is quite exceptional and, as one parent put it, 'is a very special "special" school'.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 1

The post-16 provision in the link college has an outstanding impact in building on the students' prior academic and personal development. Students' progress continues to be outstanding. A vibrant curriculum has been developed that prepares them very well for the next stage of their

education. A good example was the collaborative drama work being done with students from the co-located Varndean College. Students' work in areas such as catering is accredited through the Open College Network and they continue with their Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which they start in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum provides excellent experience in life skills, from working in the Fairtrade Café to growing vegetables on the college's allotment. These vocational and other workplace opportunities enhance both the students' personal qualities and their skills in independent living. There was a great deal of enjoyment seen in the building, typified by the impromptu 'break dancing' at mid-morning break. Excellent care, guidance and support are provided by all staff. This continues into breaks and lunchtimes when all staff work very effectively to continue to develop students' social and moral skills. Teaching is outstanding; a significant feature is the team work between teachers and the well-informed and effective support staff, especially when supporting the most challenging students.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 1

Provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is organised in conjunction with that for pupils in Years 1 and 2. Attainment on entry to the Reception Year is well below expected levels, because of children's complex special educational needs. Outstanding leadership and management ensure a safe, stimulating and very caring environment in which children can thrive and thoroughly enjoy their learning. Children settle quickly and, where appropriate, manage dual placements with local primary schools very well. There are very good induction procedures and these help to establish excellent relationships with both the children and their families. Teachers plan very well to meet the specific needs of these children and as a result they make outstanding progress with their communication skills and with improvements in their mobility. Children also acquire new skills and understanding in other areas of learning. They make outstanding progress with their personal development because of the attention all staff pay to meeting their needs and the rich opportunities to experience new situations.

What the school should do to improve further

- Further develop the use of a range of assessment procedures so that the full extent of pupils' progress across a variety of complex needs is made more explicit.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Achievement is outstanding as school staff, supported by a range of agencies, are successful in building pupils' confidence, self-esteem and self-awareness. There is significant improvement in pupils' behaviour and a substantial reduction in challenging behaviour for those for whom this is a particular difficulty. The physical progress of many of the pupils is exceptional and is substantiated with convincing documentation, including photographs and positive comments from parents and pupils alike. Many pupils have considerable communication difficulties but they make outstanding progress, including successfully learning to use a wide range of technological supports to make themselves understood. Pupils make substantial progress in meeting the challenging targets in their individual education plans and this progress accelerates the longer they are at the school. The progress of the most vulnerable pupils, including the looked after children, is similar to that of their peers. Pupils who speak English as an additional language make excellent progress in their understanding of English as well.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils enjoy coming to school and enthusiastically participate in the exciting activities planned for them. Young pupils entered eagerly into the telling of the story of 'The Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch', while older students enjoyed recalling details of bacteria and viruses in relation to everyday living. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles including participating positively in a range of physical activities such as dance, swimming and boccia. They behave in a thoroughly responsible manner when preparing food for consumption by the public in the college café. They contribute extremely well to the community through activities such as the school and college councils. Local headteachers comment that joint activities with pupils from Downs View have a profound, positive influence on their own pupils' personal development. Pupils from Downs View contribute extensively to local events such as the Brighton Festival. Pupils are proud to take on responsibilities, for example being milk monitors or carrying the garden tools to the allotment. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, including their exceptional responses to opportunities to reflect on people whose lives may be less fortunate than their own.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Adults working in the school know the pupils really well and possess exceptional abilities to plan activities and provide well-targeted support. This enables pupils to make outstanding progress while enjoying their lessons. Teachers manage to plan to meet all the differing individual needs of the pupils in the classes while still maintaining and concentrating on a central theme. Teaching assistants are deployed very effectively as a team so that all staff both extend and consolidate learning while implementing aspects of behaviour plans if necessary. Excellent relationships are key to the pupils' exceptional progress, as are the increasing opportunities for them to develop independence. Pupils trust and like the staff and this helps to encourage them to work towards meeting their challenging targets. The school uses home/school books as one way of communicating with parents and this has a positive impact in enabling parents to pursue their children's education at home. Teachers assess the progress of pupils accurately and use the information very well to inform their planning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is very responsive to pupils' needs. Pupils are challenged to develop their communication skills and respond very positively. Through a wide range of physical activities and therapeutic interventions, pupils' physical mobility is enhanced. Pupils' enjoyment is reflected in their positive response to an inviting range of opportunities to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. These range from dancing the samba with girls from a local school to drumming sessions, both during the school day and after school. The school offers considerable additional opportunities to extend pupils' academic and personal skills, through, for example, residential trips to France and Calshot. These opportunities are valued by both the pupils and their parents.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

There is a direct correlation between the high quality care, guidance and support that pupils receive and their improving behaviour, good attendance, increasing confidence and improving self-awareness and self-esteem. The school's comprehensive behaviour management plans are consistently implemented, resulting in sharp reductions of challenging behaviour. Child protection and safeguarding procedures meet requirements and stringent risk assessments are undertaken for all aspects of school life. The school has extensive systems for tracking pupils' academic and personal progress and is now implementing new procedures which are more effective in identifying progress across multiple complex needs. As a result of effective target setting, the individual focus of pupils' academic and personal development is clearly identified to both staff, parents and, where appropriate, the pupils themselves.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are sharply focused on providing the very best education for the pupils at Downs View and are exceptionally successful in achieving this. Leaders identify the school's strengths and areas for development precisely and plan accordingly. Individual leaders know their areas of responsibility very well and have the confidence and the skills to bring about improvement. Governors challenge school leaders very well. Senior leaders encourage others to be innovative and to utilise their considerable areas of expertise. This expertise is shared through excellent in-house training. School leaders take good account of the views of the pupils and their parents.

The school is outstanding in promoting community cohesion. Pupils gain a developing understanding of the locality and wider afield. The community is rightly proud of the school's contribution to an expanding understanding of the capabilities that its pupils develop. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school and it has a deservedly excellent reputation for meeting the needs of these most challenging of pupils.

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

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?	1	1
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?	1	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1	1

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	1	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	1	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	1	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	1	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	1	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	1	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1	

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?	1	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	1	
The attendance of learners	2	
The behaviour of learners	1	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1	

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1	1
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	1	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1	
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**

20 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Downs View Special School, Brighton, BN2 6BB

You may remember that we visited your school and link college recently to see how well you were doing. Thank you for making us feel so welcome. We really enjoyed our time with you, talking with you and the staff and seeing all the examples of your work on display in the corridors and classrooms. We agree with the views of many of your parents that Downs View is an outstanding school and that you make exceptional progress while you are there. As a result of all the support and guidance you receive, you are able to communicate better, you control your body better so that your movement improves and, for those of you who have behaviour problems, there is a great improvement in your behaviour. The excellent work of all your teachers and other adults makes sure that you really enjoy school, feel safe and always have someone you feel you can talk to. You contribute exceptionally well to the school community and wider afield, for instance at the Brighton Festival. You really enjoy and benefit from the many links with local schools and organisations, for example through your dance and drama work with local schools. You are supported well in the transition to the next stage of education, so much so that all the Year 14 students have places to go on to in further education or specialist colleges.

We agree with you and your parents that you enjoy an extensive range of activities and visits that support your personal development really well. We were particularly impressed by your reflection on others who you consider less fortunate than yourselves.

Your headteacher, staff and governors are doing a great job in helping the school to develop further. We have asked the staff to carry on developing their use of the assessment system they have introduced, which will give the school, you and your parents more information about your progress.

The inspectors were really impressed by all the young people that we met and we will always remember our short stay at your excellent school.

Yours faithfully

Tim Feast Lead inspector