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Mr A Frame and Mrs S Whitlock
Co-headteachers
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Dear Mr Frame and Mrs Whitlock

Short inspection of Downlands Community School

Following my visit to the school on 3 October 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in July 2013.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the previous inspection. Downlands Community School faces particular challenges. Almost all the pupils are from service families, who mostly live in the army training camp for short periods, often of no more than six months. Very few pupils stay in the school from Reception through to Year 6 and the make-up of the pupil population continually changes. Despite this, there is a strong sense of community in the school, and you are rightly proud of your staff team's success in integrating new arrivals into the school smoothly. You provide excellent care and support for all pupils, including the most vulnerable. Parents recognise the quality of this provision. They typically comment that it is 'a wonderful school which is so nurturing and inclusive for all', and 'the school has provided a safe and enjoyable learning environment to encourage our daughter to reach her full potential'.

You have worked hard to strengthen the school's assessment procedures to take account of relatively recent curriculum changes. Middle leaders such as curriculum coordinators play an important role in making sure that these changes have a positive impact on learning. Staff welcome their increased accountability for ensuring progress. Governors check the quality of teaching and learning, provide challenge and support for the leadership, and come into school to help pupils enjoy a range of activities which make the curriculum even more interesting for them.

When the school was previously inspected, teachers were asked to use assessment and success criteria more creatively to help boost pupils' progress. Staff have done

this: after a dip in results in 2016 as the school was coming to terms with changes in the curriculum and methods of assessment, outcomes improved. This has particularly been the case for the few pupils who are on roll at the school for a longer period. At the previous inspection, inspectors asked the school to improve resources. This has happened, especially following the new building programme which has helped create a stimulating learning environment. The previous inspection report also highlighted the need to improve achievement in mathematics. This has begun to happen, especially lower down the school, and the efforts have begun to filter through higher up the school. Finally, inspectors identified that staff needed to have more consistently high expectations of what the most able pupils in particular could achieve. School leaders recognise that this is something that the school still needs to work on.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have made sure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Records are detailed and of high quality. All the staff inspectors talked to understood very well the need to be vigilant in looking out for, and reporting, any possible concerns. Staff and governors receive good training in safeguarding matters. School leaders give parents a lot of information and advice on ensuring safety, much of which is helpfully online. As a result, there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school, reinforced by the physical situation of the school within a secure, guarded site.

Rates of attendance are above the national average and pupils enjoy coming to school. Pupils feel safe, and parents agree that this is the case. Pupils and parents value the high quality of care and what they call the 'community and family feeling' in the school. Parents would recommend the school and see behaviour as a strength of the school. A typical parental comment was, 'The positivity, enthusiasm and care shine through in the children.'

Inspection findings

- My first line of enquiry was about the rate of pupils' achievement throughout the school by the end of Year 6. Data has to be treated with caution because the composition of year groups is constantly changing, making it difficult to analyse trends. Nevertheless, I was able to see the work done by pupils currently and discuss progress with senior leaders, middle leaders, governors and the local authority.
- Children in Reception, who often join the school with levels of skill, knowledge and personal development below expectations for their age, make good progress.
- There has been progress made in learning phonics skills in key stage 1. Achievement in phonics by the end of Year 2 is broadly in line with expectations.
- Most pupils in key stage 1 make good progress and their attainment is rising, for example in mathematics.
- Following a recent dip in results, pupils in key stage 2 are now making good progress. Pupils from an ethnic minority background, pupils who speak English as an additional language and pupils who have special educational needs and/or

disabilities share in this good progress. Additional funding used for individual tuition, along with other initiatives, has boosted their progress.

- Some of the most able older pupils do not achieve as well as they should in writing because staff do not have consistently high expectations of them and so do not routinely set them challenging work. The limited depth and range in writing can be seen in English and other subjects, for example in science.
- My second line of enquiry centred on the quality of teaching. Although teaching was judged as good at the previous inspection, teachers did not use assessment enough as an aid to pupils' learning. The school has worked on this successfully, so that teaching has improved. Subject coordinators make sure that teachers use the results of assessments to plan more effectively for individual pupils' needs. Teaching assistants have also benefited from training and consequently are now more skilled and active in helping individuals or small groups to learn effectively. Teachers usually give pupils useful feedback on their work.
- My third line of enquiry concerned the role of leadership and management at all levels in sustaining the school's previous strengths and helping it to continue to move forwards. Senior leaders, particularly the two co-headteachers, have been successful in improving the school. They check the quality of teaching and learning more regularly and systematically than before. Leaders enable staff to develop their skills. They also know the school's strengths and weaknesses well and use this as a basis to plan improvement.
- Subject coordinators check pupils' progress more thoroughly now, helping to ensure good learning.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils, especially the most able, can achieve, especially when they are writing; they should make sure that the tasks they set are at an appropriate level of depth and provide sufficient challenge.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Dorset. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

John Laver
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held meetings with you and with governors. I also talked with other staff, including subject coordinators. I had a conversation with a

representative from the local authority. I spent some time with you in walking through all the classrooms to observe learning and behaviour.

I looked at a range of documentary evidence. This included the school's evaluation of itself, its improvement planning and records of attainment and progress. I read some external reports on the school, I looked at information on attendance, current attainment and progress, and various documents relating to safeguarding. I heard younger pupils reading and talked to them about their books.

I took account of 29 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. I talked to a few parents in the playground before the start of the school day. I also took into account several free-text responses received from parents.