

Inspection of Downlands Community School

Blandford Camp, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 8BG

Inspection dates: 7 and 8 June 2023

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Early years provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy attending Downlands Community School. This is because leaders have created a school culture that is inclusive and caring. As the school has a high proportion of pupils who come from the families of service personnel, pupils sometimes join the school mid-year. They are welcomed by all and consequently settle into the school quickly. Pupils are confident that they can speak to staff about any concerns they have. They know that adults will help them sort out any issues or worries.

Pupils enjoy learning. They value the rewards they receive for making good choices about their work or behaviour. Therefore, classrooms are calm learning environments. Pupils understand the importance of treating everyone fairly.

Pupils participate in a variety of community activities. These help them to become active citizens. For example, members of the choir speak enthusiastically about singing at the sergeants' mess. Pupils benefit from a range of clubs and activities that foster their talents and interests.

Pupils take part in a range of wider experiences to develop leadership responsibilities. Older pupils enjoy being 'play leaders' and supporting younger children to socialise and play games.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders have designed a well-structured curriculum. However, in many subjects, it is either yet to be implemented or teachers do not have sufficient subject knowledge to teach it well. This means that pupils do not develop the depth of knowledge that they need to be successful.

In some subjects, leaders make regular checks to ensure that pupils understand what they are taught. However, this is not the case in all curriculum areas. This means that some pupils move through the curriculum with ongoing gaps and misconceptions in their learning.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well. The special educational needs coordinator works with external agencies to provide targeted support for pupils. Parents value the work leaders do to support transitions in or out of the school.

Children in pre-school provision get off to a strong start. The curriculum is ambitious and children respond to this well. Staff support children to make links between different aspects of their learning. This helps to deepen their understanding. As a result, children develop skills and knowledge quickly.

Children enjoy listening to stories and joining in with rhymes. Staff support them to learn new words and encourage them to use these correctly. This helps to prepare

children for Reception class. Children learn to read as soon as they start school. The reading books that staff give them match the phonics sounds they know. Those children who fall behind are supported to catch up and keep up.

Beyond Reception class, the focus on learning to read is less rigorous. Leaders have not ensured that the reading curriculum is fully defined. The knowledge and skills pupils need to get better at reading are not planned with precision. This means pupils do not become fluent, confident readers quickly enough.

Leaders place pupils' personal development at the heart of the curriculum. This is underpinned by the school motto, 'We care, we share, we believe, we achieve.' To support pupils whose parents/carers serve in the Armed Forces, staff share carefully planned reading texts. This helps pupils to develop resilience and independence.

Pupils learn about life beyond their immediate environment. They enjoy finding out about a variety of cultures. They talk with maturity about the importance of equality and understand that everyone should be respected.

Pupils understand how to look after their physical and mental health. They embrace opportunities to participate in sport and proudly represent their school in local competitions. Pupils explain how healthy eating and regular exercise help to keep them fit. They value opportunities for reflection and say that these periods help them to improve their concentration.

Pupils learn about democracy by voting in the 'pupil parliament.' They understand that the pupils they select represent their views in meetings. However, pupils are not able to make links between their own parliament and national government or British values.

Governors understand the school's context well. They recognise the strengths of the school and those areas that need to improve. They have welcomed expert support from outside of the school. Leaders are considerate of staff well-being. Staff appreciate the support that leaders provide to help them to manage their workload. They refer to the school as 'the Downlands family', where everyone helps one another.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a robust and thorough culture of safeguarding in place. All staff receive relevant training and identify and report any concerns they have.

Leaders work diligently with external agencies to support pupils and families, where appropriate. Governors and other leaders carry out thorough checks to ensure that adults appointed to work in the school are suitable.

Pupils know how to keep themselves safe when online and beyond. They understand the importance of personal boundaries and permission. This helps them to develop healthy relationships with their peers

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not taken sufficient steps to implement the planned curriculum effectively. This means that pupils do not develop the depth of understanding that they need in all subjects. Leaders need to ensure that staff have sufficient subject expertise to implement the curriculum well.
- Leaders have not fully defined the reading curriculum beyond the Reception Year. Therefore, pupils do not build the knowledge and skills they need to read well. Furthermore, pupils who fall behind are not supported to catch up quickly enough. Leaders need to ensure that the curriculum supports all pupils to read confidently and fluently.
- In some subjects, the checks that teachers make on pupils' learning do not identify gaps in pupils' knowledge. Therefore, some pupils move through the curriculum with ongoing gaps and misconceptions in their learning. Leaders need to ensure that assessment is used to inform teaching and consolidate pupils' understanding.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	113659
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10256686
Type of school	Primary
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	264
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Jeremy Osbourne
Headteacher	James Rielly
Website	www.downlandsschool.org
Date of previous inspection	3 October 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The number of pupils who are registered on the school roll fluctuates due to military postings.
- There is a school-run pre-school on site.
- The school operates a breakfast club and after-school club.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the assistant headteacher. The lead inspector also met with the chair of governors, two additional governors and a local authority representative.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, history, and art and design. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to subject leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects. The lead inspector listened to pupils read to a familiar adult.
- The lead inspector spoke with the designated safeguarding leader and the deputy designated safeguarding leader to discuss the school's procedures for keeping pupils safe. She considered the school's recruitment procedures, staff induction and training, records of concern and engagement with external agencies.
- The inspectors spoke with staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- The inspectors considered responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses. They also took into consideration responses to the staff survey and the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Liz Geller, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Nicky McMahon	His Majesty's Inspector
Carl Thornton	Ofsted Inspector

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