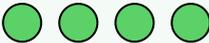


Downlands Community School

Address: Blandford Camp, DT11 8BG

Unique reference number (URN): 113659

Inspection report: 13 January 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.

Expected standard

Attendance and behaviour

Expected standard 

Pupils enjoy coming to school. Most arrive promptly and are ready to start the day. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), generally attend well. Leaders share their high expectations with pupils and their families about why regular attendance matters. They track attendance carefully and work thoughtfully with pupils and families when attendance is not as strong.

The school's STAR ambitions help pupils to understand and demonstrate positive behaviour. Routines are well embedded across the school, and pupils respect the high expectations set by leaders. As a result, pupils behave kindly and calmly around school. If bullying occurs, it is not tolerated and is dealt with swiftly and effectively. In lessons, pupils mostly engage positively with their learning. Leaders are deliberate in ensuring that pupils experience warm and caring interactions. As a result, pupils thrive in a nurturing and supportive community. When pupils need help with their behaviour, staff use clear and consistent strategies to support them. These actions help pupils to be successful in their learning environment. The school's work to teach pupils about difference is effective. Pupils are knowledgeable and respectful of others. Discriminatory behaviour is rare, and staff respond thoroughly to any concerns should they arise.

Early years

Expected standard 

The 'Dandelions' nursery class and the Reception class provide a well-organised and purposeful environment that prepares children well for their transition to key stage 1. Leaders have a clear understanding of the frequent moves that some children may have experienced before joining. They work closely with parents and carers to understand children's previous experiences. Learning is designed so that it builds securely on what children already know and understand.

Staff have high-quality interactions with children. They use these interactions to model language and help children describe what they are doing. The development of children's language is a key priority. Leaders ensure that children have regular opportunities to consolidate and practise their learning. Leaders have prioritised how well children learn their letter sounds. This is taught effectively and matched closely to children's needs. As a result, leaders are seeing positive improvements in how well children are developing. Teaching helps children learn number facts, form letters correctly and develop their pencil grip. Leaders have introduced approaches that strengthen early writing so that children continue to build their skills confidently.

Inclusion

Expected standard 

Leaders are highly inclusive in their work to support pupils. When pupils join the school, staff carefully consider any barriers to learning. Effective staff training ensures that teachers work systematically to identify pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and put appropriate strategies in place. Leaders know that pupils who have attended several

schools may not have had their needs identified effectively. They work closely with external professionals and families to assess needs and put meaningful support in place. Leaders check how well the strategies work and adapt their approach when something is not working.

Many pupils who join the school speak English as an additional language. The school plans learning carefully to support those pupils, who integrate well into the school community. Some pupils who join the school have highly complex needs. Leaders have recently opened the 'Butterfly Hub' to provide the expertise and curriculum most appropriate for those pupils. This provision is new, and staff are still developing their expertise and curriculum planning.

The school receives only a small amount of extra funding to support a small number of disadvantaged pupils. It also receives additional funding to support the many pupils from service families. Leaders use this funding effectively to strengthen pastoral care and provide further help in reading, writing and mathematics so that pupils achieve well.

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

Pupils gain positively from a comprehensive and well-planned approach to their personal development. Through assemblies and events, pupils develop their understanding of fundamental British values alongside the school's own values. This helps them to act with integrity. Leaders adapt the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum so that it is appropriate for pupils' needs. For example, teachers simplify complex content to ensure it is meaningful. Pupils learn about growing up in a supportive way that builds their confidence to ask questions. The PSHE curriculum is made relevant to pupils' experiences, helping them to develop greater knowledge about how to keep themselves safe.

A focus on class discussion encourages pupils to talk about different ethical issues. This supports them to appreciate different beliefs and views. Pupils celebrate difference and diversity, which helps them to be respectful and understanding of one another. Leaders ensure that there is high-quality pastoral support for pupils. Pupils learn to practise mindfulness and manage their emotions. When they need more support, there is a dedicated space in school where pupils feel comfortable going for additional help. Leaders provide more extensive pastoral guidance when needed. The school focuses carefully on pastoral care to support pupils whose families move regularly, or whose friendship groups may change as a result.

Pupils value the ways in which they can contribute to school life. They take on a range of leadership roles. For example, the newspaper team produces the school newspaper, and the school parliament gathers the views of their peers to share with leaders. Pupils carry out these roles proudly. Leaders plan clubs and visits that provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to try new things. Speakers and events enhance curriculum learning further, and pupils enjoy these experiences.

Needs attention ●

Achievement

Needs attention ●

Some pupils do not gain the skills they need in mathematics or writing as securely or as quickly as they could. At times, learning expectations are beyond what pupils have been taught, and when this happens pupils cannot apply what they know confidently. Because the school is located on a military base, pupils frequently join and leave the school. This has an impact on the school's published outcomes in national tests, which are often below national averages, as many pupils are not at the school long enough for their progress to be accurately reflected.

Improving how well pupils progress across the curriculum and how securely they gain the skills they need is a key priority for the school. Leaders have ensured the curriculum is well planned so that pupils can build on what they know and can do. In some parts of the curriculum, this is working well. For example, more pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read are learning their phonics securely.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention ●

Some parts of the curriculum are not implemented precisely enough to enable pupils to practise their skills effectively. In some subjects, activities do not relate closely enough to what pupils know and can do. When this happens, it limits how securely pupils gain key knowledge and can lead to them relying too heavily on adult support.

Since the previous inspection, leaders have refined their curriculum so that it is well mapped and sequenced, with careful planning for mixed-age classes. There is a clear emphasis on pupils learning key vocabulary and applying this to their learning. Leaders have more recently developed and embedded some aspects of the curriculum, such as the school's approach to teaching early writing. Teachers focus explicitly on helping pupils learn correct letter formation and ensure pupils rehearse this regularly.

Teachers quickly get to know pupils' starting points, which is particularly important for those who join the school mid-year. Staff provide extra support that helps pupils focus on the specific knowledge and skills they need to catch up. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported well in lessons, with the right help provided so they can learn and achieve alongside others.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention ●

The systems leaders use to understand the impact of their work are not yet embedded or robust enough to give them a reliable picture. As a result, leaders do not always have a detailed or fully informed understanding of what is working well. Some improvement work is not as securely established as leaders intend it to be.

Leaders are earnest in their work to improve the school and outcomes for pupils. They take careful account of the school's context so that pupils who experience frequent moves are well supported. Leaders increasingly work with partners beyond the school, which helps

them to consider the next steps for improvement. Recent work to refine the curriculum and strengthen its sequencing is now in place. Subject leaders are beginning to review how well their subjects are being implemented, and leaders ensure there is time for this work to happen.

Governors have the training and experience needed to undertake their duties and to both support and challenge the school. They understand the school's priorities well. Many governors have a military background, which helps the school to engage effectively with the community and make good use of local resources.

Leaders have established a programme of professional development that draws on research and aligns with school improvement priorities. This helps staff to strengthen their expertise in different areas of practice. Staff understand the school's priorities clearly and feel well supported in their work and wellbeing.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

Pupils are warmly looked after during their time at Downlands School. The school is uniquely situated 'behind the wire' on a military base and serves a community where pupils often join or leave the school partway through the year. Frequent pupil movement means many pupils arrive or depart at short notice. Pastoral care supports children and pupils effectively through these transitions and helps them settle quickly. As a result, pupils and their families become part of an inclusive and caring community.

Pupils behave respectfully and show understanding towards one another. Leaders manage incidents of unkindness quickly and pupils feel confident that unfairness is not tolerated. Older pupils act as positive role models and children in the early years learn the routines that help them settle well. However, some pupils find change difficult when joining or leaving mid-year and staff continue to refine support to help minimise disruption to learning.

Older pupils enjoy their responsibilities as play ambassadors and spend time supporting younger children in their games. They show care and consideration in their interactions. The school community is enriched by pupils who speak English as an additional language and who join from overseas. Pupils enjoy learning about the diverse cultures and experiences represented in the school community. The school teaches pupils how to stay safe, both beyond the military base and online, and pupils have a sound understanding of this.

Pupils enjoy their learning. They talk confidently about subjects that interest them such as their work on Queen Boudicca in history. Pupils know teachers will help them when they need support. However, some pupils do not achieve as quickly from their starting points as leaders intend. In some areas of the curriculum, pupils do not improve their literacy or mathematical knowledge securely enough. As a result, some pupils are not yet fully prepared for the next stages of their learning.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that learning activities are carefully designed so that pupils are not limited by the task and can build on what they already know, applying this confidently to new learning.
 - Leaders should establish rigorous and precise systems for checking how well their work is making a difference, so they can make reliable decisions about what to improve next.
 - Leaders need to ensure that recent curriculum developments, such as the approach to early writing, are implemented securely so that more pupils make the progress expected from their starting points.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Mr Jeremy Osborne.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior teachers and members of staff.

The lead inspector met with representatives from the local governing body and with a representative from the local authority.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The number of pupils attending the school fluctuates frequently due to military postings.

The school has recently opened a resource base for children and pupils with highly complex needs.

The school runs a nursery class for 3-year-olds.

The school provides wraparound care at the start and end of the school day.

The school is not currently using any alternative provision.

Headteacher: Mr James Rielly

Lead inspector:

Rachel Hesketh, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspectors:

Claire Mirams, Ofsted Inspector

Jo Walker, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 13 January 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

215

Close to average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 272

School capacity

420

Above average

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils who can attend the school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

National average: 300

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

5.76%

Well below average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

National average: 26.3%

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

4.65%

Close to average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

National average: 3.5%

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

28.84%

Well above average

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

National average: 15%

Location deprivation

Well below average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

All pupils' performance

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standards in a combined reading, writing and mathematics measure.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	43%	61%	Below
2024/25	42%	62%	Below
2023/24	42%	61%	Below
2022/23	45%	60%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	64%	74%	Below
2024/25	54%	75%	Below
2023/24	65%	74%	Below
2022/23	71%	73%	Close to average

Pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	53%	72%	Below
2024/25	54%	72%	Below
2023/24	58%	72%	Below
2022/23	47%	71%	Below

Pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	66%	73%	Below
2024/25	65%	74%	Below
2023/24	65%	73%	Below
2022/23	68%	73%	Close to average

Disadvantaged pupils' performance

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	11%	46%	Below
2024/25	S	47%	S

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2023/24	S	46%	S
2022/23	S	44%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	33%	62%	Below
2024/25	S	63%	S
2023/24	S	62%	S
2022/23	S	60%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	67%	59%	Above
2024/25	S	59%	S
2023/24	S	58%	S
2022/23	S	58%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
Latest 3 year average	33%	60%	Below
2024/25	S	61%	S
2023/24	S	59%	S
2022/23	S	59%	S

'S' in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

Disadvantaged pupils' performance gap

Disadvantaged pupils are those who have been eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years and children looked after. The school disadvantage gap is the difference between the performance of the school's disadvantaged pupils compared to the performance of all non-disadvantaged pupils nationally.

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics, including the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	11%	68%	-57 pp
2024/25	S	69%	S
2023/24	S	67%	S
2022/23	S	66%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in reading

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in reading and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	33%	80%	-46 pp
2024/25	S	81%	S
2023/24	S	80%	S
2022/23	S	78%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in teacher-assessed writing and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	67%	78%	-11 pp
2024/25	S	78%	S
2023/24	S	78%	S
2022/23	S	77%	S

Disadvantaged pupils reaching the expected standard in mathematics

The percentage of disadvantaged pupils meeting the expected standard in mathematics and the disadvantaged gap.

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
Latest 3 year average	33%	80%	-46 pp
2024/25	S	81%	S
2023/24	S	79%	S

Year	This school	National non-disadvantaged score	School disadvantage gap
2022/23	S	79%	S

'S' in the table above indicates the data has been suppressed, which is usually due to small cohorts. The suppression rules applied by the DfE when publishing the data have been mirrored and applied in the report card.

Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 terms)	4.4%	5.2%	Close to average
2023/24	4.4%	5.5%	Below
2022/23	4.7%	5.9%	Below

Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school	National average	Compared with national average
2024/25 (2 terms)	10.6%	13.3%	Close to average
2023/24	11.2%	14.6%	Close to average
2022/23	8.3%	16.2%	Below

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

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