

Inspection of an outstanding school: Downs View Special School

Warren Road, Woodingdean, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 6BB

Inspection dates:

11–12 February 2020

Outcome

Downs View Special School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an extremely friendly and welcoming school where pupils feel happy and safe. One parent who completed Ofsted's Parent View Survey summed this up by saying, 'The secret to Downs View's success is the culture of care, warmth and love that comes from its community.'

The school provides for pupils with a whole variety of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), some of which are very complex. High-quality training and a comprehensive knowledge of each pupil ensures that staff know exactly how to support pupils. Staff teach pupils strategies to manage their behaviour and to develop resilience. As a result, pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary. Leaders are determined to give all pupils the best chance to be successful in their future. Pupils are enthusiastic in their lessons and classroom environments are calm and purposeful. Pupils said that bullying rarely happens, but they know that staff will help them if they have any worries.

In September, when the building work is complete, the pupils from Hollingdean will move to Woodingdean. In preparation, Hollingdean pupils have been visiting the Woodingdean site regularly. Everyone is looking forward to being one school.

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

Leaders have carefully thought about the skills and knowledge pupils will need by the time they leave the school. They call this the 'skills ladder'. They have used this information to design a broad curriculum that is ambitious and personalised for each individual pupil. The curriculum starts highly effectively in the early years, where pupils begin to learn essential life skills. This exemplary start continues through all other key stages of the school. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage of education, employment or training.

Leaders have developed their own assessment system called 'onwards and upwards'. Teachers use the pupils' assessment information to plan work that ensures that any gaps in pupils' knowledge or skills are addressed. Skilful teaching has meant that pupils have the confidence to try more challenging tasks. As a result, pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, know what they have learned and remember it well.

Leaders recognise that teaching pupils to communicate effectively must be prioritised. Developing pupils' communication using signs, pictures, technology or words is a real strength in the school. Leaders ensure that the same communication approaches are replicated on all three sites. Pupils have communication plans that all staff follow diligently. As a result, pupils are successfully learning to communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs.

Pupils develop a love of reading in a variety of ways. For some pupils this is through listening to stories or sensory stories. Most-able pupils are taught to read and are encouraged to read a wide variety of books, including poetry. Leaders have ensured that the books match the pupils' reading ability and that topics are appropriate to their age. This has meant that older pupils, who may have struggled to read in their previous schools, are happy and keen to improve their reading skills.

Children in early years make a super start to their education. Routines are put in place so that children quickly become independent. The curriculum is planned exceptionally well, starting children on their journey of developing essential skills and knowledge they will need in their future. The children enjoy lots of interesting and well-planned activities. Children's interests are used to motivate them to complete tasks. This has resulted in the children being eager to learn.

Students in the sixth form have a highly effective personalised curriculum that prepares them to be independent in the community or at work. Students run their own 'FAB Café' where they prepare the food, serve the customers and manage the money. In this way, students learn vital skills that they can take into the workplace. The students benefit enormously from the continuity of joining the school's own provision for students aged 19 to 25 once they leave the sixth form.

Pupils have excellent opportunities that extend their learning beyond academic subjects. Pupils benefit immensely from regular visits in the community. This enables pupils to use their communication skills in different environments and helps develop their independence. There are a whole variety of trips organised. Pupils in Year 11 spoke enthusiastically about the residential trip they are going on in Cornwall.

Leaders have successfully created a culture where staff feel valued and supported. Staff say that leaders care about their well-being. Leaders have provided a comprehensive training programme that has given staff the expertise they need. This has meant that pupils are incredibly well supported by highly skilled and knowledgeable staff.

Governors are highly skilled. They work in partnership with leaders and staff to ensure that all the school sites share the same values and aspirations for the pupils. Governors

know the school well. They challenge leaders rigorously yet are supportive of leaders and the work they do for pupils in the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The welfare and safety of pupils are given the highest priority by all staff. Leaders ensure that safeguarding training is thorough, and staff know how to raise concerns about pupils. Highly effective communication between parents, external agencies and the school means that any concerns are rapidly acted upon. All parents, and staff spoken to on the inspection, felt the pupils were safe in the school. The first day of the inspection was 'safer internet day'. Inspectors saw pupils taught to be safe online and in the community. Pupils said they know they can talk to staff if they are worried about anything.

Background

When we have judged a special school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged Downs View Special School to be outstanding.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	114680
Local authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	10122300
Type of school	All-through special
School category	Community special school
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	218
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	45
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair/Chair of trust/Chair of governing body	Chris Girvan
Headteacher	Adrian Carver (executive headteacher)
Website	www.downsview.brighton-hove.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	17 May 2016

Information about this school

- Downs View is an all-through specialist school for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The school provides for pupils who have moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Some pupils have social and emotional mental health needs.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- In September 2018, the Cedar Centre merged with the school and was renamed Hollingdean.
- The school is based on three sites. The main schools are at Woodingdean and Hollingdean. The sixth form students attend the Link College.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the executive headteacher, deputy headteachers, the governing body and the local authority adviser. Meetings were also held with other school leaders.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, communication, and personal, social and health education. We met with subject leaders, teachers and groups of pupils. We visited lessons and looked at pupils' work as part of these deep dives.
- We reviewed safeguarding procedures in place at the school, including the single central record and child protection and safeguarding policies. We met with the designated leaders of safeguarding.
- We took account of 22 responses recorded on Ofsted's Parent View survey, including 19 associated free-text comments. We also spoke to some parents during the school day.
- The views of staff were gathered through meetings with groups of staff.
- We spoke to pupils in lessons and observed pupil's behaviour in lessons and during break and lunch times. We met with a group of pupils on the Hollingdean site.
- We looked at a range of documentation, including: the school's self-evaluation; the school improvement plan; information relating to the attendance and behaviour of pupils; the curriculum; minutes from the governors' meetings and local authority adviser reports.

Inspection team

Susan Conway, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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