



## **Downlands Community School**



**Learning is at the heart of everything we do**

### **DOWNLANDS SCHOOL - GENERAL INFORMATION FOR APPLICANTS**

**“This is an outstanding school” – Ofsted January 2017**

#### **Popular and Oversubscribed**

**“The Headteacher’s commitment to place learning at its heart permeates all aspects of this caring school. Morale is high among pupils, staff and parents.” (Ofsted)**

Downlands Community School is an 11-16 co-educational school, which serves a semi-rural, village catchment area in Mid Sussex just 8 kilometers north of Brighton. Four main junior schools feed into Downlands and in recent years many parents residing outside the designated catchment area have elected to send their children to Downlands, increasing our number on roll to 1043. Two school coaches serve the outlying villages and a number of pupils come from Burgess Hill to the north and Brighton to the south via the main London to Brighton train line.

The intake, in terms of ability, is slightly above the national average. The percentage of pupils on free school meals is 4.5% and percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups 6.2%. The school enjoys an excellent reputation and remains popular within the area and as a consequence is oversubscribed. Due to an unprecedented increase from within catchment, as from September 2016 we are taking an extra form of entry. Our current Year 7 have 8 forms of entry (240 students) and this increase will continue until the school role is 1200 in 2020.

The school was inspected by Ofsted in November 2016 and report published in January 2017. The school is judged to be “outstanding” in all areas.

#### **Academic Success and Excellence due to High Expectations**

**“Pupils benefit from exceptionally strong teaching which is leading to outstanding outcomes.” (Ofsted)**

**“Leaders’ insightful evaluation and effective management skills lead to continuous improvement. They set high standards, which they achieve.” (Ofsted)**

We are an ambitious school and seek excellence in all we do. We have placed teaching and learning at the heart of our work and our focus has seen a strong trend of improvement over the past years from 60+% 5 A\* - C including English and Mathematics to maintaining 70+% for the past 4 years. We set our whole school and pupil targets on FFTD Aspire (Fischer Family Trust) and aim in the next two years to obtain outcomes that will put the school securely in the top 10% and even 5% of similar schools nationally. Whole school value added was over 1020 between 2013 and 2015 and Progress 8 this year is 0.34.



### **Learning is at the heart of everything we do**

In 2015 an initiative based on Growth Mind-set was introduced as the philosophy that underpins all that the school seeks to achieve – “Learning is at the heart of everything that we do”. A growth mind-set is one where there is belief that success is not based on innate ability but depends on mind-set. Ability is not fixed and so can be developed by practice and feedback. This message is being given to pupils in order to develop positive attitudes. The following 5 learning messages are key to developing successful learners who believe that:

- there are no limits to success
- challenge should be embraced
- feedback should be acted upon
- practice supports success
- working together leads to success

The language used in classrooms has changed to reflect this. Inspiring quotes are displayed around the school and the same messages are being used in the professional development of teachers.

The most recent government statistics published on “Raiseonline” suggest why OFSTED judge our pupil outcomes as outstanding.

We provide strong, structured support for pupils with additional needs. Teaching assistants help these pupils meet their targets through in class support and withdrawal. We have devised our own, successful programme for gifted and talented pupils at Key Stage 3 called iGifted.

The curriculum is reasonably traditional being broad and balanced. However, we teach a two year Key Stage Three curriculum allowing pupils in Year 8 to make some choices for Year 9. The Key Stage 4 options for GCSE ensure that pupils are provided with a curriculum to meet the English Baccalaureate.

### **Outstanding Pastoral Care**

**“Staff cater for pupils’ needs very well. Relationships are strong and this enables pupils to thrive academically and personally” (Ofsted)**

**“Pupils’ behaviour is exemplary. They engage enthusiastically in lessons and show respect and care for each other.” (Ofsted)**

We are extremely proud of our strong pastoral team and system which supports all pupils and their parents. The school encourages all pupils not only to succeed academically, but to broaden their interests beyond the formal curriculum, and the very stable and highly committed staff team provides excellent support and care for all pupils.



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Heads of Year, now called Achievement Leaders, and their teams of tutors are supported by Pastoral Support Officers who work with individual pupils and liaise with parents and carers. Learning Mentors provide assistance to pupils who need extra, individual support to help them achieve their targets.

There are 4 Houses which provide a structure for competitions. The Sports Day in summer is run on this basis and pupils earn house points through good attendance and behaviour.

Good relationships between staff and pupils are a feature of the school. Recently, there has been an initiative to build on this through a new behaviour policy which has strengthened recognition of achievement and rewards whilst providing more consistent expectations. This has reduced minor disruption from its already low level and provided more effective responses to occasional unacceptable behaviour.

### **Wide Ranging Extra-curricular Provision**

**“The academic curriculum is rigorous and challenging. It is enriched by provision for the arts and a strong programme of extracurricular activities which further enhance pupils’ social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding” (Ofsted)**

We provide a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities. The high participation rate of children in all aspects of school life is a testament to the appreciation of the time given by staff to go the extra mile for pupils.

All pupils have the opportunity to have a voice about various aspects of the life of the school through a variety of Focus Groups each of which is led by teacher. These feed into a School Cabinet. Currently the Focus Groups cover the following areas: Community and Charity, Teaching and Learning, Mind, Body and Soul, Houses and Extra-Curricular, International School and Eco School and Environment.

Pupils enjoy competitive sports fixtures and Downlands frequently does well in District competitions. A wide range of clubs are held during lunchtime. Some are subject based whilst others help children develop new interests. Educational visits are a feature of the curriculum as are trips abroad, including ski trips, French revision trips and visits to a school in India with which we have developed links through our International School Status.

### **Staff Development for All**

**“Staff benefit from an excellent training programme that makes sure they are always perfecting their expertise to help pupils excel.” (Ofsted)**

The school has an excellent track record for professional development. The large amount of expertise available to us in school is often the starting point.



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Performance Management targets are differentiated for teachers of different levels of experience and allow them to develop in ways that will assist with their career development.

In addition to “in house” development, effective professional development opportunities are provided by other organisations, such as PIXL and the local e-PD consortium.

Recently, a number of teachers near the beginning of their career have been given responsibilities within the school and teachers often gain promoted posts in other schools based on the experience and professional development they have benefited from here.

NQTs have a full programme of support and are mentored by the Assistant Headteacher in charge of Teaching and Learning.

We are an active and participating member of three teaching school alliances: Millais Alliance of local secondary schools offering training places through the Schools Direct teacher training programme in partnership with the University of Brighton; Wolstonbury Alliance – taking an active lead in the implementation of ‘The Growth Mindset’ with all our primary feeder schools and St Paul’s Alliance – one of our Assistant Heads leads the ‘Aspiring Leadership’ courses.

### **A Strong Community at the Heart of our Local Community**

**“The school makes an exemplary contribution to the community; it is a community school in action as well as in name.” (Ofsted)**

The school is always highly praised and complimented for its very warm and friendly welcome. The pupils are our best ambassadors and are proud of their school. Pupil responses to all surveys and leavers’ questionnaires are always very positive with the vast majority saying they have been very happy and have always felt well supported.

Visitors frequently comment, as they go round the school, on the calm but active atmosphere and comment on the respect that the pupils show for the buildings and facilities.

Parents are very involved and supportive of the school and participation and attendance at Parents Evenings and whole school events is always very high. We have a very active PTA which meets regularly to raise money for the school whilst organising and running excellent community events such as our Christmas market and Summer Fair. We have excellent community links with local business, Parish Council and other local committees.

The Headteacher is supported by a Senior Leadership team comprising two Deputy Headteachers and three Assistant Headteachers. Current staffing comprises 66 teaching staff and 52 non-teaching staff. All teachers are encouraged to take an active part in the management of the school and the following meetings are held: Academic Board, Pastoral



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Care, Teaching & Learning, Staff Forum and ad hoc groups as the situation dictates.

The success of the school is also due to the excellent support provided to the teachers and leadership team by the non-teaching staff whose contribution is highly regarded. The happy atmosphere that visitors notice is due to the good working relationships fostered and enjoyed by all the staff.

The Staff Committee ensures that there are many opportunities throughout the year for the staff to enjoy each other's company and these events are well attended and enjoyed. For example, there is badminton on Friday nights, parties are held at the end of the winter and summer terms and groups who meet informally to socialise. The staff enjoy reduced rates to use the Community Leisure Centre facilities and some find time to meet each other in the Costa Coffee social area in the Centre.

We have a very active and supportive Governing Body and all members of Leadership sit on the appropriate committee and present Whole School Development priorities to the Governors who actively monitor progress.

### **Continuously Improving Accommodation and Facilities**

Downlands opened in 1960 as a Secondary Modern becoming fully comprehensive in 1975. The school is housed in a mixture of old and modern buildings on one site. In 2002 we took possession of a brand new, purpose built Mathematics suite and our Music accommodation doubled in size with the addition of a new teaching room and three practice rooms. The Art Department benefited from enlarged accommodation and modernization in 2004.

In addition, the school has the following accommodation: Hall, Dining Room, Gym, seven laboratories, two workshops, Graphics room, Drama Studio, two Food Technology and one Art/Textiles studio, classrooms for English, Mathematics, Modern Languages, Humanities, Careers, four Information Technology Rooms and Year 11 Common Room. Our remodeled front entrance along with the enlarged shared community facility and additional office accommodation provides a warm welcome to the school.

A £2 million Sports Complex was completed in 2006 and is a very desirable asset including a fully equipped community gym. Downlands also has a third generation floodlit all weather pitch.

In January 2010 the school opened a large extension to the school canteen and now provides some of the best canteen facilities in the County.

Works to increase the capacity of the school are under way; new buildings include a three story teaching block, dance studio, changing rooms, improved circulation, offices, toilets, SEN base and enlarged library.



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Further information can be found on the Downlands Website [www.downlands.w-sussex.sch.uk](http://www.downlands.w-sussex.sch.uk)

Visits prior to application are welcomed and encouraged.

Thank for your interest in working at Downlands.

Information about vacancies and application forms for both Teaching and Non-Teaching staff can be downloaded from the Downlands' website under "Vacancies" or from our HR Officer: email [jmcmahon@downlands.org](mailto:jmcmahon@downlands.org) Tel: 01273 84 77 34 with whom you can also register your interest in working at Downlands and be kept informed of any suitable vacancies when they arise.