



# Welcome

At The Downs, we want to give all our students the very best start in life; to help them develop into well-rounded young adults able to venture into a rapidly changing world with confidence and determination. These principles are summed up in our vision which encompasses the whole school community:

**We strive for excellence in learning through**

- ◆ Resilience
- ◆ Responsibility
- ◆ Respect

Set in the West Berkshire Downs, The Downs School is a special place where, I am proud to say, the staff are totally committed to excellence and achievement at all levels. Teaching and learning is at the heart of everything we do and we are striving to move this beyond outstanding through our philosophy **'Learning together, learning for life'**.

The school provides a balanced approach to the pursuit of excellence by offering an interesting, challenging and lively curriculum. Students gain academic, creative, sporting and social skills – both in and out of the classroom – ensuring a well-rounded learning experience for all.

We respect the trust placed upon us by parents who choose our school for their children. Relationships are a key strength of the school, including our partnership with parents, and this ensures that students feel valued and comfortable in a big secondary school environment; we pride ourselves on that small school feel.

I feel confident that you will wish to join this exciting, vibrant school community and we very much look forward to welcoming you and your family at The Downs School.

**Mr C Prosser**  
**Headteacher**



**“Outstanding  
leadership and  
management pervade  
the school”**

**Ofsted 2013**

“Achievement overall is outstanding because students in all year groups make rapid progress”

Ofsted 2013



## Caring Community

At The Downs School, a safe school community is of paramount importance to us. Our pastoral system ensures students are given the support they need to achieve their full academic potential. We pride ourselves on caring for our students, nurturing the individual and valuing personal qualities such as resilience, responsibility and respect.

Pastoral teams of tutors are responsible for the day-to-day welfare of our students and mentor students who need additional support. Student Support Managers provide help and guidance for students with particular difficulties. The Pastoral and Special Educational Needs teams work closely together to ensure all students are supported effectively in their learning and personal growth.

We have extremely high expectations of attendance, behaviour and uniform, which all students are expected to meet. Consistency is achieved through The Downs Diamond, a behaviour management system of rewards and sanctions, which has been developed by students and staff. Rewards are given in the form of house points, postcards home and vouchers for success in progress reports.

Our house system is incredibly important to us. It enriches the lives of staff and students alike, fostering a sense of teamwork and community by providing opportunities for students to participate in a wide variety of competitions, earn house points for academic success or positive contributions to the school, and take on a variety of student leadership roles. The many inter-house competitions are highlights of the school calendar and cover a broad spectrum of activities from sports and performing arts to fundraising for house charities.



# A Modern Curriculum

We offer an exciting, responsive and varied curriculum which helps to develop students skills in all aspects of learning. Our teachers are passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects and their enthusiasm motivates students to become independent, lifelong learners.

We are proud of our academic achievement and we are consistently one of the top performing schools in the authority both at GCSE and A level.

All students follow a broad based curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 which includes English, Mathematics, Science, History, Geography, French, Computing/ICT, Music, Drama/Dance, Art, Technology, Physical Education, Religious Education and a Personal Development Programme. Countryside and the Environment is included in Year 7 which relates to the school's rural setting. A second modern foreign language, in addition to French, is offered from Year 8 to support the school's focus on internationalism. From Year 8 onwards students are placed in very broad ability groupings in English, Mathematics, Science and Modern Languages.

In Years 10 and 11, students study English, English Literature, Mathematics, Science, Physical Education, Religious Studies, an applied subject, a Personal Development Programme and four subjects from a wide choice. Where appropriate there is an opportunity to consolidate learning in English and Mathematics. Able students are offered the opportunity of taking three separate sciences and more than one language. We offer a range of courses to appeal to different learning styles which allows all students to succeed in exams so that they can pursue their ambitions.



## Our School Environment

Over the past 20 years the growing reputation of our school has meant that it has expanded significantly. A combination of creative thinking and substantial investment has ensured that we have continued to provide a stimulating and inspiring learning environment. The Hubble Science building was recently opened and has transformed the learning environment, with spacious new classrooms and the most up-to-date technology. This has allowed us to enhance existing facilities for our expanding and successful sixth form and create a more appropriate area for our library to meet the growing needs of the school. We also have a number of ICT suites strategically placed around the school for specialist ICT teaching and to support learning across all other curriculum areas.

The school has extensive playing fields and a covered heated swimming pool. The Downlands Sports Centre provides joint community and school use.

“The sixth form is outstanding. Students make exceptional progress and are very well prepared for the next stage of their education or training”

Ofsted 2013



## Able, Gifted & Talented

Students of all abilities have special educational needs. At The Downs School we recognise that some students are particularly able in various subjects across the curriculum and therefore need appropriate support, stretch and challenge in order to maximise their abundant academic potential. These students are encouraged to pursue their studies and interests to the highest levels possible.

Students are identified through a range of measures and then placed upon the **Able, Gifted and Talented** register. Students, staff and parents are all made aware of the membership of this register and included students will be provided with regular extension opportunities in order to ensure they make the most of their capacity to succeed.

Students may become members of the register at any point through their time at The Downs School. Our aim is to give all our students the chance to excel and be part of this initiative. At present over 200 students are members of the **Able, Gifted and Talented** register.

## Countryside

Given the school's rural setting, we offer a Countryside and Environment course which is extremely popular with our students. It has a diverse and flexible approach and deals with a range of current affairs that affect the countryside around us. At Key Stage 4 the BTEC is offered to provide an alternative choice to traditional GCSE subjects, by meeting the needs of students and different style of learning. We have a variety of different learning spaces and resources, which allow students to have the freedom to take on responsibility within this subject.



# The Sixth Form

Our Sixth Form offers great opportunities for students to achieve success in A Level, BTEC Level 3 and BTEC Level 2 programmes. Our results are consistently amongst the top institutions in Berkshire and in 2014 the school was one of the highest performing comprehensives in the entire country.

We offer a full range of Advanced Level subjects. All students on a two-year course generally follow Advanced Level courses together with enrichment opportunities, a Personal Development Programme with relevant careers information and guidance and the opportunity for private study.

We offer a quiet, well-structured environment in which to study and all students experience a high degree of individual attention from well-qualified teaching staff.

Students wishing to enhance Level 2 achievement have the opportunity to follow a one year programme which includes a BTEC qualification and further development of literacy and numeracy as well as life skills in first aid, money management and work experience. Progression from this programme can be into a Level 3 AS or BTEC course in school or in further education or training.



# School Trips

Our ethos is to encourage learning outside the classroom in order to enhance and enrich the school experience. A large number of trips are organised and in recent years students have taken part in exchange visits to schools in the French Alps, Germany and Spain; field study trips for Biology, History and Geography in the UK and abroad; age based multi-activity residential trips; concert and theatre visits; a performing arts trip to New York and an annual ski trip.



“The school’s relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching has ensured the improvements are evident across the school”

Ofsted 2013



## Extra Curricular Activities

The school has a strong tradition of extra-curricular and extended-curricular activities across the three Performing Arts disciplines. These fantastic opportunities showcase and develop the talent and skills of our students’ year upon year. Recent productions have included ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’: ‘Footloose’, our students have also recently performed at the Berkshire County Show. House Drama and House Music competitions are some of the highlights of the school calendar.

There is extensive provision for tuition in instrumental music this is run by the local music hub, Berkshire Maestros. Our students find it an exciting and rewarding experience which also enables them to participate in regular concerts and music events throughout the year.

Within school, inter-house sporting competitions are extremely popular and include cross-country, netball, hockey, football, rugby, cricket and athletics. Our school teams have achieved great success at local, district and county levels in many of these sports as well as in badminton and swimming.



# Leadership

Making a contribution, taking responsibility and being a team player are all important elements of life at The Downs School. We believe that all our young people have the capacity to develop leadership skills and we encourage the development of these skills in students of all ages.

We value Student Voice as a way to develop the characters of our young people by extending their leadership responsibilities and giving them opportunities to directly influence the direction of the school.

Students may represent their fellow students by joining Year Councils and working in collaboration with Sixth Form leaders on projects to enrich the school community. Some students choose to become Learning Partners, working with faculties to give feedback from a student's perspective on how the learning experience can be improved. Older students may take on the role of prefects: mentoring younger students, acting as role models and contributing to the school community by guiding prospective parents around the school.



“Students recognise the high expectations set for their achievements and they have equally high expectations of themselves”

Ofsted 2013

“Parents and carers endorse the view that teaching is outstanding and students hold a similarly high opinion”

Ofsted 2013

## Our Partnerships

We value the school/parent partnership and firmly believe that cooperation between home and school is the key to academic success.

We maintain regular formal contact with parents through reports, parents evenings and mentoring days. Students' handbooks provide an informal but essential method of communication. Parents are also invited to half-termly parent forums where the work of the school is discussed and reviewed.

We work closely with primary schools within and outside The Downs Federation of Schools to coordinate curriculum development and ensure the smooth transition to secondary school. We are a member of The Downs Compton Federation which includes Compton C of E Primary School, an Ofsted outstanding school.

We have developed sound links with local commerce and industry and students are encouraged to use these contacts to increase their understanding of the world of work. As well as business volunteers coming into school to talk to students about career options, there are also opportunities for students to visit work places such as Vodafone. Local organisations support careers events within school which allow our students to explore different career pathways. Local companies also support work experience opportunities for our students aged 14-19 including those undertaking related BTEC courses.