

“success at all levels”

Ofsted

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 the world with confidence and determination. These principles are summed up in our aims, which encompass the whole school community.

To develop the ability . . .

To live as independent, self-developing and caring individuals

To be successful and contributing members of a global society

To challenge ourselves to achieve more than we believed we could

The school has been awarded High Performing Specialist School status.

Set in the West Berkshire Downs, The Downs School is a special place where the staff are totally committed to excellence and achievement at all levels. Students are offered an interesting, challenging and lively curriculum to ensure a well-rounded learning experience for all, encouraging the best

from everyone to the maximum of their ability - both in and out of the classroom. The school provides a broadly balanced approach to the pursuance of excellence in all aspects of learning, with students gaining academic, creative, sporting and social skills.

The school offers a comprehensive range of subjects across all Key Stages.



INTRODUCTION TO THE CURRICULUM AND LIFE AT THE DOWNS

Key Stage 3 – Ages 11 to 14

All students follow a broadly based curriculum in Years 7, 8 and 9 which includes English, mathematics, science, history, geography, French with either German or Spanish, information communication technology, music, drama/dance, art, technology, countryside and environment (BTEC), physical and religious education and a personal development programme. The second modern foreign language is offered from Year 8.

From Year 8 onwards students are placed in bands or sets in English, mathematics, science and modern languages according to their ability in those subjects. We have a track record of high achievement at KS3 with results well above the national level.

Key Stage 4 – Ages 14 to 16

In Years 10 and 11, students study English, English literature, mathematics, science, physical education, religious studies, a modern foreign language, a personal development programme and three subjects from a wide choice, leading to the General Certificate of Secondary Education or BTEC Level 2. For some, there is an opportunity to consolidate learning in English and mathematics with enhancement choices. We offer a range of courses to appeal to different learning styles. Able students are offered the opportunity of taking three separate sciences and up to three languages.

In recent years the percentage of students gaining 5 or more A* - C grades is consistently high compared with the national average.

The Sixth Form

Our Sixth Form offers the opportunity for students to achieve success in advanced studies and level 2 programmes, in familiar surroundings. We also have direct entrants from other institutions, who wish to be part of the very best provision: The Downs' sixth form results are amongst the top three institutions in the whole of Berkshire. We offer a quiet, well-structured environment in which to study, with a high degree of individual attention from well-qualified and experienced teaching staff.

“The Downs School is a very good school with outstanding features” Ofsted

“Academic standards are above average” Ofsted

FOCUS SUBJECTS

LANGUAGES

Our status as an international school enables all our students to study two languages and provides opportunities to learn other languages. Students are taught about other cultures through varied curriculum enrichment activities. Languages are housed in their own area with supporting ICT facilities. A great number of exchanges and visits are organised both by modern foreign languages and other curriculum areas.

SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS

Currently, about 50% of our students study triple science at GCSE. One or more sciences are also the preferred choices at Advanced level along with mathematics.

ASSESSMENT

Contact with parents takes place every term either through a report or a parents' evening. These are further supported by tutor mentoring days in Years 9 -13.

Parents who wish to discuss any aspect of their child's progress may contact the form tutor for assistance. Staff use assessment information to monitor progress, to set targets and to guide students towards them. Homework is regarded as an essential part of the curriculum by developing students' independent learning. Parents and tutors monitor homework through the Student Handbook.

SPECIAL NEEDS

The SEN department includes a SENCO (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) and a team of learning support staff to assist students with their learning.

Able students also have particular educational needs. There are whole school and departmental policies which ensure that all students reach their potential. This includes the careful monitoring of progress and the planning of extra-curricular activities to enable further success.

“Care, guidance and support are outstanding”
Ofsted



SIXTH FORM SUBJECTS

A full range of Advanced level subjects is currently on offer. These courses are outlined in a separate Sixth Form brochure. All students on a two year course generally follow Advanced level courses; enrichment opportunities; a personal development programme with relevant careers information and guidance and the opportunity for private study. Students wishing to enhance level 2 achievement have the opportunity to follow a one year programme including 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.

The Downs School prides itself on being a caring school that nurtures the individual

“There are many opportunities for students to take leadership roles and make a very positive contribution to the school and wider community” Ofsted

SEX EDUCATION

Sex education is integrated into the work of students in science, religious and social studies and as part of the personal development programme. The full sex education policy may be obtained from the school office.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The course of study is based upon the principles laid down in the West Berkshire agreed syllabus. In the lower school,

students study major faith traditions and at Key Stage 4 they also study moral, ethical and life issues. Parents may withdraw their children from aspects of collective worship and the religious education programme. Religious studies is also taught to GCSE level.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

The physical education programme aims to give opportunities to all students to participate in a broad and balanced range

of activities. It is intended that a positive attitude towards physical activity, a sense of achievement and the development of self-confidence will be fostered. Physical education is also taught to BTEC, GCSE and A level.

A wide range of extra curricular opportunities is available which can lead to representation at county, national and international level.

A CARING COMMUNITY

The Downs School is committed to pupil safeguarding; it prides itself on being a caring school that nurtures the individual and values personal qualities as highly as academic achievements. The pastoral organisation of the school complements and supports the work of the subject departments caring for the well being of all students.

Sports play a vital part in life at The Downs School, making full use of our extensive playing fields

presentation of annual prizes and awards. There are high expectations of behaviour. Detentions are set after school and at lunchtimes for those who break the school rules. This may require parents making alternative transport arrangements. All students are expected to conform to the school's uniform rules.

Students are encouraged to show initiative and take an active part in school life through charitable ventures, house competitions (music, sport etc.), enterprise events, as young leaders: prefects, members of the school council and as mentors for younger students.

COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

All students are invited to join in a daily act of worship of a broadly Christian nature, including periods of reflection and readings both in tutor periods and assemblies.

OUR STAFF

The school values and encourages the professional development of all staff as is evident from our philosophy 'Learning together; learning for life'. During the year there are continuing opportunities for staff to develop strategies to further improve the quality of learning, teaching and standards of achievement.

In addition the school employs a supportive and efficient team of associate staff: supervisors, caretakers, secretarial, technical, school meals, grounds maintenance and cleaning staff. The school uses the services of peripatetic instrumental music teachers, an educational welfare officer, educational psychologist, school nurse and police liaison officer.

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

There are plentiful opportunities for students to develop their understanding of their own cultural heritage, gain experience of other cultures and to enhance their knowledge and skills. The school is renowned for its music and drama. There is also extensive provision for tuition in instrumental music with over a quarter of students having instrumental tuition.

School teams have achieved great success in many team games over the years. In school, inter-house competitions



“We are very pleased with all aspects of the school. My children are very happy”
Parent



The heads of year for each year manage teams of tutors who are responsible for day-to-day student welfare.

A family and student support worker provides help and guidance for students with particular difficulties. There is a code of conduct which is widely displayed around the school; this explains that students and staff are required to show consideration and courtesy to others at all times. It is our firm philosophy that the whole school community is learning together, continuously.

There is a comprehensive system of rewards and sanctions: house points as part of the house system culminate in the

“(the students) develop excellent personal and social skills and achieve well academically” Ofsted

“(the students) are courteous, very well behaved and attendance is good” Ofsted

including school cross country, netball, hockey, cricket, rugby, athletics, music and performing arts maximise the involvement of students.

Over the years the school has been successful at local, district and county levels, in various sports competitions, public speaking, enterprise awards, environmental awards and music. In addition, members of staff organise clubs and activities during the lunch breaks and after school in the evening or at weekends. These include public speaking, Enterprise, the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and sport, music and drama.

Sixth Form students have the opportunity to travel and work abroad. A trip is currently being organised to Ecuador.

A large number of trips are organised to enhance the curriculum. In past years, students have taken part in:

- ✦ exchange visits to schools in the French Alps, Germany, Spain, Denmark, and partnership with a Nepalese school;
- ✦ field study trips in biology, history and geography both here and abroad;
- ✦ age based multi-activity residential trips and concert and theatre visits.

OUR ROLE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The school values the school-parent partnership. We have a school-parent contract which reflects the rights and responsibilities of parents alongside the expectations and obligations assumed by the school.

There is regular formal contact with parents through reports, parents' evenings and mentoring days with the students' handbooks providing an informal method of communication. In addition parents' meetings are held where aspects of the curriculum are discussed. The school works closely with primary schools within and outside The Downs Federation of Schools to co-ordinate curriculum development and to ensure the smooth transition to secondary school.

The school has also developed sound links with local commerce and industry, many of which support work experience opportunities for students aged 14 - 19. The

“I am delighted that my son has chosen to continue his education in such a highly successful school” Parent

There is a thriving Friends' Association which raises funds for the school and sponsors a number of social events and parents' evenings. All parents are automatically members and are encouraged to take a full part in the activities of the Association. The involvement of parents has added to the strength and breadth of the work of the school.

SPACIOUS FACILITIES

THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

In recent years, new, high quality buildings have been added as the school has expanded. In July 2006, with the completion of a £3.8 million building programme, the Graham Taylor Building was opened with enhanced facilities for our expanding Sixth Form, new facilities for mathematics, geography, religious education, ICT, media and art. Proposed new buildings for Science and Physical Education are now at the planning stage.

Currently, the Performing Arts Centre provides teaching spaces for music, rooms for instrumental practice and accommodation for peripatetic teachers and on the upper floor the drama studio has dedicated stage lighting. The Susan Pease Building, completed in 1997, houses the modern foreign languages department with a dedicated multi-media suite.

English is accommodated alongside the school library which is used for resource-based work in all subjects. The design technology building accommodates food technology, textiles, design and control technology, graphics and an ICT suite.

Science lessons are currently taught in laboratories in a dedicated block, whilst the Tribe building houses history and social sciences. It also accommodates a fully-equipped ICT suite and Business Studies room.

All departments have the benefit of computer facilities.

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




school has attracted a significant degree of private sponsorship from local companies in recent years and The West Berkshire “Education Business Partnership” is instrumental in providing work related activities for our students.

Sixth Form students enjoy bespoke social facilities and a high level of staff expertise. Each year the majority of students choose to continue their education beyond the age of 16 at The Downs School with most of our students continuing into higher education, employment or training. The school has fruitful links with other educational establishments and employers.

The school's sports centre provides a varied programme of sports activity for the community with the school buildings and grounds being made available for hire.

“Students respond well to the good teaching in the school”
Ofsted



The school is renowned for its music and drama

“We learn in fun and different ways and teachers always push you to do your best. Everyone is good friends” Student

The Downs School is set in the attractive village of Compton, approximately 14 miles west of Reading, 17 miles south of Oxford and 9 miles

north of Newbury. School transport is available within the catchment area from Thatcham and Cold Ash.

learning together . . .
learning for life



The Downs School, Compton, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 6NU

Tel: 01635 270000 Fax: 01635 579084 Email: contact@thedownsschool.org www.thedownsschool.org