



THE DOWNS  
SCHOOL and  
SIXTH FORM



learning for life



“The curriculum in both Key Stages reflects well the school’s aims. It provides for students’ intellectual and physical development and prepares them well for employment or for further and higher education.”  
OFSTED

“The school builds well on students’ achievements over each Key Stage. Standards are well above average throughout the school. Students’ competency in literacy and numeracy is very good.” OFSTED

The school has been recognised by Her Majesty’s Inspector of Schools for receiving three outstanding inspection reports in a row and has sustained excellent GCSE results over a number of years.

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:

To develop in young people the ability:

**To challenge themselves to achieve more than they first believed**

**To grow as independent, self motivated and caring adults**

**To be successful and contributing members of a global society**



Set in the West Berkshire Downs, The Downs School is a special place where the staff are absolutely committed to the excellence of the school. The educational programme is constructed 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, artistic, sporting and social skills.

Students are offered an interesting, challenging and lively curriculum which encourages them to reach their academic potential. The school offers a comprehensive range of subjects across all Key Stages.

### KEY STAGE 3 – AGES 11-14

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, art, technology, physical and religious education and a personal development programme. The second modern foreign language is offered from Year 8. The time allocation for science is increased in Year 9.

Initially, students are taught in mixed ability groups for most subjects apart from mathematics. The teaching groups are small in Years 7 and 8 to give students a good start and to allow targeted support. From Year 8 upwards they 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.

Introduction to  
the Curriculum  
and life at  
The Downs

## Key Stage 4 - Ages 14-16

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. Able students are offered the opportunity of taking three separate sciences and up to three languages and with some early entry in GCSE.

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 without the disruption to learning that a change of institution invariably brings.

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

## 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 a full curriculum that includes physical education, critical thinking, a personal development programme and relevant careers guidance with the opportunity for private study. There is also the opportunity for students not gaining 5A\* - C 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 course in school or into further education or training.

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



## Language College

Our specialist college status in modern foreign languages enables all our students to study usually two languages and provides opportunities to learn other languages including Japanese and Russian. Students are taught about other cultures through varied curriculum enrichment activities. The specialist school funding also enables members of the wider community to benefit from language teaching. 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.


## Assessment

Ofsted commented on our assessment methods: "The school's systems for assessment of students' attainment and progress are very good" and the consistently high quality of marking of students' work has also been praised by Ofsted.

Contact with parents is by reports and parents' evenings. Formal internal examinations are held annually. 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 Pupil Handbook.

## Special needs

For students who experience problems in mathematics and English, individual tuition is available within and outside lessons. Additional staff support certain students in the classroom across the curriculum. An assistant headteacher with responsibility for inclusion leads a team of learning support staff to assist students with their learning and the development of skills as part of an intervention strategy.



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

Able students also have special 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.

**“The sixth form curriculum is very good. It is unusually broad in the range of courses it provides, catering for every student’s needs.” 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 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 equal 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 GCSE level and A level. A wide range of extra curricular activities 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. The heads of year manage teams of form tutors who are responsible for day-to-day pupil welfare.

Family and student support workers provide 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.

There is a comprehensive system of rewards and sanctions: house points as part of the house system culminate in the 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. 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 prefects, members of the school council and as mentors for younger students.

**“Relationships between adults and students are of a high quality and based upon mutual courtesy. The climate established is strongly conducive to attainment and learning.” OFSTED**

### 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

Ofsted has commended the quality of teaching as a strength of the school and all staff have high expectations of students. The school values and encourages the

professional development of all staff. During the year there are opportunities for staff to develop strategies to further improve the quality of learning, teaching and standards of achievement.

In addition the school employs supervisors, caretakers and an efficient team of 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. Students regularly perform at the highest level nationally.

School teams have achieved great success in many team games over the years. In school, inter-house competitions including school cross country, netball, hockey, cricket, rugby and athletics maximise the involvement of students.

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

Sixth Form students have the opportunity to travel and work abroad as part of World Challenge. The most recent expeditions were to Zambia and Venezuela.

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

The school is renowned  
for its music and drama



- ✦ exchange visits to schools in the French Alps, Germany, Spain, Denmark;
- ✦ field study trips in biology, history and geography both here and abroad;
- ✦ major expeditions to Russia, China, Iceland, Africa and South America;
- ✦ year 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 and parents' evenings 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 transfer of students to secondary school.

The school has also developed sound links with local commerce and industry, many of which support the school's work experience programme for Year 10 and 13 students. The 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 new and spacious facilities with small teaching groups 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. The school has fruitful links with other educational establishments.

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.

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. Plans to further develop the school campus were brought to fruition in July 2006 with the completion of a £3.8 million building programme: the Graham Taylor Building. Enhanced facilities are now available for our expanding Sixth Form with a modern, purpose built common room and attached quiet room with ICT facilities. There are also new facilities for mathematics, geography, religious education, ICT, media and art. Improvements to buildings are also planned in the science, music and technology departments.

The Performing Arts Centre was opened by HRH The Princess Royal in October 1998. The 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 ICT suite.

The library building is used for the teaching of English and for library-based work in other subjects, and the design technology building accommodates food technology, textiles, design technology, graphics and an ICT suite.

Science lessons are taught in laboratories in a specialist block, whilst the Tribe building houses history and business studies. It also accommodates two fully-equipped ICT suites.

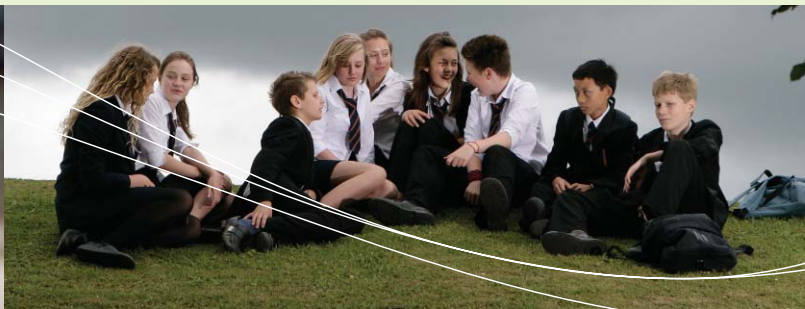
All departments have the benefit of computer facilities.

The school has extensive playing fields and a swimming pool and The Downland Sports Centre provides joint community and school use, enhancing the range of sports on offer.

**"I am delighted that my son has chosen to continue his education in such a highly successful school."** PARENT

**"Pastoral care is a strength of the school."** OFSTED

**"Safe and caring environment"** OFSTED



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

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