



DOWNSEND
SCHOOL

**PREP SCHOOL CURRICULUM:
TEACHING & LEARNING
POLICY**

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Introduction

The majority of children who transfer to the Main Site at 6+ (end of Year 1) are from our own Downsend Pre-Preparatory Schools. There is no entrance test, but the Pre-Prep Headteachers will have discussed the suitability of the move with parents. Children wishing to join Downsend at this age from other schools will spend a day at one of the Pre-Preps for a short, informal assessment of their potential. However, most children transferring from other schools will do so at 7+ (end of Year 2) and will be required to sit a short entrance test. A small number of children, moving from other schools, also enter the school at different stages and are assessed in English and Mathematics in order to assess whether they will be able to cope with an academic course leading to Senior School examinations.

Each Year group in Years 2- 8 ideally has between three and five forms. Children spend the first four years (Years 2-5) in the Lower School. Here the Form Teacher, in Years 2 and 3, is responsible for the delivery of the core subjects: English, Mathematics, Science and PSHE. Setting has now been introduced from Year 4 in English and Maths and from Year 5 in Science with children being taught these subjects by one of our Year 4 Form Tutors or Year 5 subject specialist teachers. The children also study a wide range of other subjects, taught by other subject specialist teachers, which include Computing, History, Geography, Religious Studies, French, Art, Music, Drama, Technology, PE, Swimming and Games. Year 5 children are given weekly taster lessons of Latin and Spanish, at the end of the year they select which of the two languages they will study in the Upper School.

Children transfer to the Upper School automatically at the end of Year 5 and pupils then have specialist teaching based in subject classrooms. At this stage, setting in English, Maths and Science is continued from the Lower School to ensure effective differentiation for all the pupils in this subject area.

At the end of Year 6, a minority of pupils leave Downsend, either by successfully passing the 11+ entrance examinations to one of the local independent schools or by moving into the maintained system. In Years 6, 7 and 8, English, Maths, Science and French are taught in 'setted' groups to ensure that all pupils make effective progress in these key areas of the curriculum.

The Downsend curriculum is designed to fully cover the requirements of the National Curriculum whilst recognising the specific demands of the various examinations to independent Senior Schools. The school carries out standardised cognitive ability testing, using the CAT4 scheme, from Years 2 to 8. In addition standardised progress testing using the PTM, PTE and PTS scheme is used to assess English, Maths and Science from Years 2-8. Both the CAT4 and the progress tests are computer-administered and the scores are calculated electronically. Year 7 pupils also enter for the levels set out in the ESB spoken and communication skills programme, Year 5 take part in an in-house Public Speaking event performing poetry. Downsend has a system of written reports and Parents' Evenings, whereby information is reported and discussed with parents on a regular basis.

The curriculum, assessment and reporting arrangements mentioned in this brief introduction will be discussed in more detail in the individual sections below.

Timings of the School Day

Period Number	Time	Lower School Years 2 - 5	Upper School Years 6 - 8
1	8.45-9.15		
2	9.15-9.45		
3	9.45-10.15		
4	10.15-10.45	BREAKTIME	
5	10.45-11.15		BREAKTIME
6	11.15-11.45		
7	11.45-12.15		
8	12.15-12.45	LUNCHTIME	
9	12.45-1.15		
10	1.15-1.45		LUNCHTIME
11	1.45-2.15		
12	2.15- 2.45		
13	2.45-3.15		
14	3.15-3.45		
15	3.45-4.15	LATE CLASS (optional)	

Academic Standards

There should be a sensible mix of both formal and informal work, as well as a variety of teaching strategies, approaches and activities during lessons. There will be times when children are expected to listen, take notes, write or learn quietly. Pupils are encouraged to demonstrate initiative and enterprise, to co-operate with each other as a team, and to research and analyse materials for themselves. They are also encouraged to make use of the library and the ICT facilities in their academic work. The School Librarian is available to support the work of teaching staff in the use of the School Library facilities and there are staffed early morning and break-time reading/study opportunities in the Library.

All teachers encourage the children to take pride in their written work. The school uses Individual Targets for pupils who would benefit from additional support and this is co-ordinated through the school SENCO.

Teaching staff use praise and encouragement, and set achievable targets as a strategy for building confidence rather than criticism or disparagement in their general motivation of the children under their care.

Throughout Key Stage 1 and the lower end of Key Stage 2, pupils will be taught by their Form Teacher in the majority of lessons. She/he will be well placed to identify patterns in a child's work or behaviour that may give cause for concern. Year 2 & 3 teachers will often see the parents of pupils in their class with greater frequency, as they drop children off or pick them up at the end of the school day.

Homework

Downsend has a separate policy document on homework and this is attached as *Appendix A*

Inclusion: Learning Support, Gifted & Talented and EAL

The school, in accordance with its SEND Policy and approach to EAL and G&T, ensures that all pupils, including those with statements, can access the curriculum as fully as possible, with their individual needs met which will allow them to work towards their full potential. At Downsend, we recognise our responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010) to eliminate discrimination and to promote good relations between children, staff and parents.

The school has a Learning Support Department with a SENCO and a number of part-time specialists who teach children with specific learning difficulties during the school day. The school also has 'gifted and talented' (G&T) co-ordinators who support the learning of pupils with exceptional gifts / talents. The school has a separate policy document covering gifted and talented pupils, the opportunities they are given and provisions made to support their talents.

Form teachers and subject teachers are issued with an SEN and Gifted and Talented register for their own form and their classes; additional information is kept on a pupil's file within the School's database.

Display Work

Display work in classrooms and other areas of the school is an important part of the process of teaching and learning and reflects the seasonal themes in school life. The purpose of the display work includes supporting the individual's learning in different areas of the curriculum, acting as an aide-memoire and recording and celebrating pupils' work, as well as their achievements.

Assessment at Downsend

As explained in the above introduction, pupils transferring to the Main Site from the Downsend Pre-Preps, at the end of Year 1, are not required to take an entrance test. Pupils entering in any other year group from schools outside the Downsend group are required to take a written assessment in English and Mathematics to ensure that they will be able to cope with the academic demands of the school.

Children are in mixed-ability forms in Years 2 and 3. These children take written papers in English and Mathematics on a termly basis. Science is tested at the end of each topic. Using the results of these papers, standardised test results and the teacher assessment of the progress made by the individual child in the classroom during the year, the pupils are put into appropriate sets for English and Maths from Year 4.

In the Autumn Term, all pupils in Years 2-8 are assessed using the CAT4 computerised assessments. These assessment results are analysed by appropriate staff during the academic year. If these assessments, or any of the other data generated, suggest that an individual pupil requires more specialised assessment for special needs, a referral will be made to the SENCO and the Head of School.

In the Spring Term, all pupils in Years 2-6 are assessed using the computerised Progress Test series in order to track their skills and knowledge in Maths, English and Science. In addition there are termly assessments in English, Mathematics and Science in Years 3 to 5. At the end of Year 6, written examinations are taken in all the Common Entrance subjects – English, Mathematics, Science, French, Geography, History, Latin/Spanish and R.S. During Year 6, some children will also sit the entrance examinations for various schools at 11+ or the pre-tests for entry to Senior Schools at 13+.

Those children who continue into Years 7 and 8 are divided into a Scholarship or Common Entrance group in order that the appropriate work, at the required level, may be covered during the two years leading to Independent School Scholarships or Common Entrance (see below for further details) or other external school examinations where appropriate. Written examinations are taken at the end of Year 7 in all the Common Entrance subjects listed above. In Year 8, mock examinations are held in November for the Scholarship group and in February for the Common Entrance group. Common Entrance examinations take place in the first week of June. Scholarship examinations take place at various times during the academic year, depending on the requirements of the individual Senior Schools (in February, March or May) and pupils are prepared accordingly.

The results of all end of year assessments and examinations (Year 3 onwards) are reported to parents on the end of year written reports. Other informal tests and assessments are carried out during the year, according to each particular subject department and its assessment policy.

Common Entrance

In Year 8, pupils take their examination to their chosen independent Senior School. For the majority of pupils, this takes the form of Common Entrance (CE). The papers are set by an external board, ISEB, and marked by the school for which the pupil has been entered. The exams usually start on the first Monday in June, with the French Orals and mental Maths papers being a few weeks earlier. The children sit the papers at Downsend School, in familiar surroundings.

The following subjects are taken:-

English (2)	Latin / Spanish (1)
Maths (2)	Geography (1)
Science (3)	History (1)
French (1)	Religious Studies (1)

The number of papers varies per subject, as indicated in brackets above. In English, Science, French and Spanish there are two levels of papers that can be sat, depending on the ability of the pupils, whilst there are 3 levels available in Maths.

Once the syllabus has been completed at some point during Year 8, a mixture of revision, past paper practice, fine tuning and guidance on exam technique will prepare the pupils for the examinations.

Staff teaching exam subjects will need to continually keep abreast of Common Entrance and Senior School requirements. Pupils preparing for external exams will need to be given sufficient practice in exam technique and should be familiar with the format of the exams they are sitting.

The results of Common Entrance are usually delivered to the school by the Wednesday of the following week and the Headmaster announces them to pupils at school on Thursday of the week following the exams. It is likely that the parents will receive them at the same time. We always try to ensure that the pupils are given their results together, at Downsend.

Scholarships

Students of above average academic ability may be entered for a scholarship level assessment. Academic Scholarship exams are usually set and marked by the individual Senior School and therefore vary in content and difficulty. The pupils sit these exams, which normally fall between February and May at their chosen Senior School. If a pupil does not achieve an award but nevertheless produces good papers, he or she may be excused Common Entrance.

Scholarships are also available to certain schools in Music, Art, Sport, Technology, Drama whilst some have 'All-Rounders Awards'. Pupils taking external awards are also given appropriate interview practice prior to their examinations. Although we are aiming for the highest possible academic standards, we also try to ensure that our pupils are given plenty of enrichment opportunities to develop and stretch their skills in as many different aspects of school life as possible. External exams all too often give rise to panic because the success of the school, teachers and individual pupils are measured by them. It is important not to overplay their significance, especially to the pupils.

Past papers give incentive, measure growth, and help us to teach pupils exam technique. As such, they should be used where appropriate. However, perhaps the most important task to teach the scholars is to look after themselves so that they prepare properly and arrive at their exams mentally and physically ready.

Reporting Arrangements

In the Lower School (Years 2-5), there are three formal written reports to parents, one each term. There are also two Parents' Evenings for parents to meet their child's Form Tutor (and core subject teachers in Years 4-5) in the Autumn and Spring Terms.

In the Upper School in Year 6, there are Parents' Evenings in the Autumn Term, where parents have the opportunity to meet the relevant teachers of English, Mathematics and Science in order to discuss their child's progress. There are formal written reports in the Spring Term and the Summer Term. In the Upper School, there is also a system of interim effort and attainment grade reports, which are issued to parents to indicate their child's progress.

There is a Parents' Evening for the parents of Year 8 Scholarship students in the Autumn Term. There is also a Parents' Evening for both Year 7 and 8 parents in the Spring Term, where parents are able to discuss progress with teachers of all the CE subjects. Formal written reports, in all CE subjects, are issued to parents in the Autumn and Summer Terms (for Year 7 pupils) and in the Autumn and Spring Terms (for Year 8 pupils).

Parents' Evenings

Parents' Evenings are held at various times during the Autumn and Spring Terms for individual Year groups (see Academic Calendar for dates). A bell system operates, which means that the time allocation is maintained throughout the evening. Staff should ensure that they have all the relevant paperwork and materials to ensure a constructive dialogue is carried out, including any appropriate targets to help parents to understand how to assist their child to progress.

In Years 2-3, parents meet the Form Teacher for a ten minute session in which the child's attainment and progress are discussed. The child's books will also be set out in the relevant classroom for parents to look at prior to seeing the Form Teacher. In Year 4, parents will meet the Form Tutor for a five minute slot to discuss non-core subject progress and general issues, and will also meet the teachers of English and Maths to discuss their child's progress.

In Years 5 and 6, the Form Tutor has a five minute slot with the parents to discuss non-core subject progress and general issues. The parents also meet with the subject teachers in English, Mathematics and Science for a five minute period.

In Years 7 and 8, the teachers of all the Common Entrance subjects are allocated a five minute slot with the parents to discuss work and progress and issues relevant to CE / scholarship work.

POLICY ON HOMEWORK (*Appendix A*)

Homework

For the purpose of this policy, “*homework*” is defined as any work which pupils are expected, by their teachers and parents, to do at home. This may be written work, learning, research, reading or preparation for a forthcoming lesson or project. The quantity and type of work given may vary according to the pupil’s individual needs.

Requirements by Year Group

Year 2

It is important for pupils to gain a sound grasp of multiplication tables, number bonds and the basics of spelling in their first years. A certain amount of rote learning is required in this respect and parental involvement is required for learning homeworks. In addition, maths exercises and phonic sheets may be given to reinforce classwork. Reading books will be sent home each day.

Spelling: Spelling lists are given each week. Lists are differentiated according to the spelling ability of the children. The spellings are tested on a weekly basis in the form of a list and three dictation sentences.

Reading: 10 minutes each night with an adult, who should discuss the text with the child to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary.

Tables/Number Bonds: Number Bonds are tested at the beginning of the year, before tables tests are started. If necessary, these are sent home for practice and then retested at school. Tables tests are started after the Autumn half-term. Initially, the children start with the 2x table but, as they progress through the tables, the tests will be differentiated according to ability.

Mathematics: The children will receive a Maths activity each Friday to be completed over the weekend. This could be a few set pages in a workbook, a maths sheet or a game. Work should be checked by parents and any corrected answers written next to the original. Parents are asked not to rub out incorrect answers, so that the teacher is aware of difficulties, and can plan future learning accordingly.

Unfinished Work: Work not completed during the day may be sent home for completion at the discretion of the teacher. Parental discretion should also be exercised. If the child is too tired or busy, completion may be inappropriate. Liaison between teacher and parent will support good work practices for the child.

Year 3

Reading: 10 minutes each night with an adult who should discuss the text with the child to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary. It is important that parents use the reading record diary to record what the child has read each night. A 'guided reading booklet' is distributed to all parents at the start of the year and is also available on the school website.

Spellings: Every week the children learn core words based around a key sound or pattern. They are tested on the core words and additional words in the following week in the form of a dictation. The children are also expected to extend their knowledge of the sound of the week by finding additional examples in their own time. The children will complete an exercise in their spelling workbook to reinforce their understanding of the sound / rule of the week.

Times Tables: In the Autumn Term the children will revise the tables from 1x to 10x, focussing on a table a week. In the Spring Term and Summer Term the children are encouraged to develop their speed of recall of the times tables facts.

Homework Projects: Every half term the children are set topic-based homeworks which involve a variety of different subjects and skills. The projects are presented to the class.

Mathematics / English: The children will be given a written Maths and English task per week, to be completed for the following week. The tasks will revise mathematical or grammatical concepts studied in the week, or may take the form of a written comprehension activity.

Year 4

Pupils are expected to read each evening for a minimum of 10 - 15 minutes. In addition to this, each week, there will be set homework of 20 minutes per night, as shown in the Homework Diary.

English :	Spelling learning / written English
Maths:	Tables or Maths learning / written Maths
French:	Vocabulary

Occasional project-based work or research may be set by the Form Teacher, depending on the individual pupil's aptitude and ability. Parental involvement is required for learning and research homework. A note that 'help was given', written next to the homework, enables the teacher to plan future work appropriately.

Homework Projects: Every half term the children are set topic-based homeworks which involve a variety of different subjects and skills. The projects are presented to the class.

Year 5

Homework is set only in Maths, English, Reasoning, Science and French. In the case of Maths and English, this consists of two 20-30 minutes sessions per week and Science has one 20-30 minute session. One of the English homeworks will be devoted to spellings. There will also be a French learning homework per week.

Year 6

For the first half of the academic year, there will be two English and Maths homeworks and one Science homework per week, each being approximately 30 minutes long. There will also be French and Latin learning homework tasks set each week, plus a Reasoning homework as necessary. At the end of January, the homework timetable changes to include all the Common Entrance subjects for a single session plus a learning homework for Latin and French. There may be up to two homework tasks, therefore on weekday evenings and three at the weekend. A separate I1+ policy document is available, which discusses the specific area of preparation for I1+ examinations.

Years 7 & 8

The Common Entrance subjects each have a single session, approximately 40 minutes in length, plus a learning homework for Latin and French and a general revision homework. There may be up to two homeworks, therefore, on weekday evenings and three at the weekend.

Homework Diaries: The Homework Diary in Years 3 and 4, and the Reading Record Book in Year 2, should be signed each evening by a parent or carer who has supported and / or checked their child's homework; it should be returned to school with the work each day. Children in Year 5 will have their Homework Diaries monitored regularly by their form tutors.

Each child in the Upper school is issued with a Homework Diary in which a record should be kept of daily homework requirements. This Diary will be checked by the form tutor on a weekly basis.

Parental help: Parental help is welcome with learning homework. In the case of written homework, if a pupil is struggling with the homework then it would be useful if parents discussed their concerns with the appropriate member of staff to ensure that the necessary support can be given.

Reading: It is to be hoped that all children will read widely for pleasure and for information. Specific reading tasks will be set each evening for the younger children and it is necessary for parents to help by listening to their children's reading. The school librarian may be consulted about possible reading tasks which might be appropriate to the specific needs of individual pupils.

Optional Work

The school would not wish this policy to restrain any child who is enthusiastic about undertaking or completing a particular piece of work. It should be remembered, however, that such homework is entirely voluntary and done at the request of the child rather than his or her parents or teacher.

School Holidays

Homework will not be set, for Lower School pupils, during school holidays except in “exceptional circumstances” (see below). In the Summer Term of Year 5, children will be set a basic ‘revision’ homework in the core subjects in preparation for end-of-year exams.

Homework may be set for the Upper School, particularly if there are external examinations in the following term. Learning materials and study guides and advice may also be found on the school’s website to facilitate parental involvement and catching up work from students who are off school for some reason including working from home in the case of school closure.

Exceptional circumstances

1. If any child is struggling with a particular subject for any reason, it may sometimes be sensible for the teacher to set some additional homework to help overcome the difficulty. Such homework will only be set following discussions between teacher and parents and an agreement reached about what has to be undertaken.
2. Children who fail to complete work in class may be asked to do so during their breaks, when they will be supervised by the staff. If any child falls a long way behind with their work, a request may be made to catch up with this work at home, but such a demand will always follow consultation between teacher and parents.

Problems

If parents feel that the homework requirement for their child differs widely from this stated policy, they should speak, in the first instance, to the subject teacher concerned. Continuing problems should be addressed to the Head of the Lower or Upper School or the Curriculum Manager