

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Downsend School

March 2023

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School College	Downsend School	
DfE number	936/6065	
Address	Downsend School	
	1 Leatherhead Road	
	Leatherhead	
	Surrey	
	КТ22 8ТЈ	
Telephone number	01372 372197	
Email address	office@downsend.co.uk	
Headteacher	Mr Ian Thorpe	
Chair of governors	Mr James Carroll	
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Limited	
Age range	6 to 16	
Number of pupils on roll	659	
	Juniors 335 Seniors	324
Inspection dates	7 to 9 March 2023	

School's Details

1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 Downsend is an independent, co-educational day school. Founded as a boys' preparatory school in Hampstead in 1891, it moved to its current site in 1918. The school became fully co-educational in the mid-1990s. The school was purchased by Cognita Schools Limited in 2006. Oversight is provided by a team appointed by the proprietor. Pupils from Years 2 to 6 are members of the junior school and those in Years 7 to 11 make up the senior school.

What the school seeks to do

1.2 The school aims to inspire in its pupils a global perspective, which encourages an awareness and understanding of the world in which they live. It strives to develop pupils' emotional intelligence to create curious, innovative, creative and critical thinkers who can successfully build relationships, lead teams and apply their digital mastery to successfully navigate an ever-changing world.

About the pupils

1.3 Pupils come from families with a range of professional backgrounds, most of whom live locally to the school. Assessment data provided by the school indicate that the majority of pupils are of broadly average ability. The school has identified 101 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of whom 45 receive additional support. The range of difficulties includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, speech and language, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 22 pupils. Where the school identifies pupils who are the most able in its population, the curriculum is adapted to meet their needs.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School Standards)</u> <u>Regulations 2014</u>.

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.
- 2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.
- 2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils demonstrate high levels of academic achievement as a result of knowledgeable and highly focused teaching.
- Pupils are excellent communicators.
- Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are highly developed and applied successfully throughout the curriculum.
- Pupils are highly successful both within and beyond the school in the arts, sport and activities.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils' development of self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence is exceptional.
 - Pupils demonstrate excellent decision-making skills.
 - The development of pupils' spiritual awareness and senior pupils' awareness of broader diversity issues are less well developed.
 - Pupils' behaviour throughout the school is excellent.
 - Pupils across the school demonstrate an excellent sense of responsibility.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
 - Enable pupils to develop a deeper spiritual understanding and a broader awareness of diversity issues, building on the excellent examples already in place in the junior school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 The school fulfils its aim to help pupils develop their emotional intelligence to build relationships and lead teams, become curious and critical thinkers and to equip them with digital mastery in a global context. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, the vast majority of parents agreed that teaching helps their children to make good progress and equips them with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life. Most pupils who responded to the

questionnaire feel their teachers are supportive, know their subjects well, and know how to help them learn.

- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate high levels of academic achievement as a result of knowledgeable and highly focused teaching which builds on a deep understanding of each pupil as an individual learner. The vision and strategy of senior leaders, and the well-managed tracking, monitoring and intervention systems, ensure pupils attain excellent results in externally standardised tests as well as ongoing assessment of their performance in the rich and varied curriculum. Pupils in the senior school, preparing for the school's first GCSE examination entries in 2023, are closely monitored, and data provided by the school demonstrate significant value being added to pupils' progress and academic outcomes when compared to their ability on entry. Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve progress throughout the school in line with their peers, often from considerably lower starting points.
- 3.7 Pupils develop high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across different areas of learning. Pupils are enthusiastic about acquiring new knowledge and are skilled in their application of techniques and methods. They successfully and skilfully draw upon previous learning and demonstrate success in applying this to a range of learning activities. For example, pupils in Year 3 develop their understanding of images related to Easter, volunteering that eggs symbolise new beginnings. Pupils in Year 6 demonstrated excellent understanding of the features of a river, explaining meanders, oxbow lakes and how deforestation causes flooding. They raised the issue of pollution and the impact humans have on animal habitats. In a chemistry lesson, pupils in Year 10 demonstrated excellent understanding that the same mass of matter can react at different times due to different surface areas. They applied this knowledge adeptly to predict whether French fries or chunky chips would cook more quickly, testing the hypothesis with an experiment on the reaction rates between calcium carbonate and hydrochloric acid.
- 3.8 Pupils are excellent communicators and, most notably in the junior school, they speak fluently, expressively, eloquently and with assurance. Pupils in Year 4 spoke with confidence as they volunteered to pronounce the words for fruit and vegetables in French, for example, 'les champignons', 'les haricots verts' and 'les petits pois'. In an art lesson, pupils in Year 5 demonstrated great confidence when expressing their own ideas about how pictures can represent abstract movement. Pupils listen attentively to their peers and respectfully to their teachers. Pupils in Year 7 confidently and musically responded to the register being taken by matching the pitch of the teacher's welcome. Pupils' writing skills develop rapidly throughout the school. Pupils in Year 2 demonstrated effective transactional writing when they conveyed meaning clearly and eloquently in a science display. Pupils are enthusiastic about reading and enjoy having access to their school libraries and participating in termly reading challenges, including the accelerated reading scheme. The value their teachers place on reading across all subject areas encourages pupils to hone their skills and develop the start of a lifelong love of reading.
- 3.9 Pupils are highly numerate. Pupils in Year 2 demonstrated their understanding of multiplication by learning to draw and interpret arrays. In Year 6, pupils responded effectively to teachers' comments about initial misunderstandings in algebraic equations and showed significant improvement over successive practice activities. Pupils are self-assured about their ability in mathematics and select appropriately challenging tasks. Pupils in Year 11 demonstrated a high level of numeracy competency when solving trigonometry graphs and using equations in paired work. Beyond their mathematics lessons, pupils develop their skills through drawing graphs in science, identifying and using straight lines and geometric shapes in art, measuring distances in geography, and in drama calculating the number of audience seats required for a performance.
- 3.10 Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills are highly developed and, in line with the school's aims, are embedded as a natural, everyday feature of the pupils' *modus operandi*. They apply their skills across the curriculum for research, presentation and in a number of creative ways, such as pupils in Year 2 recording each other's animated retellings of stories before using the recordings to act as a visual and auditory prompt in their own writing. Pupils in Years 3 and 4 use

coding platforms to create games. Pupils in Year 6 use their personal devices with great confidence. For example, they researched websites and created leaflets to advertise how the Medina River is used on the Isle of Wight. In discussions, senior pupils talked with conviction about their mastery of ICT skills and their use of these to create displays and projects as well as using an online platform for data manipulation and file management.

- 3.11 Pupils' study skills are well developed. Their ability to draw upon a range of sources is excellent. Pupils demonstrate excellent higher-order thinking skills and respond thoughtfully and creatively to challenging and open questions. As a result of teachers ensuring that critical thinking skills are embedded across all curriculum areas, junior school pupils reported that they enjoy 'thinking outside the box' as was seen in a Year 4 drama lesson where they used movement and sound to create the illusion of transport in a study of performance theatre. Pupils in Year 7 carried out research with illustrations in presentations on Nelson Mandela. Pupils in Year 8 clearly demonstrated their ability to hypothesise and synthesise during their investigation into methods of heat transfer. Pupils in Year 10 made excellent evaluations of what makes an accurate method in their experiments. They analysed the results of comparing infrared radiation rates of hot water in black, grey and white tins, making rapid progress in developing their skills in fair testing and identifying issues which may affect the results. In Year 11, pupils responded critically to the poem, *Hadrian's Wall*, noting that the poet 'demonstrates to the reader the closed, xenophobic and often racist attitudes that some people have about outsiders'.
- 3.12 Pupils are highly successful both within and beyond the school in the arts, sports and activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme (DoE). In recent years, a large number of senior pupils successfully achieved their bronze awards, and several are preparing for their silver awards. In addition to a plethora of national successes by a range of different sports teams, including football, rugby, swimming, biathlon and shooting, high numbers of pupils represent the school in county and local events. In their responses to the questionnaire, the vast majority of parents agreed that the school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils take great delight in participating in drama productions and concerts in the school's new, well-equipped theatre. Recent successes have included Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Lion King, High School Musical and Mort. Individual pupils have enjoyed successes in regional drama festivals and involvement in local acting schools. This is supported by highly successful entries to national drama and speaking examinations in which the majority of pupils achieve the highest grades. In national music examinations, four-fifths of pupils achieve equal numbers of distinctions and merits. Pupils regularly participate in national mathematics, writing, poetry, history, engineering and science competitions and boast an array of silverware to show for their efforts, including top 100, best in year and several winners.
- 3.13 Pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. Their positivity, most notable in the junior school and lower years of the senior school, can be seen in and beyond the classroom. The drive and vision of governors and senior leaders strive to ensure that pupils are nurtured as global citizens with a positive work ethic based upon a clear set of values which are lived and breathed on a daily basis. Pupils develop a keen sense of responsibility for their own learning, commenting that, in sport 'you don't blame others, you work as a team'. Pupils work collaboratively across the curriculum and can confidently explain how they develop these skills in drama by 'being kind, letting everyone be heard, listening and having good communication with each other'. Senior pupils displayed excellent levels of enthusiasm for their 'experimental chemistry' in an after-school activity. They used appropriate science equipment to explore how to conduct a variety of experiments including the range of ph values in rainbows and using electrolysis to extract copper from copper sulphate solution.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 Pupils' development of self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence is exceptional. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning and performance, and outcomes are enhanced by their independent approach to self-correction and improvement of their work, which they demonstrate with a sense of pride. This approach was clearly seen in practice when scrutinising pupils' work and seeing use of the school's feedback policy which encourages pupils to reflect and improve their work. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 spoke confidently about their structured reflection time and their willingness to develop their thinking, displaying effort, courage and resilience. Pupils in Year 9 demonstrated their use of more diverse vocabulary through discussion and subsequent use of the word 'patriarchal' in their next piece of writing about Macbeth. In a mathematics lesson, pupils in Year 11 worked collaboratively in pairs to prove their answers were correct when solving linear equations and using the inverse operation.
- 3.16 Pupils demonstrate excellent decision-making skills. When studying the Great Plague, pupils in Year 2 extended their questioning, for example 'Which choices are you going to make? Would you stay or go? And where would you go?', capturing the decision-making process. Pupils respond effectively to consistently high expectations set by teachers and extend their learning by exercising autonomy in deciding the level of challenge in the work they tackle. They exercise this responsibility sensibly, changing between mild, spicy and hot activities as appropriate. In a biology lesson, pupils in Year 10 discussed lifestyle choices and understood the ramifications of the economic impact on the NHS of diabetes following a research project into the disease, and its prevention and treatment.
- 3.17 Pupils appreciate the non-material aspects of life and show aesthetic and cultural awareness, although opportunities for deeper thinking and experiencing the awe and wonder of the world in which they live, are inconsistent across the school. In a religious studies lesson, pupils in Year 3 reflected silently on how Jesus might have felt when he was betrayed. They responded in roles as disciples, 'It's not me, Jesus, why would you think I would betray you? I'm sorry that happened to you.' Pupils in Year 3 gasped with joy when participating in outdoor learning activities, enjoying the newly flowering daffodils before heading off to dig in the mud and build shelters. In Year 5, pupils responded in wonder as they suddenly identified an abstract figure within a piece of vorticist artwork, whilst pupils in Year 10 were able to draw upon the inspirational design of Gaudi's 'Sagrada Familia', creating their own excellent interpretations of building design using pencil and inks. Whilst these examples of spiritual development and appreciation of the non-material aspects of life were observed, the broader development of this aspect of the pupils' lives is less well advanced.
- 3.18 Behaviour within the school is excellent and pupils show respect towards others in and beyond the school community. The vast majority of parents and pupils who completed the questionnaires agree that the school promotes good behaviour and deals with any incidents of bullying and harassment effectively. Older pupils demonstrate a mature sense of responsibility when they look after younger pupils at break times. Pupils in Year 7 made excellent progress in history when debating the rights and wrongs of Elizabeth I's decision to execute Mary Queen of Scots and how it was influenced by international alliances and religion. In response to the questionnaire, a sizeable minority of senior pupils did not agree that the school treats pupils fairly. Interviews revealed that pupils felt conflicted in this area. Whilst they rate the school's fairness highly, they identified areas they felt were unfair, for example the use of mobile phones, rules about girls' hair and access to the local high street. Pupils felt that whilst they appreciate that there are effectively and in a more nuanced way for them as young adults. Pupils spoke highly about the quality of staff-pupil relationships, the support they receive, and the passion and commitment from which they benefit.

- 3.19 Pupils have excellent social awareness and enjoy celebrating the successes of others. Pupils in Year 2 enjoyed their peers' presentations of the 'I am Special' board with photographs and certificates of their personal achievements. Pupils demonstrate excellent collaborative skills, recognising the positive impact of working with others, stating, 'On your own you go quicker but in pairs you go further'. This quality was further evidenced by pupils in Year 3 where pupils worked together to make their shelters waterproof. In discussion, senior pupils identified the importance of being socially aware and highlighted this through the use of the gratitude board.
- 3.20 Pupils across the school relish opportunities to take on responsibility as they carry out the various leadership roles made available to them, such as prefects, school council and eco council representatives, house captains, peer mentors, play leaders, digital leaders and librarians. For example, the eco council planted 1000 trees on the school site, picked litter from around the school and in the local community, and voiced their strong views about the recent removal of trees from a local road junction. Pupils are encouraged to understand their place within the local area, and pupils in Years 5 and 6 wrote letters to their local member of parliament about the UK's support for the children of Syria and Turkey. Pupils participate in, and take leadership of, a range of charity and community events including collections for the local foodbank and support for local, regional, national and international causes, such as filling an entire lorry of clothes and other items to support families in Ukraine and raising funds for the victims of the Syrian-Turkish earthquake disaster.
- 3.21 Pupils show appropriate respect for each other, their own cultures and those of others. Their cultural awareness is developed through the curriculum and pupils celebrate festivals from the major world faiths throughout the year. Junior pupils have a strong sense that the school does not tolerate disrespect for anyone, no matter what their background is. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 were articulate when discussing the positive impact of Martin Luther King on racism, Harvey Milk on the LGBTQ+ community, and were able to compare women's rights in this country both in a historic context and a contemporary global one. Senior pupils' awareness of the wider diversity issues in society was less well-developed in discussions with inspectors.
- 3.22 Pupils understand the importance of staying safe both physically and mentally. Almost all those responding to the questionnaire said they knew how to stay safe online. They have an excellent understanding of this aspect of their lives and appreciate the emphasis the school places on e-safety in computing lessons. They confidently offer advice on not sharing personal information, using safe websites and reporting anything of concern. Pupils are aware of the importance of good mental health and feel the school 'mentally prepares you for when you will face hard times'. They were confident they had many avenues in which to seek support and referred to a whole school display of 'I matter', which offers key information and contact details. Pupils spoke warmly of the support they receive from the school nurses, emotional learning support assistants and school counsellors. Year 6 prefects support younger pupils in the playground and understand their role as having an emotional as well as a physical focus. Pupils understand the importance of being fit and healthy and pupils in Year 2 washed their hands carefully before their morning snack. Pupils explained that they have healthy snacks, such as fruit, rather than chocolate and sweets. Pupils in Year 8 made excellent progress in their learning about differing forms of contraception in a PSHE lesson. All pupils could differentiate between barrier and hormonal methods as a result of focused, sensitive and confident teaching to avoid embarrassment.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registrations and assemblies. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Alexander Mitchell	Reporting inspector
Ms Rachel Pairman	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school)
Mr Jonathan Egan	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr David Williams	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)