

# Material change inspection report

4 July 2025

## **Downsend School**

1 Leatherhead Road

Leatherhead

Surrey

KT22 8TJ

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

## Inspection outcome

The school has requested a material change to increase its capacity from 680 to 940 pupils and to change its age range from pupils aged 7 to 16 to 7 to 18. The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school Standards if the material change is implemented. It is recommended that the material change be approved.

## Inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

ISSR paragraphs 2, 2A 3 and 4

1. The school's curriculum is carefully planned and covers all the required areas appropriately. Leaders have reviewed provision to ensure that it will be suitable for the cohort of pupils entering the new sixth form. The curriculum offers pupils a suitable range of choices and pathways for future opportunities as they progress through the school, including opportunities to study for A levels, for BTEC diplomas in physical education and business studies and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). Other optional programmes in the sixth form provide added breadth, such as certificated courses in sports leadership, future skills and critical thinking.
2. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum enables pupils to learn about a comprehensive range of issues which help them to develop as young adults, such as friendships, bullying, alcohol and drug misuse and mental health. The PSHE curriculum incorporates citizenship and relationships and sex education (RSE). The content of RSE is relevant, follows statutory guidance and is taught effectively in an age-appropriate manner. The programme, which is supplemented by external speakers, effectively equips pupils with knowledge and understanding of issues such as sexual relationships, consent and coercion. Leaders have given careful thought to how this content is developed to cater for the needs of older pupils in the sixth form and have put suitable plans in place. Careers education is integrated into the school's PSHE course so that pupils receive suitable impartial guidance about their next steps. Leaders have made appropriate arrangements to support the needs of older pupils, including those in the sixth form, including the appointment of a careers co-ordinator.
3. A suitable co-curricular programme offers a wide range of inclusive opportunities for pupils to explore and develop new interests and skills.
4. Leaders have put in place robust measures to monitor the quality of teaching. This provides assurance that teachers have the necessary subject knowledge and pedagogical skills. Additional support and training have been provided to prepare teachers for the delivery of courses in the sixth form. Lessons incorporate suitable activities and teaching strategies that enable pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding well. Teachers plan lessons that are engaging, purposeful and help enable pupils to make good progress. They encourage pupils to think critically and work both independently and collaboratively. Staff have positive relationships with pupils, understand their needs and adapt learning to build on their prior attainment.
5. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive tailored support which positively impacts on their academic development. Individual plans and support strategies, including the effective deployment of learning support staff and external consultants, address their specific needs well.
6. Effective assessment systems are in place to track pupils' attainment and progress and identify where additional support is needed. Data is used appropriately to inform teachers' planning. Pupils

receive useful feedback from teachers that helps pupils understand how to improve their work and to set personal targets.

7. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

## **Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

ISSR paragraph 5

8. Leaders have adopted an effective cross-curricular approach to the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Themes which address the development of pupils' understanding of issues such as respect for different faiths and cultures, discrimination, equality, right and wrong, civil and criminal law, and public institutions and services are incorporated into subject schemes of work, including those for PSHE. Other aspects of pupils' personal development, including their understanding of democracy, are promoted through learning opportunities such as educational trips, visits and expeditions, external speakers, leadership training, pupil councils, community service, fund raising and the wide range of sporting and arts-related activities provided by the school. Leaders successfully encourage independence, teamwork and responsibility. The school has made suitable plans to provide a relevant and age-appropriate PSHE programme for pupils in the sixth form.
9. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

## **Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

ISSR paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 9, 10, 11, 12, 14 and 16

10. The measures in place to safeguard pupils are robust. Safeguarding leaders have received suitable training and possess a clear understanding of statutory requirements. They are attentive to the specific safeguarding risks pupils may face and make sure staff remain alert to warning signs that a pupil may be in need of help and support. Staff are especially mindful of the mental health issues faced by young people.
11. A member of the proprietorial executive team has specific responsibility for safeguarding and monitors the school's safeguarding arrangements. Leaders carry out an annual review of safeguarding. This helps enable the proprietor to ensure that the school's safeguarding policies are being implemented effectively.
12. Leaders have put in place well-defined communication systems that allow for the early identification and reporting of concerns so that action is taken promptly. They collaborate effectively with the local safeguarding partnership and other external agencies, such as the police and local authority designated officer (LADO). Child protection records are thorough and clearly document the reasoning behind leaders' actions and decisions. Measures to protect confidentiality are appropriately maintained.
13. Leaders have established clear policies and procedures, in line with statutory guidance, which define the processes for identifying, reporting and responding to safeguarding concerns related to staff conduct. Staff understand when and how to report low-level concerns and the importance of whistleblowing in keeping pupils safe.
14. Leaders provide suitable training to ensure that staff fully understand and effectively apply safeguarding policies. This includes ongoing briefings and regular updates. As a result, staff are clear about their responsibilities, remain alert, and feel confident in responding to and reporting promptly concerns relating to pupils. They are also appropriately trained to identify signs of abuse, mental

health difficulties, and radicalisation. Leaders have put in place suitable training plans to ensure that the safeguarding needs of older pupils are well understood by staff.

15. The school provides pupils with effective education on personal safety, including minimising potential online risks. Leaders have implemented suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems, which they regularly review to ensure their efficacy.
16. The school has appropriate systems to ensure that any pupils joining or leaving the school at non-standard transition times are reported to the local authority.
17. Leaders promote positive behaviour through a clear policy which staff consistently apply. Serious incidents are dealt with appropriately. Suitable records are kept and are analysed for trends in both types of incident and inconsistencies in implementation. Leaders respond effectively to any concerns raised.
18. The PSHE programme and other learning opportunities provided by the school help ensure that pupils understand the meaning of, and can identify, bullying. Bullying happens rarely and the school responds effectively when it does happen. Pupils have learned about not being a bystander and the need to act when they have concerns.
19. Leaders implement strong health and safety procedures, which are closely monitored by the proprietor. Regular inspections of equipment, machinery and premises are carried out and recorded. Maintenance is undertaken promptly and effectively. There is a systematic approach to fire safety. Fire exits are clearly marked and kept clear. Fire panels are regularly tested and serviced. Fire extinguishers are serviced annually. Pupils understand what to do in the event of a fire. Termly fire drills are carried out and the effectiveness of procedures reviewed as necessary.
20. The school makes appropriate arrangements for the supervision of pupils at break and lunchtimes, and on their arrival at and departure from school.
21. Leaders have a robust approach to the management of risk. Thorough monitoring systems are in place to ensure that risks related to activities, areas of the site, trips and visits, and pupil welfare are suitably identified, recorded and mitigated.
22. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

#### **Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors**

ISSR paragraphs 18, 19, 20 and 21

23. The school's recruitment processes are rigorous, with all required checks completed before adults are allowed to begin employment or to volunteer at the school. These checks are accurately recorded on the school's suitably maintained single central record of appointments.
24. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

#### **Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools**

ISSR paragraphs 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29

25. Suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided in the various buildings which make up the school site. Appropriate changing facilities are available in the sports hall for pupils undertaking physical education. There is a medical room with a dedicated toilet and an isolation area. The school facilities are maintained to a high standard. Staff actively monitor the premises, which allows any faults to be identified and rapidly resolved. The acoustic and lighting conditions in the school are appropriate to the activities provided. Suitable drinking water supplies are available and clearly identified. A range

of outdoor spaces are provided for physical education and recreation, including play areas, sports pitches and a woodland learning area. The newly renovated premises on a separate site, that will house the sixth form, have been thoughtfully designed and planned to meet the needs of the pupils and comply with relevant health and safety requirements.

26. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

#### **Part 6. Provision of information**

ISSR paragraph 32(1)(c)

27. Leaders provide parents with information relating to safeguarding by publishing its safeguarding policy on the school's website.

28. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standard if the material change is implemented.

#### **Part 8. Quality of leadership and management of schools**

ISSR paragraphs 34(1)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c), 34(2)

29. The monitoring of policies and procedures is robust and well documented so that systems and procedures promote the welfare of pupils. The proprietor ensures that leaders have the skills, knowledge and understanding to fulfil their roles and to ensure the Standards are consistently met.

30. Leaders have planned effectively and carefully for the proposed admission of older pupils. This includes rigorous oversight by the proprietor and a detailed identification and mitigation of associated risks.

31. The school is likely to continue to meet the Standards if the material change is implemented.

## School details

<b>School</b>	Downsend School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	936/6065
<b>Address</b>	Downsend School 1 Leatherhead Road Leatherhead Surrey KT22 8TJ
<b>Phone number</b>	01372 372197
<b>Email address</b>	office@downsend.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.downsend.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Cognita Schools Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Mr James Carroll
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Ian Thorpe
<b>Age range</b>	7 to 16
<b>Number of pupils</b>	615
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 to 9 March 2023

## Information about the school

- 32. Downsend School is an independent co-educational day school located in the town of Leatherhead, Surrey.
- 33. The school has identified 205 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
- 34. The school has a small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
- 35. The school states that its aims are to inspire a generation to embrace the future, shaping young people who will make change in our world.

## Purpose of the material change/progress monitoring/additional inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection following an application made by the school to the Department for Education to make a material change to the school's provision. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about whether the school is likely to meet the Independent School Standards if the material change is implemented.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

4 July 2025

36. Two reporting inspectors visited the school for one day.

37. Inspection activities included:

- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school and information available on the school's website
- tour of the main school site and the new sixth form site to inspect health and safety arrangements and the suitability of premises and accommodation
- discussions with the chair of governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- observation of lessons in conjunction with school leaders.



### **How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant Standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

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