



Downside Middle School

Inspection report

**Better
education
and care**

Unique Reference Number 118206
LEA Isle of Wight LEA
Inspection number 291051
Inspection dates 1 - 2 November 2006
Reporting inspector Mr Alan Marsh (HMI)

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of School	middle deemed secondary	School address	Furrlongs, Barton
School category	community		Newport PO30 2AX
Age range of pupils	9 - 13		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01983524340
Number on roll	210	Fax number	01983533467
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of Governors	Mr Stuart Clements
		Headteacher	Mr Peter Shaw
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002		

Age group	Inspection Date(s)	Inspection No.
9 - 13	1 - 2 November 2006	291051

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Downside is a small school in Newport, Isle of Wight. Almost all students are White British. A high proportion is entitled to free school meals. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is high. A new headteacher took over in February 2006.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Downside is a satisfactory and improving school with a good capacity to improve still further. Students make satisfactory progress in most subjects, and good progress in mathematics. Standards, however, remain below national averages, particularly in English and science.

The school enjoys a reputation for good care and support, and for helping students develop well socially, morally and emotionally within a safe environment. These are indeed all strong features: as one parent said, 'My children have been very happy here - the teachers couldn't have done more for them.' The school has developed an outstanding range of extended services, from the breakfast club and family learning activities to youth workers on site and parental involvement in clubs, which places it at the heart of the local community. Students feel a strong sense of identity and pride in their school. This has been created despite having a student population that is more mobile, and therefore more volatile, than most schools on the island.

The new headteacher and reorganised leadership team have made a number of changes that are raising the standard of students' work. Building on teachers' very good knowledge of individual students, precise targets are now set and carefully monitored. Much of the teaching is becoming more dynamic and stimulating, and students are gaining in confidence and independence as they are encouraged to question and explore more. These developments are not yet fully implemented by all and some lessons still lack a sense of adventure. Students have weak skills in information and communications technology (ICT) and there are not enough opportunities in lessons for them to develop them.

Students enjoy life at Downside. They behave and treat each other well. They assured us that bullying is now rare. They are particularly enthusiastic about the many opportunities to get involved in activities after school. They value the relationships that teachers build with them: as one said, 'You can always go to a teacher, about anything, and they'll find time to help you.'

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in English and science.
- Improve skills in ICT and increase opportunities to use them.
- Ensure that more lessons are dynamic and stimulating.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Students enter the school with standards that are well below average. They make satisfactory progress overall through

the school but standards remain well below average in the core subjects of English and science and just below average in mathematics until the end of Year 8 when they leave the school. There is no discernible pattern to the differences in progress between boys and girls.

In mathematics, most students are now making good progress and standards have risen, though some still lack confidence in applying what they know. In English, progress is satisfactory, but many students have weaknesses in basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar which affect the overall quality of their writing. They do not have enough opportunities to write at greater length in different subjects. In science, students' progress is satisfactory. The work in their books and files reflects a reasonable range of practical and theory work, but some students have too much work which is not finished. Students' ICT skills are limited and they are not always given enough opportunities to make use of and develop these further in lessons. Students who are identified as having particular learning difficulties or disabilities make at least satisfactory progress and some do even better because of the good support they receive.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' personal development and well-being are good. They enjoy school and are enthusiastic in lessons and activities. Because the school has placed a strong emphasis, both in and out of lessons, on developing their social and moral faculties, many students show maturity and sensitivity in these aspects of their behaviour: consideration for others, responsibility for self and right choices are exercised. Their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory and improving. They generally behave well and work well in groups and teams, particularly when lessons are made really interesting and their curiosity is fed. Students know what to do if they have a problem. They say that bullying is now quite rare and when it does occur it is dealt with effectively. Students join in many activities, in and out of school, which help them to live safe and healthy lives and to participate in their local community. The elected council makes a genuine contribution to the running of the school. Attendance is satisfactory. Students' literacy and computer skills are not yet good enough and most of them show little awareness of, or ambition for, further or higher education. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities develop well and their progress is at least as good as that of other students.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching is satisfactory overall and some is good or outstanding. It is always very well planned and teachers use their thorough knowledge of individual students to ensure that they are all focused on learning effectively; but they do not check students' understanding as often as they might. Almost all students are keen to learn and they take real pleasure and pride in their work. They try hard to concentrate and many show sustained thinking in the way they ask and answer questions. The best lessons deliberately tailor material to catch students' interest and find stimulating ways of whetting their appetite for the next level of learning. Teachers do not always make the best use of students' enthusiasm for enquiry and the potential for students to learn more from each other often goes unrealised. For example, in one lesson students were put into pairs to work but all the activity was carried out and fed back individually; students had no

opportunity to swap ideas or comment on each other's work. Where teaching was more dynamic, such as when students operated interactive white boards to demonstrate mathematical proofs or undertook role play to explore the attitudes and motivation of historical figures, students displayed maturity, self-confidence and mutual respect in both giving and receiving ideas to and from each other. Indeed, the increasing use of drama techniques by many teachers is having a very positive effect, particularly on the older students' capacity to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. Weaknesses evident at the last inspection have all been redressed with the notable exception of ICT which continues to be poorly integrated into other subjects. Literacy and the use of the library have been given a boost by extra lessons that further develop reading, writing and research skills. Extra-curricular activities are many and varied and contribute significantly to the improved progress that students are making: their sense of belonging to the whole school community, their personal self-esteem and confidence, their recognition that school and teachers achieve an excellent blend of learning and fun and the enthusiastic involvement of some parents are all enriched by what goes on before and after teaching hours. Integrated expressive arts lessons are developing students' imaginations and creative talents well. However, few teachers make connections between subjects with any real sense of adventure and so cross-curricular learning is not well developed in lessons.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Downside has a reputation for being a very caring school and this is well deserved. The provision for students' overall welfare is well thought out and carefully structured. Their confidence, social skills and independence are successfully developed. The extended services, such as the breakfast club and the on-site involvement of youth workers, have had a major impact here, as has the work being done through family learning. Attention to children's health and safety is diligent. The school is now increasingly promoting students' academic progress as strongly as it does their personal development. Recent improvements to tracking, target-setting and academic monitoring are resulting in better progress in lessons but are not yet reflected generally in better test results. Learning assistants do some good work but are not always used to best advantage. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities and vulnerable students are well nurtured. The school works closely and effectively with a wide range of organisations, as well as with parents, to provide support which meets all students' needs.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The school assesses leadership and management to be satisfactory. Inspectors agree overall, but found a number of key strengths which support the judgement that the school has a good capacity to improve. A relatively new senior team, under the headteacher's strong leadership, are motivated to improve the school significantly and have the understanding and skills to do so. Students are already making better progress in mathematics but there is still much to

be done in English and science. Open communications and mutual trust and respect between staff at all levels characterise the school, but there is also a clear, uncompromising determination to improve the overall quality of teaching and raise standards. Quality assurance processes are now holding middle managers and all teachers to account for the standards they enable students to reach. Internal lesson observations are insightful and helpful. Both teachers and students are clear about what specific targets they are aiming for. Those who lead the school have put a clear focus on raising standards of students' work whilst maintaining the well-established caring, sympathetic community of the school. The promotion of some exciting out-of-school activities, the strong emphasis on sports and the growing use of drama and dance to develop confidence and expressive skills are all having a positive effect on the pride and pleasure students take in their school.

An outstanding feature of the school is the way it works with a wide range of partners and other agencies to further the overall well-being of students. The extended school services have been successfully promoted to the local community. The voices and views of parents and students are genuinely valued and imaginatively sought; they contribute with growing enthusiasm.

The school is very well supported and thoroughly scrutinised by knowledgeable governors. They take a lively interest in all aspects of what the school does. The school's self-evaluation process has been reformed: it now engages staff and governors at all levels and it is clear that the school knows itself and the communities it serves very well. Inspectors agreed with all its judgements.

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Annex A to the inspection report

Inspection Judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

Annex A to the inspection report

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interest of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

Annex A to the inspection report

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B to the inspection report

Letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection.

10 November 2006



Dear Students

Downside Middle School
Furlongs
Barton
Newport
PO30 2AX

We enjoyed visiting your school recently to inspect it. Thank you very much for making us feel welcome and for talking to us so frankly. We have now written our report and hope some of you will want to read it; but this letter is addressed specifically to you and sums up what we think of Downside.

We have judged your school to be satisfactory, with good potential to become better. These improvements are already happening under Mr. Shaw's strong leadership, and you are also contributing well to them. You told us about the improving local reputation of the school and you are rightly proud of many of the things that you enjoy doing at school, both in and out of lessons. We were very impressed by all the activities you get involved with, including the extended school activities. More importantly, we were also impressed by how well you treated each other and how most of you turned up to lessons eager to learn.

You have recently started to do much better in maths; but you still all need to do better in English and in science, and to use computers more effectively. We think you have many good teachers. You seem to appreciate that they always encourage you to do your best, treat you fairly and give you a lot of their time. We think the relationships you have with them are excellent. Those of you who need a lot of support in lessons get it; and those of you who have the ability to do very well in your tests are also encouraged to be ambitious. This is important - many of you have the ability to get better marks and grades than you are getting at the moment. Don't settle for second best.

We are confident that your school will continue to improve. For it to do so requires all of you, and your parents, to become fully committed to everything the school offers. All of you deserve to get as much out of school as you can. Help make it happen.

Good luck with your work, and your play,

Alan Marsh HMI
Lead Inspector