

STAFF PROFILE

MISS RHIANNON BLAND, TEACHER OF DRAMA

I applied for a teaching role whilst just finishing University, where I had completed four different three month placements in state schools. I feel very lucky to have been offered the Drama Teacher role at Downe House as my first post.

The main differences I have found since being here is the length of the school day. For example, I have had to adjust to longer teaching days and balance the free time I have to plan appropriately for lessons, however Drama is always demanding regarding extra-curricular activities/out of hours and so I am kept busy! I do not work on Saturday mornings at Downe House, but teaching Drama as a subject certainly compensates for this! In state schools, Drama teachers usually only work towards one production per year, but there are much more at Downe House, which I thrive upon and I have recently directed a whole year production, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

I have volunteered to supervise in Willis West House and shall continue to do this next year (to follow up one of my NQT aims). This has been valuable as it has provided me with a broader insight into the pastoral side of boarding school life.

Another difference I have experienced is that teachers acquire closer relationships with pupils in the private sector. I have certainly made more of an effort with Downe House girls and I prefer this more personal aspect of teaching. The girls at Downe House seem slightly more naive regarding "life" in general, but they do not suffer from the distractions that pupils at state schools do. Some trips are quite restrictive and, at times, I feel the girls need to experience a broader range of lifestyles. I was, however, pleasantly surprised by how much they exude self-confidence and there are so many more opportunities for the pupils here to utilise this. The girls are very supportive and enthusiastic about my subject, yet this enthusiasm, at times, needs to be carefully managed and you need to set boundaries, without being patronising but working together to their strengths. My class management training at university was useful, however I learn so much better from experience!

Schemes of work here are more flexible and they can be adapted using diverse stimulus that suit the girls. I have learnt to be more open-minded about topics for study with the girls, for example, teaching PSE based topics in Drama and exploring new cultural material, such as physical theatre lessons based upon "Capoeira," a type of Brazilian martial art and this is different and exciting! Also, the facilities here are fantastic and absolutely support the teaching of Drama.

I would advise NQT's who come to the school to be extremely thorough in your lesson planning, prepare 120%, and always ensure the girls are constantly challenged and working beyond their time, as they have much to give here and constantly want to be challenged, which is fabulous!

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Working in a boarding school is more demanding than working in a state school as you have to be more prepared regarding meeting the pupils' academic needs. I would suggest spending as much time at the school before you start so that you can absorb the surroundings and establish relationships with staff and pupils, if possible, before starting work.

There are many opportunities here for development, such as Drama assessments, aiding Sixth Form practical exams and occasions where you can attend Inset Training on assessment and learning about general life of the Boarding School. There is consistent communication amongst staff and lots of social occasions, whereby staff and pupils can get to know each other better, such as House trips and Music Weekend.

The school cares about staff welfare as well as our pupils and this encourages better teaching. It is an active environment, yet provides fantastic opportunities, in which you are expected to be involved. I do prefer working in the private sector, despite enjoying my previous experiences in the state sector, and I keep in touch with my ex colleagues and university peers and I know how different the two environments can be. I love teaching the more able students as it allows me to draw upon more mature and challenging topics to teach in Drama and I endeavour for my pupils to explore diverse cultural, historical and political topics in my lessons.

I feel fully supported here and have been throughout my first year at Downe House. I have been provided with a full NQT induction, I have an Induction Tutor and a Subject Mentor who aids my professional development. My first external inset training session I attended was not very beneficial as I had already learnt so much at the school, prior to this! Everyone has been very thorough regarding expectations of my first year and clear areas for development were set initially, in which I have focused upon. I have met other NQTs outside of the school and in comparison, I feel very well supported!

RB - 21 May 2009