

STAFF PROFILE

MRS SHEENA EVES, TEACHER OF MATHEMATICS

Having taught at a local mixed comprehensive for 9 years, I chose to come to Downe House to return to full time subject teaching. In my previous school, I had 2 roles – teacher in the Maths Department and Head of Years 12 and 13. I taught across the ability range, but especially enjoyed teaching higher ability students. I looked at both grammar schools and selective private school for my next step. I already knew 2 staff at Downe House, so contacted them for more information on what the School was like, in advance of applying.

One of the main differences I have found at Downe House is the length of school day. I am not teaching any more hours, but the sessions I do teach are more spread out. I now take less work home as a result, using the free time during the day to do my preparation and marking. I still do quite a lot of work at home, but as all the resources are here at the School, and there are very good staff work areas, this is less than it used to be. I feel that my work/life balance is much better now. I am not at home as early in the day as I was when I worked in the state sector, but more of my time is my own once I get there. The holidays here are longer, which is good for family life, but I feel that there can be more pressure during term time to get through the syllabus as a result.

Another difference is the Saturday morning teaching. Some of my friends feel that this is a huge disadvantage, but to me, having a day off in the week is far more useful, as it gives me time to do more of what I want to do.

Class sizes are much smaller here than I have been used to. The normal class size in my previous school was 31, or 18 if it was a very low ability group. Now, my largest group is 19 girls and the smallest is 7. A Level classes are similar in size to my state school experience. Having smaller groups does mean that I can give each girl more individual attention, which I find gives me better job satisfaction as well as benefiting the girls.

The environment at Downe House is significantly better than what I was used to. There is no litter, swearing, fighting or inter-family feuds and the areas provided for staff are excellent. The behaviour level of the girls in class is similar to a top set in a state school, meaning that there can be some low level disruption and the girls can be a little cheeky, but is not malicious in any way. Girls know right from wrong, so if you do have to speak to a girl on a behavioural matter, you usually get a note or a verbal apology afterwards. The girls here are often very confident, making the most of their opportunities to develop here, and sometimes, they feel the need to stand out, which can come across as over confident.

At GCSE level, few, if any, take foundation in GCSE Maths. The girls are all expected to achieve A/Bs but there are some B/C students who need motivating. At A level, in the state sector, it is perfectly acceptable to start an A level course

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with a predicted grade of D or even E. At Downe House it seems that students would not want to start a course unless they had the potential for an A or possibly a B.

Since I started here, I have found all the staff to have been very supportive and helpful, just as they were in the state sector. Downe House is run as a tight ship. Procedures are communicated well and staff are expected to (and do) meet deadlines. There is no pushing out of dates, or parents receiving reports late due to staff not having completed reports, or printing not having been completed. As staff, we expect each other to be complete professionals, to complete tasks on schedule without impact to others. We are not regularly reminded of our responsibilities, but we are allowed to get on with the job we have been employed to do.

The School provides excellent opportunities for both girls and staff. Staff are expected to get involved in the life of the school, but the level of involvement is up to you. I personally find that I want to do more than I have time to do, so have to prioritise.

I would not want to go back to state sector now, I keep in touch with my ex-colleagues and know how different the state and private sector can be. I love teaching the girls here. I get a huge amount of job satisfaction and feel that I am valued as a member of staff and treated as a professional. There are many opportunities for self-development, both in the pastoral and academic areas, and I know that I will enjoy the challenges ahead.

SJE - 20 May 2009