



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

DOWNE HOUSE SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Downe House School
DfE number	869/6002
Registered charity number	1015059
Address	Hermitage Road Cold Ash Thatcham Berkshire RG18 9JJ
Telephone number	01635 200286
Email address	correspondence@downehouse.net
Headmistress	Mrs Emma McKendrick
Chairman of governors	Mr Matthew Kirk
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils on roll	583
	Boys 0 Girls 583
	Day pupils 26 Boarders 557
Inspection dates	1 to 2 March 2017

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Paul Spillane	Reporting inspector
Mrs Fiona Angel	Team inspector (Deputy master pastoral, HMC school)
Mr Shaun Fenton	Team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)
Ms Heather Owens	Team inspector (Headteacher, GSA school)
Mr Paul Vanni	Team inspector (Deputy head, GSA school)
Mrs Sally Cunliffe	Team inspector for boarding (Former housemistress, HMC school)
Mrs Denise Hammersley	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy principal, ISA school)
Mr Christian Kendall-Daw	Team inspector for boarding (Deputy headmaster, GSA school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Downe House is an independent boarding and day school for girls aged between 11 and 18. Founded in 1907 in Kent, it moved to its present premises in 1921. The school is a charitable trust with a board of governors.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, a wide range of co-curricular activities, and opportunities to engage with the wider global world. It also seeks to provide its pupils with a safe and secure environment where they are known, valued and well supported. The school aims to enable, encourage and prepare its pupils to play a full and positive part in the global world as outstanding young women of the future.

About the pupils

- 1.3 The school has 583 pupils, of whom 557 are boarders. The majority of pupils come from within the United Kingdom. Approximately one tenth are foreign nationals from a wide variety of countries. Most pupils are from business or professional families. Nationally standardised tests indicate that the ability profile throughout the school is above average. The school has identified 64 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, 58 of whom receive specialist help. Also, 1 pupil has a statement of special educational needs. A total of 61 pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), and 17 of them receive additional support for their English. Data used by the school have identified 69 pupils as the more able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them. In addition, 131 pupils hold scholarships in recognition of their special talents in art, drama, music or sport.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Remove	Year 7
Lower IV	Year 8
Upper IV	Year 9
Lower V	Year 10
Upper V	Year 11
Lower VI	Year 12
Upper VI	Year 13

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.5 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was a standard inspection in February 2011. The recommendation from that inspection was:
- Ensure that the best features of outstanding teaching are promoted across the school.
- 1.6 The school has successfully met the recommendation of the previous full inspection.
- 1.7 The recommendation of the intermediate boarding inspection in February 2013 was:
- Record formally the monitoring of all central records.
- 1.8 The school has successfully met the recommendation of this inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- The school successfully meets its stated aims.
- Pupils' academic progress and achievement in public examinations are excellent.
- The high levels of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding reflect clear, professional and well-planned teaching.
- Exceptionally articulate, pupils express themselves confidently and persuasively.
- Pupils benefit from wide participation in an extensive range of extra-curricular pursuits, achieving high levels of success.
- Pupils approach their academic and other challenges spiritedly and with a sense of adventure.
- Pupils' academic studies do not benefit from all the opportunities that information and communication technology (ICT) can offer.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils behave extremely well, displaying a genuine concern and respect for one another.
- They make excellent progress in developing their self-confidence and resilience by engaging in a variety of imaginative and challenging activities.
- Pupils are reflective and have a highly developed sense of what contributes to their own well-being.
- Mutually respectful and positive relationships with staff and strong friendships give the pupils confidence to make the most of the opportunities offered.
- Appreciative of needs in this country and of other cultures and issues in the wider world, pupils undertake ambitious charity work at home and abroad.
- Boarding provision of very high quality provides pupils a real home from home.
- Pupils develop into young women with high levels of self-esteem, well prepared to face their futures confidently and boldly.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:

- Applying uses of ICT more widely in order to enhance teaching and pupils' learning.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Successful in meeting its stated aims, the school provides its pupils an excellent all-round education.
- 3.3 An atmosphere of happy, purposeful and collaborative endeavour permeates school life, and is reflected in high achievement across a wide range of academic and other disciplines. The following analysis of academic performance uses the national data for the years 2014 to 2016. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results at GCSE are well above the national average and IGCSE results are higher than worldwide norms. These indicate that pupils make high progress in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Results at A level have been above the national average and well above in 2014, pointing to good progress in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities and high progress in 2014. Pupils with SEND or EAL perform in line with their peers, and those with EAL often outperform predictions. Typically, about four-fifths of sixth form leavers proceed to a university with demanding entry requirements. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all of the parents and pupils are pleased with the academic progress that their children are making.
- 3.4 Pupils display high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding, and achieve excellence in many aspects of their studies. Their breadth of understanding is greatly increased by the number of educational ventures which are undertaken in the UK and abroad, such as field trips and visits to places of interest as well as the term spent in the village of Veyrines de Domme in France by all members of Year 8. All pupils including those with EAL are exceptionally articulate. They express themselves confidently and persuasively in conversation, in class and on the public stage. In all age groups, pupils' command of a wide active vocabulary enables them to engage in higher-level debate and to make the most of question and answer opportunities in lessons. Pupils write fluently, with the presentation of their work reflecting pride and care. They are proficient in numeracy and put their mathematical skills to good use in other subjects, notably science, geography, and design and technology. Pupils achieve secure competence in ICT, but its potential as an aid to learning and teaching is not used extensively. In creative subjects such as art, photography and textiles, pupils communicate their purpose cogently. They take their academic work seriously, at the same time displaying enthusiasm for their studies. Pupils apply themselves with determination and can be relied on to work independently. From a young age they annotate texts and source material assiduously, maintaining concentration and displaying perseverance. Pupils display mature study skills and intellectual curiosity; they are responsive to their teachers' encouragement to explore beyond the prescribed syllabus. Their acquisition of well-developed analytical, evaluative and critical faculties enables them to tackle demanding assignments with confidence and success.

- 3.5 Pupils are helped to achieve academic fulfilment by the range of choice in the academic curriculum, which in accordance with the school's stated aims is broad as well as balanced, incorporating subjects such as Italian and Mandarin in its modern languages provision, and including photography and textiles among the creative arts subjects. Central to the excellent academic standards throughout the school is the quality of teaching; well-prepared lessons are taught with clarity and a high level of professional expertise. In some cases, the teaching observed during the inspection was inspiring. Those with SEND or EAL and the most able benefit from having excellent individually prepared education plans, as their special needs are recognised and strongly supported. The expected progress of pupils is maintained by systematic tracking and target setting, with remedial help for those falling short of expectations. Pupils report that they appreciate the amount of time their teachers willingly provide outside lessons and in boarding time; enrichment and extension seminars and assignments greatly assist sixth formers as they prepare for A-level examinations and university entry. Pupils' focus on their aspirations and ambitions is maintained through a record of academic and general progress and achievement, kept over their four GCSE and A-level years.
- 3.6 Pupils' extra-curricular achievement is excellent. Supported by the governing body and teaching and non-teaching staff, leadership and management provide extensive opportunities for pupils to find and develop their aptitudes and talents, thus fulfilling the school's stated aim to offer a wide range of co-curricular activities. The fact that the great majority of pupils are boarders enables them to benefit from these opportunities in the evenings and at weekends, as well as during the timetabled school day. Pupils achieve well in sport both individually and collectively, with a significant proportion gaining representative honours at county and regional levels. Year on year, team performance in hockey, lacrosse, netball and athletics has been particularly high, with notable individual distinction in squash, biathlon and skiing. Each year, large numbers of pupils achieve success in external examinations in music, speech, drama and ballet, as well as national mathematics and science challenges and competitive debating. During the inspection a great deal of vibrant activity in the creative and performing arts was observed; the senior choir sang part of a Haydn Mass with passion and enthusiasm, a number of individual musicians gave accomplished performances, and artwork of high quality adorns the school. Over the past ten years the number of bronze, silver and gold awards in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) has increased to an excellent level. This success is in part built on foundations laid by the school's own Wakefield award, which is enjoyed by the younger pupils and serves as an introduction to some of the opportunities and challenges of the DofE scheme.
- 3.7 The pupils' spirited approach to learning and participation contributes significantly to their successes and personal development. Ambitious and competitive, they are nonetheless generous in their appreciation of others' achievements. Pupils work collaboratively in many contexts and constructively use feedback provided to others in order to improve their own performance. They listen carefully to their teachers, coaches and one another. Pupils display independence of mind both in class and in initiatives such as taking the lead in debates, running a lecture series, proposing charitable ventures and putting forward ideas for new activities. Without arrogance, pupils are proud of their school and of the high, sometimes exceptional, standards which they achieve. The successful fulfilment of the school's aims is testimony also to the high quality of governance, leadership and management.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils become increasingly self-aware as they move up the school, developing a clear understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance, and appreciating the importance of personal values and codes of behaviour. The school successfully nurtures pupils' growth in confidence and self-worth. Pupils learn to respond positively to challenges and occasional setbacks. Unafraid to speak or perform in front of their peers, they are prepared to take risks and are at all levels developing strong resilience. Following the example of leadership, management and staff, pupils come to understand their responsibility not only to the immediate community of the school but also to the wider community beyond. They understand the choices open to them at key stages of their educational development. Through the excellent and systematic guidance, pupils make informed choices about universities and careers.
- 4.3 Boarders flourish in this community, where boarding is central to the character and life of the school. In providing boarding facilities of very high quality, governors, leadership and management give the pupils a real home from home, and a context in which they can thrive. Pupils speak very positively about their houses, demonstrating great loyalty to them and the house staff. They feel nurtured and safe. Pastoral care is of a high standard and most boarders are confident that they can turn to any number of people for support when needed. Boarders use the well-appointed social spaces responsibly and they appreciate the opportunity to personalise their own areas, thus increasing the homeliness of their environment. They have fun, and enjoy and benefit from one another's company, whether decorating cupcakes, raising funds for charity or sharing mindfulness sessions. Boarders have excellent warm relationships as the boarding experience enriches their personal development and inculcates a sense of independence. Pupils are known, valued and supported, in fulfilment of the school's aim. The parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire approve overwhelmingly of all aspects of the boarding provision.
- 4.4 In interview, all pupils spoke warmly of the school's friendly community in which pupils across the age groups get on well with one another. Older pupils willingly help younger ones through the academic and pastoral mentoring system; senior pupils also undertake safeguarding training, run subject workshops and mentor their peers. Pupils conduct themselves sensibly and courteously around the school. This concurs with the overwhelming majority of parent respondents to the questionnaire, who confirmed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. In an essentially kind and compassionate community, pupils do fall out with one another from time to time, but those interviewed reported that differences were successfully settled with or without adult intervention. Pupils throughout the school recognise the importance of fair play and obeying rules, and they develop a strong moral sense of right and wrong which is reinforced by, for example, assembly themes and the messages of visiting speakers. Pupils' clear appreciation of democratic processes derives from sources such as the personal, social, health and economic education lessons, the school council and the excellent current affairs programme in Years 7 and 8. In their responses to the questionnaire, a minority of pupils felt that the staff do not treat them fairly. Inspection evidence does not support this view, and indicates that relations between pupils and staff are on the whole good and based on mutual trust, friendliness and respect.

- 4.5 Pupils develop a strong appreciation of the spiritual and non-material aspects of life. They develop a clear understanding of the key values which should characterise British society. The enthusiasm and skill with which pupils participate in the performing arts enrich them and those around them. Many pupils take advantage of the abundant opportunities to be involved in the musical life of the school. Audiences and participants are uplifted by performances in music and drama, with pupils describing performing in the musicals as among the highlights of their school careers. Pupils described art as enabling them to have ‘eyes for something beautiful’ and as helping them ‘to be calm and to appreciate harmony in the world’. Pupils gain maturity and depth of understanding from their participation in reflective groups such as philosophy lessons and meetings of the Christian union. The chapel is a spiritual centre for many pupils; regular services, the leadership of a talented chapel choir and thoughtful presentations enhance the spiritual lives of the whole community.
- 4.6 Pupils successfully learn to work together as members of a community. Socially aware, they respond positively to the opportunities for leadership and service. Pupils demonstrate their strong commitment to the school and wider communities through their actions in helping the school and the houses to run smoothly, and in supporting local, national and international charities both through fundraising and providing direct support. A strength of the school is the time and energy devoted by staff and pupils to charitable ventures, such as the practical help provided personally in places as far afield as Argentina, India, Malawi, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. Pupils report that house discussions on current affairs help them to understand the world around them. The school council is a constructive and effective forum where the pupil voice is not only heard but acted upon; many changes and improvements have been made as a result of the council’s proposals. Governors annually make a significant grant to finance a project put forward by the pupils themselves, and most recently this has led to the equipping of a fitness suite.
- 4.7 In a school where a tenth of the pupils come from abroad, pupils co-exist entirely harmoniously and relish the cultural diversity which derives from having peers from different backgrounds. Pupils’ horizons are further widened by cultural and global exchanges, and by girls from abroad who come to spend some time as pupils at the school. Pupils are constantly having their eyes opened to topical issues and the wider world; during the inspection an introduction to Islam was the subject of a religious studies lesson, the work of a British-Somali poet was used in a drama lesson, and LGBT issues were addressed in an assembly. Almost all of the parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and acceptance of those with different faiths and beliefs, and evidence during the inspection fully supports this view.
- 4.8 Pupils learn how to stay safe and be healthy. They confirm that they are thoroughly educated in online safety and that they understand the potential dangers of social media. Meals are nutritious and appetising, with an adventurous range of dishes on the lunch menus which always include salads and fresh fruit. Pupils benefit from the wide-ranging programme of sport and other energetic physical activities, balanced by the reflectiveness of, for example, yoga and mindfulness.
- 4.9 When they leave the school, pupils are well prepared to face with confidence the challenges, opportunities and responsibilities of living and working in the modern world.