

Statement of Purpose

Downham House

Downham School is a City of Plymouth special school with places for 84 boys and girls aged from 3 to 16 years (i.e. up to end of Year 11) with severe learning difficulties. Some of the pupils also have associated communication and/or physical disabilities.

We aim:

- To provide a curriculum which is balanced and broadly based and which provides opportunities for all pupils to learn and to achieve, promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life.
- To provide a caring and happy learning environment which creates an atmosphere of purpose and security.
- To provide the opportunity for pupils to express preferences, communicate needs, make choices, make decisions and choose options that other people act on and respect.
- To provide the opportunity to interact and communicate with a wide range of people.
- To provide pupils with the knowledge and understanding that every person is valued as an individual no matter what their disability, colour, sex or culture.
- To provide pupils with the knowledge and understanding to examine and make individual choices and decisions for their adult life.
- To provide the opportunity for pupils to increase their awareness and understanding of their environment and of the world.
- To provide a wide range of learning experiences for pupils in each key stage suitable for their age.

Downham School hostel, known as Downham House, provides weekly boarding facilities to the end of Year 11 for up to fourteen children during term time. The children grow up in a family atmosphere where the opportunity for social interaction and to live, mix and learn with children of a similar ability is seen as a very valuable experience and helps to enhance their independence and social skills. The warm and pleasant building is regularly decorated and comfortably furnished to give a homely feel, as similar to the children's own homes as possible.

Special features of Downham House include a games room with ball-pool/sensory area and a 'chill-out' room for teenagers. The grounds have a swing, gardening area and space to play and ride bicycles.

The permanent care staff presently employed are:

Mrs Annette Titterington DipSW	Head of Care
Miss Kim Thomas NVQ3	Residential Care Officer
Mrs Debra Kirkwood NVQ3	Residential Care Officer
Miss Diane Heyes R.S.A.	Residential Care Officer
Miss Laura Treglown NNEB	Residential Care Officer

Referrals to the hostel can be made by:

- Headteachers and Heads of Care
- LEA Special Services Officers
- Social Services and Health Authorities
- Parents

Decisions regarding admission are made by LEA officers in conjunction with the Headteacher and Head of Care. The decision will form part of the regular twice-termly Admissions Panel meeting.

Pupils to be admitted to the hostel will include:

- Pupils attending Downham Special School
- Pupils requiring support during the transition period from Downham School to another school placement.
- Pupils attending other special schools when the recommendation is agreed by the Headteacher, Head of Care and LEA.

The following can be considered to be criteria for admission:

- Pupils who have a residential requirement clearly outlined on their statement.
- Pupils who live a long way from the school in order to cut down on extreme travelling times/distances.
- Pupils whose relationships in their home have come to a breaking point.
- Pupils in need of social interaction when this is not possible at home.
- Pupils who will benefit from support for educational activities e.g. computer work, homework, reading, writing etc. when this is not available in their own home.
- Pupils who will benefit from organised leisure pursuits when this is not possible in their own home.
- Pupils who will benefit from independence opportunities.

- Pupils identified by Social Services, Health Authorities or parents as requiring short-term respite, in agreement with the Headteacher, Head of Care and LEA.

When considering a new admission to the hostel, both the needs of the pupil and the likely effects of his/her admission upon the existing group of children will be taken into account before the admission is agreed.

Whilst several of our children are resident for four nights of the week we have recently started to admit some for just one, two or three night a week. In addition the hostel may be used by other organisations at weekends and during school holidays. Because of the nature of the building the hostel is not able to accommodate pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties or with severe challenging behaviour/severe autism. Neither is it available to pupils requiring constant nursing care.

The co-ordinator for child protection is the headteacher, Martin Maleham. He is responsible for the proper operation of procedures designed to cause staff to respond sensitively and confidently to the threat of child abuse and to co-ordinate the school and hostel's response.

Our staffing policy ensures that the level of staffing is adequate to meet this Statement of Purpose. There is a minimum of three staff on duty in the hostel during waking hours and three members of staff sleep in each night. A fourth member of staff, who assists with activities, is on duty until 9.00 p.m. each evening. On one night each week a waking member of staff is employed. The head of care has hours "off operational duties" to perform the necessary management functions of her role, although she can be contacted for support if required, as can the headteacher and deputy headteacher.

(A simplified version of this Statement with symbols is available for children).
