Downs Infant School Newsletter

Autumn Term 1 2026

This half term's value has been: Aspiration. Next half term's value will be: Belonging.

Head Teacher's Welcome



Dear Parents and Carers,

As we reach the end of our first half term of the school year, I'd like to take this opportunity to share with you some exciting changes to the school building that took place over the summer, as well as the school development priorities we have planned for this academic year.

Summer Improvements and Changes

Planned building works over the summer have enabled us to refine our approach to inclusion. The following rooms have now been developed/repurposed:

Seahorse Class – Inclusion Intervention Space (IIS)

Seahorse Class (off the main school hall) is our new Inclusion Intervention Space (IIS) for children with autism and/or speech, language and communication needs. Led by Class Teacher, Miss Tamsin White, and ably assisted by Mrs Charlotte Arabzadeh and Mrs Tracey Parsons, Seahorse has the capacity for up to 10 children to attend every morning, whilst remaining attached to mainstream classes in the afternoon





The Hive

The Hive has remained as an 'unofficial' Inclusion Intervention Space with a focus on Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Interventions in The Hive are primarily led by our Learning Mentor, Ms Clare Kingan.



The Nest



During the summer term, the School Council gathered and short-listed possible names for our new Year 2 shared learning environment (previously Robin Class) and staff voted on 'The Nest'. This calm, quiet area also offers space for interventions such as Reading Army support and is additionally used by our extracurricular club providers.

Our School Development Priorities for 2026-27

Building on our strong foundations – recognised by Ofsted as 'good' in all areas in September 2024 – we have clear priorities for this academic year. Our key focus is to continue striving for excellence in education through our child-centred, play-based approach to learning with a specific focus on our disadvantaged groups. Looking at the eight areas outlined in the Ofsted Toolkit (September 2026), we have identified an area for development within each, as summarised in the table below.

OFSTED AREA	OBJECTIVE
Strand 1: Safeguarding	Continue to build on our strong approach to safeguarding by improving attendance and punctuality.
Strand 2: Inclusion	Improve inclusive practice by further developing our Inclusion Intervention Space (IIS) provision.
Strand 3: Curriculum and Teaching	Continue to implement and embed new programmes, such as Little Wandle Systematic Synthetic Phonics and Maths Mastery.
Strand 4: Achievement	Introduce a new system for tracking the progress and attainment of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
Strand 5: Attendance and Behaviour	Revise/update our Behaviour policy and systems.
Strand 6: Personal Development and Well-being	Continuously seek ways to support staff and pupil well-being.
Strand 7: Early Years	Explore our EYFS Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) data asking "What more can we do to support the 'Best Possible Start' for children?"
Strand 8: Leadership and Governance	Continue with our licence deficit reduction plan whilst ensuring that every pupil thrives and receives the high-quality, ambitious education they deserve.

Staffing

Following the retirement of our School Business Manager, Mrs Ann Mitchell, we are delighted to welcome two new faces as our finance team:

Mrs Lynn Hill (School Business Manager) and Mr Lee Bacciochi (School Business Manager Assistant)

Both Lynn and Lee are based at Varndean School but work across a number of schools in Brighton and Hove. I know you'll join me in making them feel welcome as part of our Downs community.





Partnership Working

I'm pleased to share that we continue to work closely with Ms Katie Blood and her team at Downs Junior School and we are also working collaboratively with the Thrive Together Schools Alliance (TTSA), further strengthening our partnership with other local schools. This alliance supports the sharing of best practice and expertise across schools to benefit our children's learning and development.For further information, please visit https://www.varndean.co.uk/about-us/ttsa-thrive-together-schools-alliance

Rainbow Club

I'm delighted to share that in response to demand, we've expanded Rainbow Club after school capacity from 64 to 72 places, which will help more families access this valuable provision. Our breakfast club places remain capped at 40 which meets the current demand.

Head Lice



As is common in schools at this time of year, we've noticed an increase in cases of head lice. I would be very grateful if you could check your child/ren's hair carefully over the half-term break and treat if necessary.

The NHS recommends the following approach:

To check for head lice:

- Use a fine-toothed detection comb on wet hair with conditioner
- Comb from the roots to the ends of the hair
- Check the comb for lice after each stroke

To treat head lice:

- Wet combing with a fine-toothed comb every 3-4 days for 2 weeks is effective
- Alternatively, use medicated lotions or sprays from your pharmacy (follow instructions carefully)
- Check all family members and treat anyone with live lice on the same day

To prevent head lice spreading:

- Tie long hair back
- Avoid head-to-head contact where possible

Please note that having head lice is not a justifiable reason for absence from school. Head lice are a common childhood issue and children can attend school whilst being treated. The most important thing is that treatment is carried out promptly to prevent further spread.

Please remember that we have an INSET day on Friday 23rd October and we look forward to welcoming the children back on Monday 2nd November.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support. Wishing you all a lovely half-term break.

Kind regards,

L. Walker

Mrs Lisa Walker
Headteacher

Learning in Reception

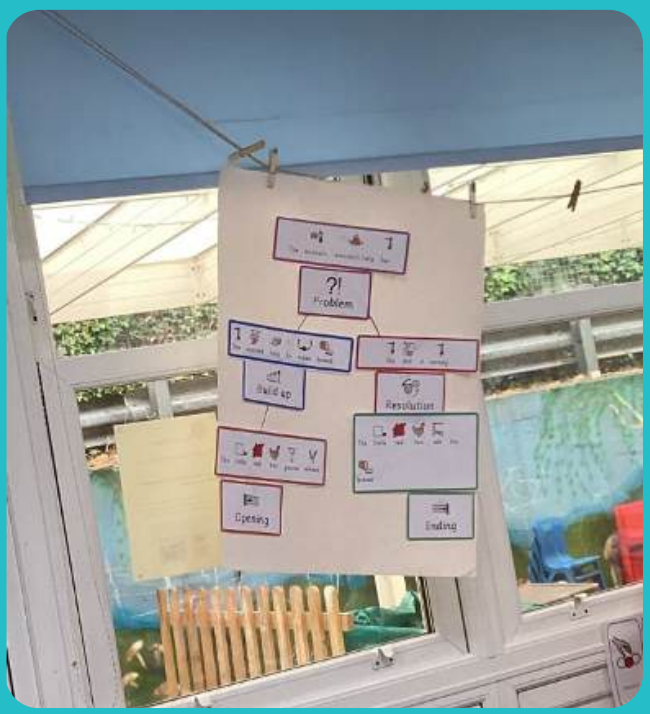
What an incredible first half term our Reception children have had! They have settled wonderfully into school life, growing in confidence, independence and resilience as they learn, play and make new friendships.

Through phonics, the children have begun learning sounds, blending them together to read words and recognising their first tricky words. At the same time, Talk for Writing has brought stories such as Mr Wiggle and Mr Waggle and The Little Red Hen to life through storytelling, vocabulary and early writing.

In Maths, there has been plenty of practical exploration, including subitising, developing a deeper understanding of early number and comparing groups to explore ideas such as ‘more’ and ‘equal’.

The children have also been busy developing their creativity, communication and physical skills through self-portraits, dough, outdoor learning, singing and lots of purposeful play. Most importantly, we are so proud to see our children becoming increasingly ready, respectful and safe, learning how to manage their feelings, help one another and feel that they truly belong in our school community. What a fantastic start to their learning journey at Downs Infant School!





For more detail and photos, please check your Tapestry account

Learning in Year 1

What a brilliant start to Year 1! The children have embraced their learning with confidence and curiosity, while continuing to enjoy plenty of opportunities to create, explore, talk and play during COOL time.

In English, they have been developing their oracy and writing skills, building sentences, exploring story structure and proudly telling their own stories to learning partners.

Maths has been wonderfully hands-on, with children comparing, counting and exploring how whole numbers can be made up of different parts.

Our young scientists have been busy investigating the animal world, learning to classify animals and exploring whether they are herbivores, carnivores or omnivores.

There has been creativity too, from self-portraits, painting and crafting to den and shop building, alongside special experiences including a visit exploring Sukkot and an author visit.

Above all, it has been lovely to see the children reading, talking, creating, sharing and caring for one another, making such a positive start to their Year 1 journey.





For more detail and photos, please check your Tapestry account

Learning in Year 2

What a fantastic start to Year 2, with so much creativity, curiosity and confident learning to celebrate!

In English, the children have been developing their storytelling and persuasive writing skills, using story mountains to organise their ideas and taking inspiration from ‘The Day the Crayons Quit’ to create some wonderfully imaginative writing of their own.

In Maths, they have been deepening their understanding of number, exploring tens and ones, positioning two-digit numbers on number lines and developing efficient addition strategies, including bridging through 10.

There has been a lot of fascinating learning across the wider curriculum too, from investigating the history of cars and designing and constructing working wheeled vehicles to exploring how artists such as Rachel Jones use colour in their work.

Through RE and PSHE, children have also been exploring stories, wellbeing and the importance of looking after both their minds and bodies.

Alongside all of this, there has been dancing, singing, creativity and plenty of opportunities to share ideas and learn together. We are incredibly proud of the enthusiasm and independence our Year 2 children are bringing to their learning!



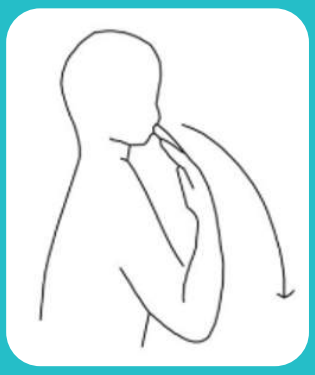


For more detail and photos, please check your Tapestry account

This half term's Makaton signs were:

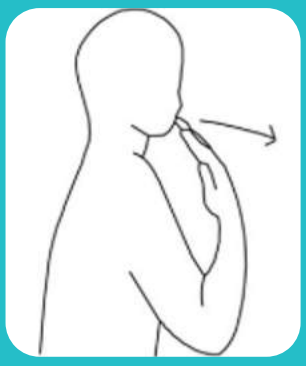
Did you know that over 100,000 children and adults use Makaton symbols and signs, either as their main method of communication or as a way to support speech?!

Please



(Tip: please to the knees)

Thank you



Kind



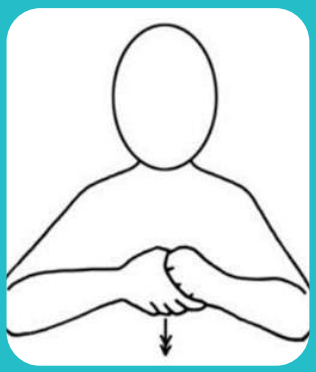
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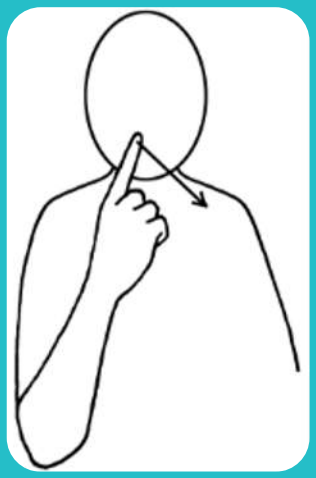
Hi/Hello



Together



To speak/say/tell



Food / Eat



To try



(Move one index finger forward past the other)

Governors' News

Welcome back!

I hope you all had a wonderful summer. A very warm welcome especially to our new Reception children and families joining our school community this term.

Following my end-of-term newsletter asking for interest in joining our Governing Board, we were delighted by the response and the fantastic expressions of support for our school. Whilst the necessary time commitment proved too much for some, I am delighted to welcome two new members to the team:

· Katie Oldham-Brown, who joins us as a Parent Governor. Katie has a child in Reception and brings valuable legal experience.

· Raivo Kittus, also a parent at the school, who has been co-opted onto the board, bringing strong expertise in strategic planning and financial oversight.

Please join me in welcoming Katie and Raivo to their new roles.

Behind the scenes, our Resources Committee continues to meet regularly to ensure that we deliver the best possible outcomes for our pupils, even within a challenging financial environment.

We look forward to working together with staff and families to ensure a successful, supportive, and inspiring year ahead for all our children

Best wishes

Susan Campbell, Chair of Governors

Safeguarding

If you would like to speak to our Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), Lisa Walker, or a member of our safeguarding team in confidence, please email: **DSL@downsinf.brighton-hove.sch.uk**

If you have any compliments, comments, concerns or complaints to feedback to school please email: **CCCC@downsinf.brighton-hove.sch.uk**

Resources Shout Out



Are you having a clear out?
We would like the following if possible:

- Sieves
- Funnels
- Cups
- Small plastic jugs



If you have any Christmas jumpers suitable for our older children, Mrs Walker would really appreciate them.

We are always looking for volunteers to help in school and would love to hear from anyone interested in helping us to keep our library looking tidy and organised. Just an hour a week would make a big difference!



As always, all year groups need lots of packaging for junk modelling. Please note that we're unable to accept packaging from products containing nuts or seeds. We also can't accept packaging from medicines or toilet roll tubes. If you could bring in your recycling on a Monday morning that would be great! Thank you.





SENCO news

Schools Mental Health Service

NHS Sussex

Brighton & Hove City Council

Does your child struggle to go to school?

Regular drop-in sessions for parents and carers *Autumn 2026*

Hosted by the Mental Health Family Support team, the sessions are a friendly space to access information and support and meet other parents/carers facing the same challenges.



Alcampo Lounge (84 London Road, Brighton BN1 4JF)

23 September 10-11.30am

20 October 10-11.30am

24 November 10-11.30am

Online session

21 October 7.00-8.30pm

To find out more or book onto the online sessions, please email: schoolsmentalhealthservice@brighton-hove.gov.uk or Jo Roeg: jo.roeg@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Reading at Downs Infant School

"There is more treasure in books than in all the pirate's loot on Treasure Island." **Walt Disney**

If you are thinking ahead about gifts for the celebration season ahead, do visit THE BOOK NOOK https://uk.bookshop.org/shop/BookNookHove

They have some wonderful reading lists on their website, including 'Top 25 books for Reception/Year 1/Year 2'

Also, check out incredible events this October Half Term.

Events are every day during Half Term for all ages; graphic novel workshops, draw-alongs, creative workshops, crafts and stories and don't miss the fabulous free Brighton Family Bookfest (with some of our favourites making an appearance) in collaboration with Afrori Bookshop and Little Green Pig.



Scheme Reading Books

These are books that come home each week and are carefully selected to meet your child's reading level. PLEASE ensure these are returned to school on the correct day.

Shared Reading Books

These are books that children can select from the book corners in class and the library. They are to be shared together to encourage the love of reading.Book corner books can be changed as frequently as you wish and library books can be changed weekly.

Book Recommendation

I adore this story! It's a gorgeous book about following your dreams while holding on to the people who matter most. David Litchfield's stunning illustrations make The Bear and the Piano a real joy to read and explore together. Perfect for sharing at bedtime and talking about friendship, ambition and belonging. And of course, I love music! Miss Cargill 🎹🐻



School Council



New School Council representatives for the autumn term have been democratically elected from our Year 1 and 2 classes. Representatives from Reception join from the spring term.

In addition to learning the Makaton sign of the week to teach our KS1 children in assembly, the School Council have met with Kaia Allen-Bevan from Youth-the-Gap and one of our Governors, Bronagh Shevlin, to help us plan the next stages of our 'Growing an Anti-Racist School' (GARS) work. The reps have also been gathering ideas from their classes to support our Our City Our World (OCOW) work on reducing waste in school.

Downs Infants Rainbow Families Group



A new group is forming for all LGBTQ+ parents of Downs Infants students. Whilst we are an integrated part of the wider school community, this group is solely to foster connections between rainbow families at Downs Infants. Please feel free to email downsinfants.rainbowfamilies@gmail.com if you are interested in participating.

Friends Of Downs Infant School

FODIS

HELLO

A **BIG hello from Lindsay, Tracy, Anna-Maria and Camille at FODIS (Friends of Downs Infant School PTA).** We hope this first term's been a fun one. It's been so nice to see so many familiar faces and welcoming new ones

FROZEN FRIDAY

****FIRST FRIDAY OF EVERY MONTH****

Thank you for supporting our **Frozen Friday** ice creams and lollies fundraising event. We raised an amazing **£100 profit** for the school. Huge thanks to **Worth** for leading the event, and our **co-Treasurer Anna-Maria** and **Ruth** for helping out

if you can help at future events, let us know x

TEDDY BEARS' PICNIC

We loved getting to know our new Reception famillies a little better at the **Teddy Bears' Picnic.** Thanks for joining us - hope you had fun!

LOST PROPERTY & FREE SHOP

Our amazing volunteer **Kate** has been busy getting lost property back to it's owners and is setting up a **Free Shop**. We'll be having drop in dates when you can pop by to collect **uniform** or browse what **needs a new home.** If you think you've **lost something and it's not in the bin** email: fodisfreeshop@gmail.com and we'll try to help.****Please remember to label clothing and regularly check the lost property bin outside the foyer****

TEA TOWELS & CHRISTMAS MERCH

The children have all been busy creating some very special artwork for our **Christmas cards** and adorable portraits for our **school tea towels. More details on how to order will be shared soon. A very special thank you** to the **teachers** and **all our volunteers** who put in so much time and effort

KEEP FODIS GOING

As our Co-Chair Tracy is now involved with FODJ at the Juniors, we're looking for someone to join our small friendly team to help keep all our brilliant fundraising and community activities going.

If you fancy finding out more, we'd love to meet over a cuppa - email: fodisgeneral@gmail.com

FUTURE EVENTS

We're working on ideas for a **special Christmas experience for the children** - so watch this space! If you have some ideas, drop us a line.

We're also trying to get a **mixer evening together for our parents** - details to follow

WE CAN'T DO ANY OF THIS WITHOUT YOU, LOVE FODIS X

Half term activities

Sunday 25th October: Paint-your-own mini bench!

11am - 1pm in Churchill Square

Paint-your-own mini bench session with supportfromStory Trail artist Martha Mitchell.
Drop in, no need to book, free with purchase of a £15 mini bench.

Monday 26th October: Free bookmark making

11am - 1pm in Churchill Square

Drop-in to makeyourownbookmarks.Noneedtobook,free to take part.

Tuesday 27th October: Free origami crafts

10.30am - 12.30pm in Churchill Square

Meet Story Trail artistEmmaFishAKAStyleIn Designforanorigamicraft session with a Halloween twist.

Wednesday 28th October: Once Upon a Trail

Starting venue Colonnade Bar, New Road, from 5pm

Tenofour sculpturesare transformed for onenightonlywithdifferentactivities including a silent disco, a choir, trick or treating and theatrical performances.
Book online: https://amazesussex.org.uk/events/once-upon-a-trail/

Friday 30th October: Free crafts

11am - 1pm in Churchill Square

Drop-in to forfreecraftactivities.Noneedtobook,freeto take part.

Paint-your-own mini bench at The Book Nook,

First Avenue, Hove, from 11am
With Story Trail Artist Kirsti Davidson. Book on their website - booknookuk.com/events

Saturday 31st October: Free badge-making

11am - 1pm in Churchill Square

Drop in to makeyourownbadges,noneedtobook,freeto take part.

Children must be accompanied by an adult

Key Dates (red = dates added since last newsletter)

Friday 23rd October	INSET day (3 of 5)
Wednesday 4th November, 9-10am (rescheduled from 14th October)	Youth the Gap, equalities workshop for parents and carers (school hall)
Friday 6th November, 9-10am	Smartphone Free Childhood (SFC) information session for parents and carers (school hall)
Monday 9th November, 3.30 - 6.30pm	Parents' evening 1
Thursday 12th November, 3.30 - 6.00pm	Parents' evening 2
Monday 16th November	Odd Socks Day (Anti-Bullying Week)
Tuesday 1st December, Time TBC	Rocksteady Concert for parents and carers of children who take part in Rocksteady on Tuesdays (school hall)
Wednesday 9th December, Time TBC	Rocksteady Concert for parents and carers of children who take part in Rocksteady on Wednesdays (school hall)
Wednesday 9th December	Christmas Lunch. Children are invited to wear a Christmas jumper or dress up in other Christmassy clothing if they want to.
Tuesday 15th December, 2.20pm	Reception performance - approximately 30 minutes (school hall)
Tuesday 15th December, 9.05am	Year 1 performance - approximately 30 minutes (school hall)
Tuesday 15th December, 5.00pm	Year 2 performance - approximately 30 minutes (Woodland – weather permitting and school hall if raining)
Wednesday 16th December, 9.05am	Year 1 performance - approximately 30 minutes (school hall)
Wednesday 16th December, 2.20pm	Reception performance - approximately 30 minutes (school hall)
Monday 4th January 2027	INSET day (4 of 5)
Tuesday 12th January, 9-10am and 6.15-7.15pm	Phonics and early reading session for Reception parents and carers - please note that this is the same session running twice and it is different to the session held in September (school hall)
Thursday 28th January, 9-10am and 6.15-7.15pm	Maths at Downs Infants – an information sharing session for parents and carers (school hall)
Tuesday 9th March, Time TBC	Rocksteady Concert for parents and carers of children who take part in Rocksteady on Tuesdays (school hall)
Wednesday 10th March, Time TBC	Rocksteady Concert for parents and carers of children who take part in Rocksteady on Wednesdays (school hall)
Tuesday 16th March, 9.05am	Year 1 performance - approximately 30 minutes (school hall)
Wednesday 17th March, 9.05am	Year 1 performance - approximately 30 minutes (school hall)
Monday 7th June	INSET day (5 of 5)
Tuesday 6th July, Time TBC	Rocksteady Concert for parents and carers of children who take part in Rocksteady on Tuesdays (school hall or Woodland)
Wednesday 7th July, Time TBC	Rocksteady Concert for parents and carers of children who take part in Rocksteady on Wednesdays (school hall or Woodland)
Wednesday 14th July, 9.20am	Year 2 performance - approximately 45 minutes (school hall)
Thursday 15th July, 9.20am	Year 2 performance - approximately 45 minutes (school hall)
Wednesday 21st July	Last day of the school year