

Desborough School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110099
Local Authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	378054
Inspection dates	21–22 September 2011
Reporting inspector	Janet Mercer HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	749
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	159
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr Nigel Cook
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Linnell
Date of previous school inspection	13–14 May 2009
School address	Shoppenhangers Lane Maidenhead SL6 2QB
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 30 lessons and saw 30 teachers, and held meetings with groups of students, governors and staff. They observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documentation, including the school's self-assessment and improvement plan, departmental reviews, the school's records of lesson observations, minutes of meetings of the governing body and school policy documents. Inspectors also analysed the questionnaire responses from 68 parents and carers, 86 students and 28 staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The impact of the school's work to raise attainment at Key Stage 4 and improve teaching and learning since the last inspection.
- The effectiveness of the school's systems to monitor the quality and consistency of performance across all subjects.
- How well all lessons offer appropriate levels of challenge for all groups of students.
- The effectiveness of the school's strategy to reduce differences in attainment and progress between different groups of students.

Information about the school

Desborough is an average-size comprehensive school for boys with specialist status in modern foreign languages. Almost 40% of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. The majority of these are of Pakistani heritage, but the school also has significant numbers of students from Other White backgrounds. Around one in five students speak English as an additional language, and a small proportion of these are at the early stages of learning English. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is similar to that seen nationally, although the proportion with a statement of special educational needs is a little higher than average. Their needs include specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, as well as difficulties in speech, language and communication. While the proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is relatively low, it has increased in recent years. The school has gained the Healthy Schools and the International School awards.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

3

Main findings

Desborough School provides a satisfactory education and good care and support for its students. It is an inclusive and welcoming environment where students feel safe, secure and well cared for. Most students enjoy school and the great majority of parents and carers speak highly of how the school supports their children, enabling them to grow into confident and well-rounded young men. Students work very well together, showing respect and tolerance within the diverse school community. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sports, cultural activities and foreign exchange visits, enriches their experience and supports the development of good personal and social skills, preparing boys well for further study or employment.

Despite some significant improvements in GCSE examination results in recent years, leading to the school's best ever results in 2010, students' achievement remains satisfactory overall. The proportion of students achieving five or more A* to C grades including English and mathematics was above average in 2010, but declined in 2011 and was in line with the national average. There is a very wide variation in achievement between different subjects, with boys making consistently good progress in mathematics, science and drama, but less than the expected progress in English. A few subjects such as art and design, French and business studies have had below average results for several years, and declined further in 2011.

The school's monitoring of students' progress in 2010/11 did not effectively identify variable or declining subject performance through the year and thus enable managers to intervene during the year to improve the situation. Tracking of students' progress and subject performance did not distinguish sufficiently between students' current progress towards targets and final predicted grades to give the leadership team and governors an accurate measurement of progress against whole school and subject level targets.

Some examples of good, and occasionally outstanding, teaching and learning occur, but the quality of teaching remains variable across different teachers and subjects. Students make the most progress where teachers reinforce high expectations of what students can and should achieve, and where they provide regular opportunities for students to participate actively in lessons and assess their own learning. Teachers devise effective strategies to enable sixth form students to participate more actively in lessons and learn independently but this does not happen enough in other year groups. Teachers do not always make enough use of assessment information to plan lessons to meet students' different abilities. As a result, teaching remains satisfactory

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overall, as at the last inspection.

While whole-school self-evaluation identifies key strengths and areas for improvement, departmental reviews are inconsistent in format and rigour. The best contain a detailed and self-critical analysis of attainment data, findings from lesson observations and feedback from students, and clearly identify areas and strategies for improvement, but not all are equally thorough. The school's own lesson observations often focus too much on teaching activities in the lesson and not enough on how well students are learning, and present a more positive view of teaching and students' progress in lessons than that seen during the inspection.

Senior leaders recognise that monitoring processes were not sufficiently rigorous or accurate last year and have started a thorough analysis to identify the underlying reasons for the declining performance in individual subjects. While not complete at the time of inspection, this review has identified some emerging issues. This rigorous analysis of performance, combined with strengthened monitoring procedures, indicates satisfactory capacity to improve.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' achievement at Key Stage 4 by:
 - reducing the wide variations in the performance of different subjects
 - ensuring all teachers have consistently high expectations of what students can achieve and adopt strategies to promote more independent learning.
- Improve the proportion of good and better teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that teachers involve all students more in their learning through active participation in lesson activities
 - supporting teachers further to use assessment information and feedback from students to plan future learning
 - making sure that students know and understand relevant success criteria, so that they can use these effectively to self- and peer-assess their learning and progress
 - identifying more opportunities for staff to observe and share existing good practice and targeting their specific development needs more sharply.
- Ensure greater consistency in the quality of departmental reviews and subject evaluation, and systematically monitor progress on implementing action plans and the impact of action taken to secure improvement.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

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Students enjoy lessons, especially when they are actively involved in varied learning activities. Progress in lessons is at least satisfactory overall, and sometimes good, with no significant differences between different groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has successfully addressed some specific areas of underachievement. Targeted support for different groups of Pakistani pupils increased the proportion who achieved five A* to C grades including English and mathematics.

However, students' progress varies between subjects and lessons. For example, in the school's specialist area, in Spanish and German lessons, the teachers' high expectations and the brisk pace of activities, with frequent opportunities to practise listening and speaking skills, ensured that students made good progress. By contrast, younger students in a French lesson made less progress as the teacher had not taken sufficient account of students' different levels of prior attainment and abilities in the subject. As a result, students spent too much time repeating what they already knew, rather than extending their learning.

In science, students make good progress when they undertake practical tasks and discover new things for themselves. In drama, regular opportunities for working together in groups and providing feedback on performance builds confidence and helps students to know how they can improve their work. However, progress in English, though improving, remains lower than in science and mathematics, as activities are not always sufficiently challenging, particularly in developing more-able students' writing skills.

Behaviour around the school is good and attendance rates are above average. Students are polite and courteous; they work well together and have good relationships with teachers and other school staff. A few students and parents expressed concerns about occasional disruption in lessons. Inspectors observed predominantly good behaviour in lessons, with most boys keen and ready to learn. However, a small minority of students lose focus and concentration when teaching is less effective in engaging and maintaining their interest.

Students develop an excellent understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle and participation rates in sports are high. The school's 'Lifeskills' programme is very effective in developing students' understanding of a range of health risks, including the dangers of misuse of drugs or alcohol. Students' work on the Kick It anti-junk food campaign helped the school win a Healthy Schools award.

The school successfully promotes boys' wider understanding of the world through a wide range of arts and cultural activities, which create opportunities for reflective thinking. The widespread culture of developing leadership in the school enables boys to make an outstanding contribution to the school and wider community. For example, a significant number of sixth form students act as mentors to Year 7 students while others lead sports and modern language sessions in local primary schools. Many boys contribute ideas for school improvement, through participating in departmental reviews and the strong student council.

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Students are well prepared for further study or employment, with all Year 11 students progressing successfully to either post-16 courses at school or the local college, or into apprenticeships or employment last year. Students develop good skills in numeracy and information and communication technology, and can articulate their ideas confidently.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils’ behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The majority of lessons are characterised by positive relationships between teachers and students. Most boys are keen to learn and respond enthusiastically when teachers plan interesting content and activities which hold their interest. For example, in a GCSE economics lesson, a stimulating, high level discussion about the Chinese economy increased students’ understanding of the current world economic situation. Purposeful homework tasks motivated them to research the topic further. Students enjoyed opportunities for structured discussion in pairs and small groups which enabled them to express and explore their ideas.

Lesson planning is too often focused on completing tasks or activities at the expense of deeper consideration of what students are learning by doing them. Teachers do not always make sufficient use of assessment data and their knowledge of students’ prior attainment, different abilities or learning styles to provide work to meet their different needs. In physical education lessons, students made good, and sometimes

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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outstanding, progress because teachers had a very detailed understanding of students' prior attainment and their abilities, and used this extremely well to plan next steps of learning for each individual.

On occasions, the work set is not demanding enough and students do not always make as much progress as they could in the time available. In some lessons, teachers talk too much and do not give students enough opportunities to work and learn independently and develop a curiosity about the subject. When teachers explain learning objectives clearly, students understand what they are learning and why. However, not all teachers share and explain these objectives equally well, and do not always revisit them during, or at the end of, the lesson, to review and check students' understanding. While some teachers make good use of questioning to check and extend students' learning, this is not consistently well developed. Marking does not always provide sufficient detail to help students know how to improve their work. Opportunities to assess their own work and receive feedback from others against given criteria help students understand how to improve their work and achievement, but this approach is not consistently well developed across the school.

The school's specialism in modern foreign languages makes a significant contribution to students' learning experiences. Almost all students take at least one language at GCSE, although results have been consistently stronger in German and Spanish than in French. The school's good promotion of language learning in the wider community, for example, through work with primary schools and three annual exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain, has contributed to the achievement of the International School award. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, through clubs, trips and residential visits, significantly enhances students' enjoyment and personal and social development. Participation rates in such activities are high.

The school has extended its offer of vocational courses since the last inspection, including opportunities to study information and communication technology and business through vocational awards. Students on these courses have achieved well, although the school has not yet capitalised on opportunities for extending some of the different approaches to teaching and assessment evident in these courses to other areas of the school's work.

The school has identified improving literacy across the curriculum as key to raising achievement. Subject teams have responsibility for integrating literacy into their curriculum and lesson planning. In a physical education lesson, a teacher very effectively reinforced students' literacy skills through extending specialist vocabulary when students were learning about skeletal function, exercise and muscle activity, but this well-integrated approach is not consistently well developed.

The school provides very good pastoral care and support for students, especially when students join the school in Year 7, and when making choices in Years 9 and 11 about future courses. Students settle into school quickly and know they can seek help from staff or older students who act as mentors. Good support for vulnerable students, those who speak English as an additional language and those with special

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educational needs and/or disabilities enables them to make progress comparable to their peers. The school’s good partnerships with external agencies ensure that students requiring specialist support, for example, speech therapy, receive the help they need. The majority of parents agreed that the school meets their child’s individual needs well. One student now in the sixth form noted how the support he had received earlier in the school had helped him become more independent. However, the school has not comprehensively mapped provision for all students with special educational or emotional and behavioural needs across all year groups. Teachers do not always receive sufficient information on individual needs or guidance on appropriate strategies to help them plan for and meet these needs in lessons.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

Senior leaders’ and governors’ agenda for school improvement was successful in raising attainment over the last few years. Following the unexpected decline in results in 2011, leaders have taken prompt action to identify the underlying reasons for declining performance across a range of subjects. They are strengthening monitoring processes and focusing on improving teaching and learning to secure rapid improvement in the coming year. Governors receive detailed reports on whole school and subject level performance so that they can effectively support and challenge the leadership team in its drive for improvement.

Arrangements for safeguarding are good, and close liaison with external agencies promotes staff awareness and students’ understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Staff receive good training and regular updates, and systems to record any concerns or referrals to external agencies are thorough. Senior staff have received appropriate training in safer recruitment procedures.

The school has an inclusive ethos and promotes community cohesion well. Students treat others with mutual respect and learn to understand and value different beliefs and values. Diversity is celebrated through assemblies and whole-school events. The school has been successful in reducing underachievement of Pakistani boys and reducing any significant differences in achievement between different groups of students.

Parents are made welcome in the school and many help out at school events. Most say that communications with the school are good, although a small minority say

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they would value more information about their child’s progress and how to help them in their learning.

School leaders and governors have successfully managed the school’s finances to eradicate a deficit and balance the budget, while investing in improved accommodation and facilities in the school. Value for money is satisfactory.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	3
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Students’ prior attainment when they join the sixth form is a little below the national average, but they make good progress by the end of Year 13 to achieve A-level results that are in line with the national average. Progress is broadly satisfactory during Year 12, but accelerates as students move on to the second year of their courses. The overall proportion of students achieving A* to B grades at AS and A-level remains below the national average, and the attainment of these higher grades varies between subjects.

As in the main school, the quality of teaching varies between teachers and subjects, but students make good progress overall as they are encouraged to work more independently, often undertaking additional work and research outside lessons. Students value the additional support they receive from teachers outside lessons.

The curriculum provides a good range of AS and A-level subjects and a small, but increasing range of vocational courses, with the introduction of Advanced-level business and Intermediate-level sport. The revised enrichment programme introduced this year gives students a good range of choices to explore personal

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interests and develop additional skills and knowledge. Courses include sports leader awards, additional languages and financial awareness. This provision, along with good careers guidance, prepares students well for higher education or employment. Students enjoy and benefit from opportunities to develop leadership skills and they make a very strong contribution to the school community through leading events and supporting younger students.

Sixth form leaders have introduced effective systems for tracking students’ progress to identify any underachievement and to enable staff to provide prompt support to help students improve. Staff meet regularly through the sixth form steering group to discuss students’ progress and identify any concerns. However, managers have not always followed up reasons for underperformance in individual courses assiduously enough. Although good practice is discussed at team meetings, it is not always sufficiently well targeted to ensure individual teachers can benefit and improve their practice.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	2

Views of parents and carers

The relatively small proportion of parents and carers who completed the questionnaires are highly supportive of the school and the quality of education it provides. All parents and carers agreed that the school keeps their child safe and 90% agreed that they were happy with their child’s experience at school.

A large majority agreed that behaviour was well managed, although a few parents expressed concerns about a minority of boys who occasionally disrupted lessons. Most agreed that the teaching was good overall, and that their child made good progress, but a few commented on the variable quality of teaching between different teachers or subjects. Inspection evidence supports this view, finding that teaching is satisfactory overall. A small minority said they would like to receive more information about their child’s progress and how to help them in their learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Desborough School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 68 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 749 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	27	40	35	51	6	9	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	27	40	41	60	0	0	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	24	35	34	50	8	12	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	37	32	47	8	12	2	3
The teaching is good at this school	20	29	36	53	8	12	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	18	26	36	53	7	10	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	21	45	66	6	9	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	20	29	35	51	5	7	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	23	34	34	50	8	12	2	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	28	36	53	7	10	3	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	18	26	37	54	5	7	2	3
The school is led and managed effectively	26	38	30	44	8	12	2	3
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	30	44	31	46	4	6	2	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.

23 September 2011

Dear Students



Inspection of Desborough School, Maidenhead, SL6 2QB

Thank you for making us so welcome and helping us with the inspection. We have taken your views and those of your parents, carers and school staff into account in arriving at our judgement that the overall effectiveness of Desborough School is satisfactory, and good in the sixth form.

While GCSE results have improved over several years up to 2010, the proportion of A* to C grades declined in many subjects in 2011. The school is conducting a detailed analysis of the reasons for this in each subject to ensure this does not happen again.

Many of you said you enjoy school, particularly when you have opportunities to be involved in practical tasks and paired or group discussions in lessons. We have asked the school to ensure that teachers include more of this kind of work, to make sure that activities meet your different needs and that assessment helps you to know how to improve your work. In the sixth form, teachers encourage students to work more independently, which helps sixth formers make good progress. More of this during Key Stage 4 would help you to make better progress.

Many of you participate in extra-curricular activities, especially sports and this makes a considerable contribution to staying healthy and fit. Inspectors were impressed by the way many of you develop leadership skills and the outstanding contribution you make to the school and wider community, for example, mentoring younger students or running sports and language sessions in primary schools, and contributing to departmental reviews.

Leaders acknowledge the need to monitor your progress very closely in the coming year and to ensure that teaching and learning are equally good in all subjects. They will work very closely with your teachers to help you all make as much progress as possible. You can help the school to improve by making sure you all work hard in each lesson and on homework and giving staff feedback on what is going well and how things could be improved to help you all learn better and achieve your considerable potential.

Yours sincerely

Janet Mercer
Her Majesty's Inspector

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