

Inspection of Downham Market Academy

Bexwell Road, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9LL

Inspection dates: 26 and 27 April 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils agree that Downham Market Academy has improved considerably. They feel safe, more secure and happier. Pupils praise how their teachers take care of them. They know that there is always someone to talk to if they have a problem.

Behaviour is good. Pupils usually participate enthusiastically in class. They work well in groups and independently. Most pupils say that teachers deal with less positive behaviours well. Most pupils say they have never been bullied. They know that if it happens, teachers resolve bullying quickly. Students in the sixth form are mature, articulate and respectful.

Pupils enjoy learning. They appreciate their teachers. This is because teachers plan effectively, which helps pupils to learn well.

Pupils are positive about the many clubs and other activities they attend. Sixth-form students feel very well supported. They receive the guidance they need to make appropriate choices about the future.

Pupils say life at the school was not always like this but now things are much better. Most parents agree and many more want their children to go to Downham Market Academy.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and the Eastern Learning Alliance Trust (the trust) have worked together to provide an ambitious and broad curriculum. Leaders ensure that teachers are specialists in their subjects. As a result, teachers have strong subject knowledge.

Leaders carefully choose the knowledge they want pupils to acquire. They break learning down into small steps. This helps all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), to learn well. Teachers often present new knowledge clearly and ensure that it builds on previous learning. Therefore, by the time students are in the sixth form, they demonstrate a deep understanding of complex ideas. They can also use many sources of knowledge to support their views and arguments.

Teachers frequently check how well pupils are learning. This helps pupils recall knowledge better and enables teachers to spot any misunderstandings and mistakes. Teachers provide pupils with support to help them improve further.

Leaders identify needs of pupils with SEND accurately. Leaders ensure that teachers apply precise strategies to help these pupils access the curriculum. Teachers break learning into even smaller stages and ensure pupils receive more practice at what they have learned. A small number of pupils attend alternative provision off site. Leaders review how this is appropriate to pupils' needs.

Leaders emphasise the importance of reading throughout the curriculum. Pupils say they love reading. They enjoy a range of diverse texts by global authors. Pupils who fall behind with reading receive precise help to enable them to catch up. Leaders continue to improve how they support pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Leaders and the trust have listened carefully to concerns raised previously by parents about behaviour and bullying. They have introduced systems to tackle less acceptable behaviours. Teachers apply these systems consistently. Leaders have also instilled a powerful ethos which nurtures and rewards important human values such as compassion, empathy and resilience. Pupils are kind. They work hard and support others.

Leaders ensure that extra-curricular provision enriches this ethos further. Nearly all pupils engage with wider activities. In the sixth form, however, opportunities for students to contribute more widely to the school community have been limited. Leaders acknowledge this. Following the relocation of the sixth form, leaders are keen for more students to lead, mentor and support younger pupils academically in order to support students to develop important leadership and organisational skills.

Leaders provide well-planned personal, social and health education for all. Pupils learn content that is appropriate for their age. Teachers across the curriculum reinforce elements of relationships and sex education. The curriculum promotes inclusivity, diversity and equality effectively. Pupils are open-minded and respectful of difference.

Careers education meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships. Pupils receive independent and objective guidance and support about future education, training and employment. They gain useful professional skills through work experience.

The trust has tirelessly supported leaders to ensure rapid improvement across the school. Leaders have a strong understanding of the school's strengths and how it still needs to improve. They have worked hard with the community to shift previously negative perceptions of the school. Some of this work was slowed by the pandemic. While many parents appreciate the quality of education the school now provides, others still need convincing. Leaders are aware of this and are keen to engage further with the local community.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders provide regular, up to date safeguarding training to all staff. Staff know how to identify when pupils may be at risk of abuse and neglect. Staff report concerns swiftly. Leaders make appropriate, timely referrals to a variety of outside agencies.

This ensures that pupils receive the support they need. Pupils learn to respond appropriately to risks and dangers in society and when online. They know that they can share concerns with staff and these concerns will be followed up.

Leaders carry out appropriate checks on all new staff. New staff receive thorough safeguarding training prior to commencing employment.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Many parents acknowledge how the school has improved. A small minority do not support their views. Leaders acknowledge that some face-to-face communication channels were curtailed during the pandemic. As a result, some parents do not feel listened to, and they are less aware of some areas of life in school. Leaders need to liaise more closely and engage more positively with all stakeholders so that they are more informed about school life.
- Students in the sixth form have made a limited contribution to the school community to date. As a result, they have not had the opportunities to hone further useful life skills to support them in the next stage of their lives. Leaders need to enhance personal development in the sixth form to increase opportunities for students to take on pupil leadership and to make a greater contribution to the wider life of the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	145196
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10212299
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1124
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	96
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jim Warwick
Headteacher	Mark Eastwood/Rolf Purvis
Website	dma.tela.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school makes use of part-time and full-time alternative provision, with two registered providers.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, middle leaders, members of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the trust.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives into English, mathematics, science, history, and art. These included discussions with subject leaders, visits to lessons, meetings with staff and pupils, and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of pre-employment checks and met with the leader for safeguarding.
- Inspectors considered 501 responses to Ofsted's pupils' survey, 77 responses to Ofsted's staff's survey, and 135 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, together with 127 free-text responses from parents.

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