

Inspection of Debenham High School

Gracechurch Street, Debenham, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6BL

Inspection dates: 2 and 3 March 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

Ofsted has not previously inspected Debenham High School as an academy school under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections.

Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils leave Debenham High School having made excellent progress. Leaders have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic effort, and pupils rise to meet these. Pupils receive highly focused, good-quality teaching, which enables them to make progress. Pupils praise staff at the school, saying, 'they encourage you to be the best you can be.'

The exceptionally wide range of trips and clubs enhances the curriculum and brings learning to life. Pupils take part in language trips and enjoy sharing languages at events such as 'polyglot' club. They have access to many sports clubs. They have excellent relationships with their tutors and appreciate the in-depth personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum they follow. Pupils are highly respectful of each other, and diversity is celebrated.

There is very little bullying. Where there is unkind behaviour or language used, pupils are confident that staff will resolve it quickly. Pupils are very happy and safe attending this school. They have many opportunities to develop leadership skills, working as peer mentors and house captains, for example. There is a wide range of support services in place, such as mentors and a school nurse.

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

Leaders have made sure that the curriculum is progressive from Year 7 through to Year 11. Key concepts are revisited over time. Leaders trust departmental teams to plan the curriculum in detail. The way this is done varies, but each subject team works closely together to ensure that the delivery of the curriculum is strong in virtually all areas. Teachers regularly check on pupils' understanding of what they have learned, and they address any gaps. Consequently, pupils make excellent progress through the curriculum.

Where a very small number of pupils have arrived in Year 7 with significant gaps in their reading and mathematics, leaders have rightly provided additional teaching in phonics and basic numeracy skills. However, the way these have been delivered is not rigorous enough. Staff do not have enough knowledge of phonics and how to structure the early mathematics curriculum. Books do not match pupils' current stage of reading. This means that pupils who have struggled with reading previously do not always make the progress needed to catch up quickly.

The school library has good-quality texts and is regularly updated with current books. Most pupils in key stage 3 read widely and are encouraged to do so. They talk with interest about what they are reading. Pupils in key stage 4 do not read as much beyond the core curriculum.

The way that pupils are grouped in core lessons means teaching is highly focused on the exact skills and knowledge that each class needs. Those who find English and mathematics difficult receive more adult support. Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make strong progress because teachers appropriately adapt learning by, for example, building up writing in small, achievable steps.

The curriculum is broad, with a wide range of academic and vocational subjects available. However, the take up of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is low. This is because only around a third of pupils choose to study a language at GCSE. The EBacc is a set of GCSE subjects that keeps pupils' options open for further study and future careers. Leaders are encouraging more pupils to study languages, providing a wide range of language trips, for example. As a result, the number of pupils learning a language is increasing.

The PSHE curriculum is of excellent quality. Form tutors teach topics in a sensitive way, which pupils appreciate. Pupils develop high levels of independence and confidence because of this. They are very tolerant of difference and extremely polite. Leaders ensure that careers education is thorough and ambitious. Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of education.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. Pupils have very high levels of self-control. They are strong role models and look out for each other. Pupils work exceptionally hard in lessons.

Leaders monitor the implementation of the curriculum over the course of a year. Leaders and governors monitor pupils' progress by regular 'milestone' assessments in each subject. Staff are positive about the support they get from members of the leadership team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained in identifying any risks that pupils may face. Pupils learn about important issues, such as consent, and have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe.

Leaders know pupils well and work closely with their families as needed. They work with a range of different agencies, where necessary, to keep pupils safe. Leaders are tenacious in making sure that pupils get the timely support they need.

All appropriate pre-employment checks are made on staff in the school. These checks are thorough and accurately recorded.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The support for pupils who join the school with weak reading and mathematics is not as rigorous as it should be. This means that pupils are not catching up as fast as they should. Leaders need to ensure that staff have the guidance and expertise to teach early reading and mathematics effectively. Leaders then need to monitor this provision to ensure programmes are well implemented and help pupils to catch up.
- Pupils in key stage 4 do not read regularly beyond their English lessons. This does not help pupils to read a wide range of texts. Leaders must ensure that teachers across the school develop strategies to encourage older pupils to continue their wider reading, as leaders intend.

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.

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	136416
Local authority	Suffolk
Inspection number	10211910
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	677
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	David Carruthers
Headteacher	Simon Martin
Website	www.debenhamhighschool.suffolk.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school opened as an academy in January 2011. The predecessor school, Debenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled High School, was last inspected in January 2008 and graded outstanding.
- The school is a single academy trust. The trustees are known as the governing body.
- The school is Church of England, part of the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. The last section 48 inspection, Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools, took place in October 2017 and was judged outstanding. The next section 48 inspection will take place within eight years.
- A small number of pupils attend both unregistered and registered alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires school to provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with information and engagement about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded 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 leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other members of staff. They met with members of the governing body and spoke to a representative of the diocese.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, geography, business studies and physical education. For each of these, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils, and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at plans and visited some lessons in other curriculum subjects.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record and a wide range of safeguarding files. They spoke to leaders (including the designated safeguarding leaders), staff, pupils and parents.
- Inspectors considered the 237 responses and free-text comments to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They took the 277 responses to the Ofsted pupil survey and the 78 responses to the Ofsted staff survey into account.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Tom Sparks	Ofsted Inspector
Zoe Fisher	Ofsted Inspector
Liz Smith	His Majesty's Inspector

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