

Inspection of Debden Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary Academy

High Street, Debden, Saffron Walden, Essex CB11 3LE

Inspection dates: 20 and 21 June 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Outstanding
Leadership and management	Good
Early years provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

'Be kind, be brave, be safe, behave' is Debden CofE Primary Academy's motto. Pupils know it and live it out every day. They are happy and safe at school. Bullying is not tolerated and rarely happens. Pupils help each other sort out disagreements. They play together harmoniously in their free time.

There is a respectful and inclusive culture throughout the school. Pupils value and celebrate difference. New pupils who join the school quickly become part of the school community.

From Reception to Year 6, pupils listen well to adults. They understand the adults' high expectations of their learning and behaviour. As a result, they work hard in lessons. Pupils are confident and resilient. They say that mistakes are 'ok' because they learn from them.

Pupils enjoy the many trips that enhance their learning. They particularly enjoyed the whole-school trip to Colchester Zoo where they learned about endangered animals. Pupils of all ages participate in a wide range of sporting activities. They compete, often successfully, against other schools locally and further afield. Extra-curricular clubs offer pupils the chance to develop their talents beyond the classroom. These include robotics, photography, cross-stitch and boot camp.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders have made significant improvements to the curriculum. They have planned the knowledge and skills pupils will learn in each subject and the order in which they will learn these. The curriculum is broad and ambitious. It includes many links between subjects. It enables pupils to learn and achieve well.

Teachers explain new learning clearly and use questioning effectively to check pupils' understanding. They revisit what has been learned before. They often make links between subjects. These strategies help pupils to apply their learning in more complex ways over time.

Pupils behave well in lessons. Lessons are calm and purposeful. Most pupils are eager to contribute orally and generally produce high-quality written work. This is not true across some of the curriculum. In a few subjects, the work pupils are asked to record does not give them opportunities to practise new learning or revisit previous learning. Nor does it reflect their progress through the curriculum.

A significant number of pupils arrive and/or leave mid-way through the school year. Leaders are adept at ensuring they quickly assess what pupils know and can do. Leaders provide an effective programme of support for any pupils with gaps in their learning that helps them to catch up.

Leaders quickly identify any pupils who need extra help or those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils get the help they need to access the full curriculum. Leaders work well with external specialists where needed. Pupils with SEND achieve well and are active in the school community.

Leaders have strengthened the teaching of reading. The school's chosen phonics programme is delivered effectively in Reception and key stage 1 by well-trained staff. Most pupils acquire the knowledge and skills they need to become fluent readers by the end of Year 1. Those pupils who need additional help are supported by patient and skilled teaching assistants. Older pupils read widely. High-quality texts support teaching in all subjects. The school's library club, run by parent volunteers, is popular.

There have been many improvements to the school's provision in the early years. Children in the Reception class get a great start to their education. They are curious, enthusiastic learners. They take turns, share resources and help each other. The well-planned curriculum gives children the knowledge they need for key stage 1, as well as the personal, social and emotional skills.

The programme for personal development is exceptional. The school's ethos strengthens pupils' understanding of values such as aspiration, compassion and respect. Older pupils talk confidently about religious tolerance and democracy. Through the different committees of the student council, pupils are involved in many aspects of school life. This includes planning themed events such as well-being week, supporting behaviour on the playground or helping to lead weekly achievement assemblies. Pupils engage with the wider world by campaigning for safer roads, litter-picking or writing to the prime minister about environmental issues.

Since the last inspection, the headteacher has taken decisive action to drive improvements at the school. He has established an ambitious vision that is shared by staff. It is also shared by governors and trustees, who provide appropriate challenge and support. Staff feel valued by leaders and appreciate the professional development opportunities they get. Parents' views of the school are very positive. All those who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire would recommend it to other families.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff and governors are appropriately trained. All adults know what to do if they see something that suggests a pupil may be at risk of harm. There is a clear process for reporting and recording concerns. Leaders act on these swiftly. They liaise with external agencies where appropriate and set up support for vulnerable pupils if this is needed.

The school has rigorous systems for recruiting and checking adults who work or

volunteer with pupils.

Pupils learn how to stay safe, both on and offline. Posters around the school remind them what to do if they are worried about something.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There is some variation in the quality of pupils' written work in the foundation subjects. In a few subjects, teachers do not give pupils opportunities to apply their learning, or to revisit prior learning, through recorded activities. This means they may not be embedding knowledge and skills as securely as they might. Leaders should build on the good practice they have established in other subjects to ensure pupils' learning and progress are fully reflected through their work across the whole curriculum.

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	143855
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10288549
Type of school	Primary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	4 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	137
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Andrew Taylor
Headteacher	Matthew Hawley
Website	www.debdeneschools.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9 – 10 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average primary school with some mixed-age classes. The number of pupils on roll at the school is increasing and has risen from 88 at the time of the last inspection.
- At the time of the inspection, leaders were not making use of any alternative provision.
- The school has a Christian religious character. The most recent Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (section 48) took place in November 2017. The next section 48 inspection is due in the 2023/24 school year.

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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, art and geography. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers, spoke with some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of their work. The lead inspector listened to a sample of pupils read to a familiar adult. The lead inspector also looked at a sample of pupils' work in other subjects, including computing, design and technology, French and music.
- To inspect safeguarding, the lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads to review records. An inspector scrutinised the single central record of recruitment and vetting checks. Inspectors also spoke with governors, staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- The lead inspector spoke with a group of governors, including the chair and vice-chair of governors. She met with the chief executive officer of the trust, who is also the executive headteacher. The lead inspector spoke on the telephone with a representative of the Diocese of Chelmsford and with the school's external school improvement partner.
- The lead inspector reviewed a range of other school documentation and policies, including the school development plan, external reviews of the school and minutes of governing body meetings.
- Inspectors gathered the views of pupils by speaking with them during lessons, in the dining hall and at breaktimes. There were no responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for pupils.
- Inspectors considered 49 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. This includes 35 free-text responses.
- Inspectors gathered the views of staff by speaking with some while on site. Inspectors also reviewed 20 responses to Ofsted's online staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Caroline Crozier, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Simon Harbrow

Ofsted Inspector

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