

Inspection of an outstanding school: Debden Park High School

Willingale Road, Debden, Loughton, Essex IG10 2BQ

Inspection dates:

18 and 19 October 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The head of school is Andrew Hogan. This school is part of The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT), which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Karen Roberts, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Gaenor Bagley. There is also an executive headteacher, Helen Gascoyne, who is also responsible for this school and has some trust-wide responsibilities.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are happy as they build strong relationships with peers. Sixth-form students mentor younger pupils. They engage in conversation with the younger pupils around the school. Almost everyone feels comfortable and safe. Pupils know there is always a staff member they can turn to. They look forward to coming together as a community at events such as the Christmas performance.

Pupils know that staff want them to achieve their best. They study a broad and interesting curriculum. Pupils benefit from teachers who have strong subject knowledge. Pupils get lots of helpful guidance to ensure that they are able to make well-informed choices about their next steps. Sometimes, pupils do not get precise enough guidance about how to improve their work. This means they do not always achieve as well as they might.

Pupils want to come to school. Attendance is strong. Pupils understand that lesson time is for learning. Any disruption is extremely rare. Where it does ever happen, teachers deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils really value how positive behaviour and achievements are celebrated. They also take great pride in the leadership roles they have such as 'The BE team' and 'Debden Hearts'.

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

The school has ensured that pupils study a curriculum that is well matched to their needs. Pupils receive high-quality careers guidance that supports them effectively to make informed choices. For example, pupils who have early aspirations to study medicine are guided to study triple science at GCSE. Trips and wider experiences enhance the curriculum. For example, pupils visit Epping forest, so they can draw on experiences that enhance their writing.

The planned curriculum is effective. The school has ensured that, in each subject, pupils' understanding of important knowledge builds over time. Teachers are typically subject experts. They provide clear explanations and use examples effectively. Pupils understand the most important knowledge. However, on occasion, teachers do not give precise enough guidance where there are gaps in pupils' understanding, or opportunities for pupils to improve further. This means that, although pupils typically achieve well, some do not achieve as well as they might.

The school has prioritised increasing the take-up of languages at GCSE. This means the number of pupils who enter the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) is currently low, but increasing year on year. The EBacc is an academically ambitious range of subjects, which provide a broad foundation of knowledge, that pupils can take at GCSE.

Reading is sharply prioritised. Pupils have regular reading lessons where staff model reading and build pupils' reading ability. Teachers promote and develop subject-specific vocabulary across the curriculum effectively. Those pupils at the earlier stages of reading receive effective, tailored support to help them overcome existing barriers to reading.

The school ensures that pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified effectively. Strategies to support pupils' needs are captured in plans that pupils, teachers and parents review. Teachers use these plans to support pupils with SEND to access the curriculum and achieve well.

Sixth-form students are supported to become confident young adults. The school provides a wealth of opportunities for students to enrich and deepen their experiences. These opportunities prepare them for their next steps. For example, 'The BE' student leadership team is actively involved in changing and improving the school. Students identified well-being as a whole-school priority and have contributed to assemblies and growing pupils' awareness of mental health.

Leaders have prioritised promoting good attendance, so pupils attend well. Pupils treat each other with tolerance and respect. They have positive attitudes to learning. Any disruption to learning is rare.

The school offers a wide range of opportunities that extend the curriculum. Most pupils attend a well-developed 'period 7' offer. This enriches pupils' wider experiences well. For example, pupils get to make pizza while learning Italian phrases. Pupils learn about relationships and maintaining a healthy lifestyle through a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). Pupils have regular opportunities to

participate in musical and expressive arts performances. These bring the school together as a community.

The trust has ensured that responsibilities for governance are well understood and work effectively. In partnership with the trust, governors challenge and support leaders effectively. For example, they come and see things at the school first-hand, so they can ask well-informed questions in meetings. Leaders are highly considerate of staff workload and well-being. Staff genuinely feel there is a supportive culture where they can share practice and develop professionally.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school has not ensured that pupils always get precise enough guidance in some subjects about how to address gaps in their understanding, or how to improve the quality of their work further. As a result, pupils do not always embed what they have learned well enough, or have enough clarity about what they need to do to close gaps in their learning. The school needs to ensure that all teachers accurately and precisely identify any gaps in pupils' understanding, and that all pupils receive precise information about what they need to do to either close these gaps or improve further, so that they achieve as well as they might.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in January 2017.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136555
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10240619
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
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	1,073
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	184
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Gaenor Bagley
CEO of trust	Karen Roberts
Headteacher	Andrew Hogan (Head of school), Helen Gascoyne (Executive headteacher)
Website	www.debdenparkhighschool.org
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 January 2017

Information about this school

- The head of school and the executive headteacher took up their respective posts in September 2023. The executive headteacher was previously the headteacher. The head of school was formerly the deputy headteacher.
- The student 'BE team' promotes and develops the school's 'BE' characteristics with pupils. It supports the curriculum through the Year 12 Ambassador programme and promotes the school's enrichment programme. 'Debden Hearts' is the key stage 3 student leadership team. The students take a leading role in student voice and represents their tutor groups.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- To discuss governance, inspectors met with the chair of the local governing body, the trust director of education and the trust regional director.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, head of school, senior leaders, special educational needs coordinator, designated safeguarding lead, school subject leaders and staff.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders about the school's very limited use of registered alternative provision. They explored parental views and reasons why pupils were accessing the provision.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, art and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in some other subjects, including physical education, music, expressive arts, PSHE, relationships and sex education, and careers education.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. They considered pupils' views about behaviour and bullying in school. They also spoke with staff about pupils' behaviour, their workload and well-being.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey. They considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text messages.

Inspection team

James Chester, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Likhon Muhammad

Ofsted Inspector

Steven Hogan

Ofsted Inspector

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