

Inspection of Dene Academy

Manor Way, Peterlee, County Durham SR8 5RL

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 November 2023

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

The headteacher of this school is David Nelson. This school is part of Advance Learning Partnership, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Kelvin Simpson, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Alan Boddy.

What is it like to attend this school?

Dene Academy is a caring and nurturing school. Staff know pupils very well and they have high aspirations for what they can achieve. In lessons, pupils are keen to meet these expectations. Pupils receive high-quality pastoral care and they enjoy warm relationships with staff. This helps to create a positive culture in the school.

Dene Academy is an inclusive school where pupils are safe. The school provides a warm welcome for pupils, especially those seeking safety and support. The school's positive work in this area is reflected in its recent award of 'School of Sanctuary' status. Pupils respect the differences in other people. Pupils behave well. They are polite and courteous. Bullying sometimes happens. A small number of pupils say that the school does not always act as quickly as it could when bullying occurs.

Pupils are offered a wide range of opportunities to develop their interests. For example, pupils enjoy attending a range of lunchtime and after-school activities, such as karate, chess and music. Many pupils are also taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and the Diana Award. These experiences enable pupils to develop their leadership and mentoring skills so they can help others in their community. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility by taking on leadership roles as head students, ambassadors and prefects.

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

All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), follow an ambitious curriculum at Dene Academy. In most subjects, subject leaders have thought carefully about the important knowledge that they want pupils to know and remember. They have mapped out their curriculum in a well-ordered way. This helps pupils to build their knowledge and skills over time. In some subjects, such as geography, the school has not mapped out the essential knowledge that pupils need to learn as well as it does in others. Where this is the case, pupils have less secure subject knowledge. This is preventing pupils from making the progression through the curriculum of which they are capable.

Pupils benefit from their teachers' subject knowledge. Pupils receive clear instructions and explanations that help them to learn well. In many subjects, such as English and mathematics, teachers model what successful responses look like. The school has developed a variety of approaches to assessment. Pupils are invited to recall what they have previously learned. Misconceptions are often promptly identified in lessons. However, this is not consistently the case. In some subjects, the school is not checking deeply enough that pupils have learned and remembered the important knowledge that they need.

The good quality of education that pupils experience is not reflected in the outcomes achieved by Year 11 pupils in 2023. Many pupils were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a number experiencing high levels of absence. In

addition, many pupils joined the school midway through their studies and did not benefit from the rounded curriculum journey many pupils are now experiencing.

The school accurately identifies any additional needs that pupils have. This ensures that pupils with SEND receive the support that they need. Leaders ensure that teachers understand the ways to support pupils with SEND. As a result, pupils with SEND learn well alongside their peers.

The school has prioritised reading. Leaders have implemented an effective programme of support for those pupils at the early stages of reading. Strategies to support pupils with their reading are well embedded into the curriculum across a range of subjects.

Pupils behave well in lessons and most pupils conduct themselves sensibly at social times. Pupils typically treat each other with respect. Leaders track attendance very carefully. They have implemented a number of strategies to support pupils who do not attend often enough. This work is having a positive impact.

The personal, social and health education programme is very well planned. Pupils learn a range of topics in an age-appropriate way. For example, pupils learn about how to keep themselves healthy and they learn about how to be safe online. Pupils benefit from a well-considered careers programme. Pupils receive impartial careers advice and a number of training and education providers meet with pupils across all year groups. This helps pupils to have high aspirations and it helps them to make informed decisions about their future.

Trustees understand the school very well. They have a broad skill set that means they can challenge and support school leaders effectively. Staff value the development opportunities they are given and they are overwhelmingly positive about working at the school. There are a number of leaders who are relatively new to their posts. There are plans to support new leaders so that they have the professional skills to continue to improve the school's work. The trust has a clear role in these plans.

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's use of assessment is less successful in some subjects than it is in others. This means pupils do not remember knowledge consistently well across all areas of the curriculum. The school should further embed the use of assessment, and associated strategies, to help pupils to remember important knowledge.

- In a minority of subjects, leaders have not identified the most important knowledge that pupils should learn. This means pupils do not have a secure and deep knowledge of the curriculum. The school must ensure that the most important knowledge that pupils need to learn is mapped out consistently well across all subjects.
- Recently, there have been a number of changes in leadership at different levels. The school should ensure that all leaders continue to receive support and professional development, so that they can monitor and evaluate the school's work accurately and take effective action so the school continues to improve.

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	147122
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10297468
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	633
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Alan Boddy
Headteacher	David Nelson
Website	www.deneacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is part of Advance Learning Partnership, which is a multi-academy trust.
- A very small number of pupils access alternative provision. The school uses six alternative provision providers. The school uses three registered alternative providers and three unregistered alternative providers.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Year 8 to Year 11 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other senior leaders over the course of the inspection.
- The lead inspector held a meeting with trustees. The lead inspector reviewed documentation relating to governance, including minutes from trust board meetings.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, mathematics, geography, art and design, and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also visited a sample of lessons in other curriculum areas and spoke to additional subject leaders.
- An inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator and visited a sample of lessons to look at the support given to pupils with SEND.
- 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 met with leaders responsible for personal development and visited an assembly and form time.
- Inspectors met with groups of pupils and students formally throughout the inspection and spoke with them informally at social times and in lessons.
- A range of school documents was reviewed, including the school's self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils, parents, carers and staff gathered through Ofsted's questionnaires.

Inspection team

Dan McKeating, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Mark Hassack	Ofsted Inspector
Angela White	Ofsted Inspector
Jayne Gaunt	Ofsted Inspector

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