

# Inspection of a good school: Vandyke Upper School

Vandyke Road, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 3DY

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Inspection dates:

23 and 24 January 2024

## Outcome

Vandyke Upper School continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Tim Carroll. This school is a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by David Packer.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils at Vandyke are proud and articulate ambassadors for their school. They enjoy learning and achieve well. They thrive as a result of the school's ambition for all pupils to become 'world ready citizens'. This includes pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Pupils are confident, courteous and aspirational. They behave well and move around the school calmly. They respect themselves and others and keep the school environment remarkably free of litter. They feel safe.

The voice of the pupils is influential. Pupils are articulate and express their opinions maturely. They ensure that the school council is an effective forum for bringing about change.

Pupils and students in all years participate fully in the rich and varied opportunities to develop and stretch their talents and interests. Nearly a quarter of all pupils take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. They are actively involved in charity and fundraising events, including 'SMILE' week.

Pupils volunteer willingly in school and within the local community. For example, students in the sixth form run the Model United Nations, support younger pupils in class and help pupils in Year 9 to choose their options. Other clubs include drama and music, a 'Young Writers' Club', as well as a wide range of sports.

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

The school's broad and ambitious curriculum has been well planned to meet pupils' needs. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to set out important concepts clearly and to revisit them methodically. They use assessment well to enable pupils to know and remember more over time. The proportion of pupils studying the subjects that contribute to the English Baccalaureate is increasing in line with the government's national ambition. Pupils typically make strong progress and are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Students in the sixth form achieve the grades they require to follow their chosen pathway. Most proceed into higher education and many to the top universities.

The school works closely with the parents of pupils with SEND to identify their needs. Teachers receive the training and guidance they need to help these pupils learn the same curriculum as other pupils. They achieve well. This training is regularly updated. In some subjects, however, teachers have not given enough thought to the teaching of concepts that are often difficult to understand. This means that some pupils, including pupils with SEND, struggle to keep up.

Reading is a central element of school life. It is encouraged across the curriculum and for pleasure. The weakest readers receive skilled support to become more confident and fluent readers. The school has trained sixth-form students to support this. A rich and diverse selection of texts enhances the teaching of English and other subjects. Pupils enjoy reading together weekly in their tutor groups.

Pupils respond positively to leaders' high expectations for behaviour. They behave well at all times. Students in the sixth form are impressive role models for younger pupils. Pupils enjoy attending school and do so regularly.

The school develops pupils' characters well. Pupils learn how to become socially responsible citizens. They respect and value people's differences. They have regular opportunities to express their views through class meetings and the school council. Leaders are swift to act on pupils' feedback, such as by adapting the GCSE options process in Year 9. The sixth-form senior student team plays an active role in charity work and raising awareness of important societal issues.

Pupils learn about a range of topics in assemblies and in life skills lessons. Topics include healthy lifestyles, finance and staying safe. The relationships and sex education curriculum enables pupils, and students in the sixth form, to make well-informed, age-appropriate personal decisions.

The school's entrepreneurial approach to careers education is highly effective. There are regular opportunities for pupils and students in the sixth form to meet a range of employers, colleges and universities. This includes Vandyke careers week. As a result, pupils make well-informed decisions about their futures. The support for those wishing to follow apprenticeships is a particular strength.

School leaders systematically check the quality of education. They plan meticulously to build on the school's many strengths and to make improvements when necessary. The

highly experienced local governing body knows the school well and uses its considerable combined expertise to hold leaders to account.

Staff are proud and happy to work at Vandyke because leaders take exceptional care to consider their well-being. For example, leaders have scheduled report writing across the year to balance out teachers' workload evenly. The school communicates well with parents and actively seeks their feedback through its annual surveys.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- Teachers do not always plan effectively how to teach concepts that are difficult to understand. This means that some pupils, including pupils with SEND, struggle to keep up. The school should ensure that plans are adapted so that all pupils are able to access the ambitious curriculum successfully.

## **Background**

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in March 2015.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	137169
<b>Local authority</b>	Central Bedfordshire
<b>Inspection number</b>	10295039
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	13 to 18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1,509
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	433
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	David Packer
<b>Headteacher</b>	Tim Carroll
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.vandyke.beds.sch.uk">www.vandyke.beds.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	3 May 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The number of pupils on roll has increased significantly since the previous inspection.
- The school uses three registered alternative providers.
- 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.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. The lead inspector met with the chair of the trust and members of the local governing body. He also met a parent.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, history, and modern foreign languages. 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 discussed the curriculum in some other subjects, such as media studies.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 the views of parents through their responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors considered the views of pupils through their responses to Ofsted's online survey for pupils and through meetings held with pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff through meetings and informal discussions, as well as through their responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff.

### **Inspection team**

Peter Whear, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Sue Pryor	Ofsted Inspector
Catherine Wilson	Ofsted Inspector

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