

Denefield School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110100
Local Authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	310207
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Wiola Hola HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	1191
Sixth form	182
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	7
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	13
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Jenny Pickett
Headteacher	Mr Glyn Whiteford (acting)
Date of previous school inspection	6 July 2005
Date of previous funded early education inspection	6 July 2005
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Long Lane Tilehurst Reading RG31 6XY
Telephone number	01189 413 458
Fax number	01189 452 847

Age group	11–18
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Denefield is larger than the average comprehensive school. Roughly three-quarters of students are White British. The proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is similar to the national average but only a few students are at an early stage of learning English. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is average but the proportion with statements of special educational needs is above average. The main learning difficulties or disabilities are: specific or moderate learning difficulties; behavioural, emotional or social difficulties; or autistic spectrum disorder. The school has a six-place designated resource base for students with hearing impairment.

The school has been a specialist technology college since January 1994 and a Training School since September 2004. Extended services are offered beyond the school day to students, staff and the local community. The Denefield School Day Nursery offers full day care and is managed by the governing body. Out-of-school care on the school site for children aged 5 to 8 is managed by a private provider.

Following the departure, at the end of the last academic year, of the previous headteacher and three other senior members of staff, the governors, with the support of the local authority, recruited the services of an acting headteacher to run the school from September 2008.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement.

Shortcomings in leadership and management, and in teaching and learning, have resulted in declining standards. In 2008, overall results of the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below average. GCSE examination results fell to below the national average. The rate of students' progress from Year 7 to Year 11 has declined markedly in the last few years and is inadequate overall. Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory but include some variation in their attitudes and behaviour. Attendance is well below average.

Many students, staff and parents speak positively about the recent improvements in the school and praise the acting headteacher and his senior team for beginning to bring about the necessary changes. Staff tell of their restored confidence and enthusiasm. 'Things are better this year', said one parent and others make similar remarks. Many parents, however, rightly raise concerns about their children's work and progress, about aspects of teaching, students' behaviour, and the state of the school building. The senior staff, most of whom are new to the school or to their posts, are aware of these concerns and of other shortcomings. They have devised an extensive and appropriate action plan to address them, based on an accurate evaluation of the school's educational provision. Whilst senior staff understand the strengths and weaknesses in the school, and have articulated exactly how matters are to be improved, this is not universally the case for other leaders and managers. In addition, governance has not been strong enough in the recent past. Whilst governance is improving, it is still not sufficiently robust to ensure that it keeps the school under review as thoroughly as it should. Not all statutory requirements are met. For example, the school's systems for securing the health and safety of students are not entirely robust. Significant inadequacies in leadership and management, coupled with considerable weaknesses in teaching and learning, and in the quality of academic guidance in particular, are limiting the school's overall capacity to improve quickly.

Teaching and learning are inadequate because in too many lessons the pace is slow, expectations of what students can achieve are too low and tasks do not sustain students' concentration or provide enough challenge. As a result, students' progress is slower than it should be. Some good and outstanding lessons occur but not enough yet to lift standards rapidly. Good marking exists but, in the main, it is infrequent and cursory. Homework is set too sporadically and literacy skills are not yet being developed systematically in all subjects. Not enough has been done in recent years to support teachers in developing their skills. Whilst recent good initiatives to improve the overall quality of lesson planning are beginning to have an impact, much remains to be done before the school can be sure that instances of inadequate lessons are significantly reduced. Teachers' skills in questioning students to elicit how well they have grasped new material are not strong except in the good or outstanding lessons.

The curriculum and its organisation do not adequately meet the needs of all students and the school is rightly undertaking a thorough review of it. Nevertheless, there are some positive features, for example, in the performing arts, and in provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with hearing impairment. The impact of the school's status as a specialist technology college is not visible enough other than in a few areas

and the status is not contributing to raising standards. Some aspects of the personal care and support students receive are good because staff know students well and have positive relationships with them. The school has worked over the last few months to strengthen its systems for academic guidance. However, shortcomings still exist in the effective analysis and use of performance data to ensure all students are appropriately challenged and make the best possible progress.

Improvement since the last inspection is inadequate. Standards and achievement have not risen. The previous report asked the school to 'reduce the inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school by focussing subject leaders on how day-to-day assessment can raise students' attainment' but this has not occurred. The school has invested in new technologies to enhance learning, but much remains to be done to improve the overall quality of accommodation.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 4

The sixth form is inadequate because students do not make the progress they should from their starting points in Year 12. Standards in 2007 were well below average and achievement was unsatisfactory. School data for 2008 show some improvement in the percentage of students gaining pass grades but the average point score per student fell considerably from 2007. In the past, all students were encouraged to stay into the sixth form. Many students were given poor advice regarding the courses they should follow resulting in too many not completing the courses or obtaining very low grades. The school recognised that some students are taking courses that do not match their needs and, since September, it has taken appropriate action to remedy this wherever possible.

The school correctly judges teaching and learning in the sixth form to be inadequate. Although inspection evidence indicates that teaching and learning are improving, they remain unsatisfactory overall. Lessons are sometimes too teacher directed resulting in too few opportunities for students' independent work, including writing at length. Students are aware of their learning goals. Their progress against targets is checked methodically but students do not always know how to improve their grades.

The curriculum is satisfactory and generally meets students' needs and aspirations. There is a good range of subjects leading to AS and A-level qualifications. The number of vocational subjects offered has increased and is satisfactory. However, the opportunities for enrichment are few, particularly those that encourage healthy lifestyles. Students speak highly of the careers guidance they receive. Students' attitudes to work are generally good. Attendance is monitored carefully but it is unsatisfactory overall. Sixth form students play a positive part in the life of the school, supporting younger students and through acting as school councillors, for example.

Senior leaders in the sixth form have some strengths. Senior staff responsible for the sixth form show an understanding of what is needed to improve it and how to implement these improvements. The acting headteacher has created clear expectations and lines of accountability for leaders and managers in the sixth form. Nevertheless, much remains to be done before all subject leaders play a full part in raising standards and achievement at this stage. Leadership and management of the sixth form are therefore inadequate.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

The children in the school's day care Nursery make satisfactory progress in a safe, welcoming and caring environment that is organised to meet their individual needs. A reasonable range of child-led and adult-led activities is provided. Activities vary from day to day, often covering a specific weekly theme. Children's progress is noted reasonably well but records are not completed fully and aligned to the most recent guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). For the youngest children, the home-school liaison notebook is a very positive feature.

Children relate well with Nursery staff. Older ones play happily both cooperatively and independently, making choices and talking about their activities. All children are encouraged to explore the world through play activities that cover the areas of learning in the EYFS. Staff talk, sing and read with children to support the development of communication skills. They encourage children to develop their imaginations in various ways, through role-play and other creative activities. The outside area, although not seen in use during the inspection, provides a suitable and reasonably well equipped area for outdoor learning and development. Plans exist to develop this area further.

Day-to-day management is satisfactory. The relatively new Nursery manager provides satisfactory leadership and ensures that all welfare requirements are met. She feels well supported by the senior member of the school's staff who has line management responsibility for the Nursery. The Nursery management group, however, does not ensure that the work of the nursery and its staff is routinely kept under review in order to prevent any shortcomings from developing, or to recognise success. The formal evaluation of the Nursery's work and effectiveness are therefore inadequate.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the rate of students' progress by ensuring that teachers' expectations are high, and that work set in lessons and for homework is interesting, challenging, and done with good pace.
- Improve academic guidance in the written and oral feedback on students' work, in the setting and reviewing of targets, and in the advice about what courses to study.
- Improve leaders' and managers' skills in reviewing, judging and lifting the quality of educational provision, both in the main school and in the Nursery: this includes governors as well as staff.
- Improve students' attendance.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Standards have fallen in recent years because leaders and managers did not keep a close enough check on student's progress or on the quality of lessons. The school has not met its targets. Students' attainment on entry to the school, whilst varied, is broadly average overall. Their rate of progress from Year 7 to Year 11 has slipped from being satisfactory in 2006 to inadequate in 2008. Students' achievement throughout the school is inadequate because progress in too many lessons is unsatisfactory.

In 2007, overall results of tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below average. The 2008 results were lower in all three subjects of English, mathematics and science. The 2008 science results

were particularly low. GCSE results have also gone down, most markedly in the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A* to C, which was slightly above average in 2006 and 2007 but significantly below average in 2008. Four out of ten students in 2008 gained five or more GCSE grades A* to C including English and mathematics; this is below average. Students' outcomes in GCSE English have been below average for the last three years, and their rate of progress unsatisfactory. Most pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including those with hearing impairment, make satisfactory progress because of the careful attention to their specific needs. Other groups of students generally achieve in line with their peers.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Students' personal development and well-being are satisfactory overall. Many students enjoy school and show positive attitudes to learning but others do not and display their frustration. Most students behave well in lessons and around the school, but instances of disrupted learning occur more than just occasionally, often linked to the quality of teaching. Attendance is well below average and, until recently, was showing a downward trend; the upturn is still only slight, however.

Students' understanding of the world, its diversity, and of how to contribute to and create a cohesive society, is developed satisfactorily, as is their understanding of how to lead safe and healthy lives. Students say that bullying exists but is usually dealt with quickly by staff. Students are polite to visitors and most speak confidently and courteously. They have good relationships with each other and staff. They generally have a satisfactory level of skills needed for their future economic well-being, although fewer than might be expected have good GCSE grades in English and mathematics.

School council members show mature attitudes to their work and responsibilities. Some are taking a lead in planning activities for the tutor periods, in raising awareness of current affairs, for example. Council members say, 'canteen facilities are not the best' and 'litter is a problem'. These views are echoed by some parents and endorsed by inspectors. Older students have opportunities to be mentors to younger ones and are pleased to have special training for this work.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teaching and learning are inadequate. The school's analysis of lessons suggests that over a third are inadequate and inspectors agree with this view. Good and outstanding lessons occur but they are too few. Lesson plans do not always take sufficient account of the different needs within the class, and pace is often too slow. Where tasks are undemanding or lack interest, students become restless and sometimes disrupt the learning of others. Expectations of classwork and homework are often too low and students' progress slows. The guidance given to students on how to improve their work is limited, in the main. Although the school had a drive to promote students' literacy skills in all subjects and lessons a few years ago, this work has receded. Students are not required to write at length often enough; neither do they routinely receive relevant and helpful comments on their written efforts.

High quality lessons were seen in music, drama, business studies, geography and mathematics, for example. In these, the context of the work was relevant and exciting and students were clear about how they could achieve their best. Questioning by the teachers, and by students, was used to good effect. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are helped to learn and most make satisfactory progress against their targets because of the support they receive from adults within the school and from outside agencies.

The school has experienced a high turnover of staff in recent years and this has impeded good continuity of learning. Some parents mention this fact with concern.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

The curriculum does not adequately meet the needs of all students. This means that students are not all achieving as well as they are can. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities experience satisfactory provision. Intervention strategies, to support those students in Years 7 to 9 who are underachieving, are at a relatively early stage of development, although help for the weakest readers is given to good effect. Opportunities for students to choose vocational courses are limited and many students are opting for subjects that are not appropriate for their level of ability. Technology specialist status is not having a significant impact on developing the curriculum.

The school has started a process of curriculum review. The development of a more flexible curriculum in Years 10 and 11, and the evaluation of the personal, social and health education programme and tutor time activities are both taking place. Much of this review and improvement work is at an early stage and has not had time to show a difference in students' achievement.

The school provides a reasonable range of extra-curricular activities including music, drama and sports. Some students and parents feel that the sports activities could be more extensive. The school does not have well compiled data as to how many students take advantage of these activities. The extended school provision offers a wide range of activities to students from within the school and from neighbouring schools as well as to adults in the community.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

Students are individually well known by staff and this gives them a sense of security. The transition from primary schools is well managed and much praised by parents who feel their children settle in quickly. The programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education deals well with issues relating to health and personal safety, and also contributes more generally and positively to students' sound spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students receive appropriate guidance on careers. Child protection arrangements are known and understood by staff. Procedures for health and safety are regularly reviewed. The school does not, however, fully meet government requirements for record keeping in relation to safeguarding students.

Academic guidance is inadequate. Not enough has been done to ensure that students know how to achieve their best. Until recently, processes for keeping a close check on students' progress were inadequate. Although the processes have improved, teachers' application of them has yet to be fully implemented, particularly in the use of data to speed up progress. The school has adjusted and improved its arrangements for academic review days that involve students and their parents or guardians. The school has also put into place strategies to reduce

exclusions and tackle the above average figures for persistent absenteeism. All of these new arrangements have yet to be evaluated for their impact on students' achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

The new senior management team shows many strengths but leadership and management remain inadequate overall because weaknesses exist in middle management and in governance. Moreover, the changes brought in by the new senior team have yet to be fully developed, implemented, and tested for effectiveness in terms of raising students' standards and achievement.

The vision and leadership of the new acting headteacher are good. He has created a sense of urgency for lifting educational outcomes and identified with his colleagues the key areas for improvement. Strategic planning has improved. The acting headteacher has re-energised staff and improved the accountability of senior leaders, but there is still a long way to go before all leaders fully understand and discharge the expectations he has of them.

Processes for quality assurance and performance management are being strengthened. For example, subject leaders have been trained to judge more accurately the quality of lessons as a necessary pre-requisite for their role in improving teaching and learning. Some good work has begun in sharing existing good practice in teaching, in relation to the setting of clear objectives, for example. Middle leaders, including key stage and year group leaders, are increasing their role in checking students' progress but this role has not yet been sufficiently developed. Governors have not held the school to account well enough for the educational outcomes it achieved, neither have they ensured that all statutory requirements are met. Governors recognise this. They have begun to strengthen their work with additional members and revisions to their processes for keeping the school under review. These are still not good enough and more needs to be done by governors to ensure that provision and outcomes in the school and day care Nursery are all at least satisfactory. Day-to-day financial planning and monitoring are good and budgetary planning is closely linked to priorities for improvement. In view of students' unsatisfactory achievement, the school does not provide value for money.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	4	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	No
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	3	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4	4

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	3	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	3	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3	

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3	2
The attendance of learners	4	4
The behaviour of learners	3	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	4	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4	4

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	4	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

20 January 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Denefield School, Reading, RG31 6XY

Thank you for your welcome when inspectors visited the school recently. Your comments in lessons and break times helped us greatly in forming our views. I write to tell you about our findings and encourage you to read the full inspection report.

Your personal development is satisfactory. You are courteous and considerate young people, aware of how to lead healthy and safe lives. Many of you already make significant contributions to the life of the school and wider world. Most of you behave well in lessons and around the school but disruptions to learning do occur, especially when the work you are given lacks interest or challenge. Some of you come to school very regularly but too many of you have a high absence rate.

The most recent academic outcomes at Denefield School were not as good as those in the past. Whilst a lot of you achieved the standards that could be expected of you, too many of you did not. Whilst good and outstanding lessons exist, too many are unsatisfactory. The curriculum in the sixth form is satisfactory but in Years 7 to 11 there are some shortcomings. Children in the day care Nursery are provided with a secure and caring environment that satisfactorily meets their needs. The school has recently improved the ways in which you are helped to produce your best work but, in the main, the advice you get from marking and verbal comments is not yet good enough.

We have asked the school to speed up your progress by improving your attendance, elements of teaching, academic guidance, and by developing where necessary the leadership and management skills of staff and governors. Inspectors will visit the school regularly to check how well matters are being improved.

We heard from you, your parents and from staff that things have got better recently. Inspectors saw that plans for improving the school address the right issues and that a start has been made on implementing them with great clarity of purpose from the headteacher. The headteacher, senior staff and governors still have much to do before the school as a whole is adequate and in a position to move forward speedily.

We urge you to ask teachers if ever you are unsure about your work and to miss as few school days as possible.

I wish you all the very best for the future,

Yours faithfully

Wiola Hola

Her Majesty's Inspector