

Desborough School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110099
Local Authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	325101
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Daniel Burton HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number on roll	
School (total)	949
Sixth form	163
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Maureen Kenney
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Linnell
Date of previous school inspection	26 April 2006
School address	Shoppenhangers Road Maidenhead SL6 2QB
Telephone number	01628 634505
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

This average-size boys' comprehensive school is a specialist Language College. One third of students are of minority ethnic heritage, and of these, students of Pakistani heritage form the largest group. The proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is above average, although only a small minority are at the earliest stages of English language acquisition. The proportion of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities varies from year to year but is consistently above average. The range includes those who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia, and those who have difficulties in speech, language and communication. There are a small number of looked after children.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with a good sixth form. Pastoral care, guidance and support are key strengths of the school and make an important contribution to students' personal development and well-being. Since the last inspection, academic achievement has been strengthened at Key Stage 3 and has significantly improved in the sixth form. At Key Stage 4, achievement has been less consistent, and some groups of learners have not done as well as they should. This is because school tracking procedures have not been quick enough to identify underachievement, and provision has not been sufficiently well matched to the needs of all groups of learners. However, more effective intervention, informed by much-improved systems for monitoring students' progress, has ensured that all groups of learners at Key Stage 4 are now making at least satisfactory progress.

Students are fulsome in their praise for the care they receive if they need additional pastoral support. The school is particularly effective in supporting the most vulnerable learners. The school's commitment to inclusion has helped to ensure that some students who have not settled well in other schools have made a real success of their time at Desborough. Attendance is now exemplary because school managers have been relentless in ensuring that all boys regularly come to school. The school's work to improve the attendance of the most vulnerable students is particularly commendable and has resulted in notable successes. Improved academic guidance is now starting to have sufficient impact on the achievement of all groups of learners, and particularly on those at risk of underachievement.

Students enjoy coming to school and relish the wide range of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and creative arts. Students from different backgrounds get on well together and value the cultural and ethnic diversity of the school community. Students are confident, articulate and proud of their school. One said, 'We enjoy sports fixtures against other schools because it gives us the opportunity to 'play for the school badge'.' However, students are also clear about aspects of the school which are less strong. Although they enjoy their lessons, students report that teaching can vary in quality and that some lessons lack pace and challenge, judgements with which inspectors agree. While inspectors found conduct in lessons to be exemplary, a number of students reported that some teachers are more effective than others in managing occasional incidents of poor behaviour. The curriculum, though well matched to the needs of the most able, is less effective in providing for those who prefer more vocational courses, both in the main school and in the sixth form.

The headteacher's passionate commitment to the personal development and academic achievement of all learners is shared by his staff. However, school leaders recognise that their responses to academic underachievement in the past have not always been well chosen or sufficiently quick. As a result, they have now ensured that all staff are acutely aware that the need to drive up achievement at Key Stage 4 is the key priority for the school.

Dynamic leadership of the school's specialism means that modern foreign languages enjoy a high profile in the school, and all boys achieve accreditation in at least one language. The specialism has a very positive impact on the cohesion of the local community, through the school's work to support language teaching in local primary schools. Some children have even been taught to speak Urdu so that they can communicate with their grandparents in their community language. The school holds the International School Award in recognition of its

work with partner schools at home and abroad. As a result of such partnerships, students' understanding of other cultures is strong.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

This is a good sixth form, which has improved substantially since the previous inspection because of effective leadership and management. Although attainment is broadly in line with that seen nationally, this represents good progress given students' starting points. In 2008, progress in art and design and in fine art was exceptionally strong. Achievement overall has improved because highly effective tracking systems are well established in this area of the school. This has enabled early identification of students at risk of underachievement, to ensure that timely support can be put in place. Effective liaison between sixth form and curriculum leaders also means that all staff consistently use challenging targets to raise performance. As a result, all groups of learners make good progress. Care, guidance and support are good, and high proportions of students progress to higher education. Some students did report that they would like more information about alternative options to university.

The curriculum provides students with a good choice of A-level subjects, and the school has taken steps to ensure that most students can now take the combinations that they want. A small number of students benefit from provision offered at other local schools. The range of non-A-level courses is less well developed. As in the main school, teaching and learning are variable. In the best lessons, students engage in a range of activities which develop their skills as independent learners. However, such practice is not seen widely enough, and some students say they would welcome more challenge. Students make a very positive contribution to school life. For example, all Year 12 students take part in the mentoring programme to support students in Year 7. One younger student described them as 'very good role models'. Students are very positive about the extra-curricular opportunities in the sixth form, particularly in sport, which is of a high standard. Provision overall ensures that sixth-form students develop into articulate and confident young men.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement at Key Stage 4.
- Improve the quality of teaching by ensuring that all lessons offer appropriate levels of challenge for all groups of learners.
- Ensure that the curriculum fully meets the needs of all learners.
- Ensure that school policies are consistently implemented by all staff.

A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Boys enter the school with standards which vary from year to year but are broadly average. They make good progress during Key Stage 3, resulting in standards which are higher than those attained by boys nationally and above average overall. Standards have been consistently high in mathematics and science, and are now above average in English as a result of effective strategies to raise the attainment of boys in the lower and middle groups.

Progress by the end of Key Stage 4, though satisfactory, is less strong, resulting in attainment which is broadly in line with that seen nationally. In 2008, attainment in most subjects was broadly average, and strong in drama. In addition, the proportion of students attaining the highest grades in mathematics, biology, chemistry and drama was significantly above that seen nationally. Attainment in art and design, physical education, information and communication technology and English literature was below that seen nationally. Though progress for many boys was satisfactory, the progress made by boys in lower groups was below that seen nationally. Sharper procedures for school tracking are now leading to earlier identification of underachievement, and current evidence, based on modular validated examination results, shows that the progress of this group of learners has improved. Initiatives to raise the attainment of Pakistani boys are also starting to prove successful and, as a result, their achievement is in line with that of students across the school. The achievement of learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and of students in public care, are in line with other students because of good provision for care, guidance and support.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Students' good personal development and well-being make an important contribution to their academic achievement. Attendance is exemplary because students value the reward systems and know that any absence will be vigorously pursued by the school's attendance managers. Punctuality is less strong, and a small minority of students do not get to school on time. Students get on well together, and report that peer-mentoring schemes have proved effective in improving relationships between students in different year groups. As a result, they feel safe around school and know to whom to turn should they need help or support. Students' commitment to leading healthy lifestyles is a real strength. They were influential in driving improvements to the canteen and lobbied successfully for the provision of water fountains. Very high proportions of students take part in extra-curricular sports. Students' views are effectively represented through the 'Student Voice'. They exploit opportunities to contribute to the wider community, for example through the Duke of Edinburgh's scheme, community service, or through raising money for local and international charities. As a result, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Many students benefit from the wide range of trips and cultural exchanges which the school provides, including language exchanges to Germany and France. Preparation for future economic well-being is satisfactory, and is complemented through opportunities to participate in work experience.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Good relationships contribute to the quality of learning in many lessons. Students particularly enjoy lessons with a range of activities that is suitably demanding. In these lessons, their teachers use their good subject knowledge to ask searching questions and devise tasks which allow students to draw conclusions for themselves. In one outstanding lesson, the classroom was a hive of enthusiasm because students were given opportunities to work together and were fully active in their learning. However, such opportunities are not seen often enough. Too many lessons are dominated by teacher talk, which results in learners becoming too passive in their approach to work. Lesson planning varies in quality. The best lessons are carefully planned to offer appropriate challenge and support for all groups of learners. However, some lessons are

not sufficiently differentiated to suit the preferred learning styles and needs of all students. Students generally know their targets and the levels at which they are currently working, but marking is sometimes superficial, and students are unclear about what they need to do to improve. Though teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, not enough lessons are sufficiently stimulating to enable all learners to fully realise their potential.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

This satisfactory curriculum fully meets statutory requirements. An appropriate range of GCSE courses are offered, but provision for more vocational subjects is more limited. School leaders have recognised the need to provide a wider range of courses and have begun to broaden provision through, for example, the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, to better match the needs of all learners. Opportunities to undertake work experience are enhanced by dedicated Business Enterprise days, which provide students with a good introduction to work-related learning. A key strength of the curriculum is the wide range of foreign languages and cultures which can be studied in lessons or through lunchtime or after-school clubs. Some students benefit from opportunities to study Russian and Japanese, for example. The personal, social, health, and economic education programme makes an important contribution to learners' ability to manage risk in their own lives and make healthy choices. The curriculum is enriched by the vibrant extra-curricular programme, which includes a very wide range of well-attended sports clubs. Visits to theatres and art galleries, and trips abroad, make an excellent contribution to the personal development of the students.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The school's well-deserved reputation for inclusion results from excellent pastoral care, guidance and support. Students feel safe, and report that bullying and racist incidents are rare and are dealt with effectively when they occur. The school's commitment to students' welfare is illustrated by its strong links with other agencies to improve attendance or the achievement of students from minority ethnic groups, for example. One parent of a student with special educational needs said: 'The school has been proactive, receptive and willing to try new strategies to include him. He loves school and is making progress.' Academic guidance has improved, and is now having sufficient impact in addressing underachievement. Students who are falling behind benefit from a mentoring programme or booster classes, for example in modern foreign languages or mathematics. The school has recognised that previous systems to promote the academic achievement of less-able students were unsatisfactory, and has now refined its approach to ensure that all students can meet their potential. One excellent example of this is the use of a highly effective tutor to monitor the academic progress of a group of Year 11 students at risk of underachievement. As a result, each of these students has now completed all coursework assignments and all have sat public examinations. This represents very significant improvement when contrasted with the outcomes for similar students last year. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and fully meet statutory requirements.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Since the last inspection, very effective financial management has enabled the school to improve facilities in physical education, while honouring its loan repayment commitment to the local authority. Other school facilities, particularly the science laboratories, remain in need of significant investment. Middle leadership has been strengthened through effective recruitment and well-considered training for subject leaders and, in the subjects where it is best, students make good progress. However, variability in the quality of leadership is reflected in lower achievement elsewhere. The headteacher and senior team are respected by colleagues and students, and have cultivated a collegiate approach to school improvement. However, one of the consequences of this is that systems of accountability are not sufficiently robust. As a result, the best practice in leadership, management and teaching is not seen everywhere, and there is too much inconsistency in implementing school policies. The school understands its strengths and weaknesses, but self-evaluation has been too generous about some aspects of provision, such as the quality of teaching and learning. The school is effectively supported by a committed governing body, which represents well the school's ethnic diversity. However, governors acknowledge that their focus on managing the school budget has taken priority over holding the school to account with regard to academic achievement. Recent management decisions to improve provision to better meet the needs of all learners are now having a demonstrable impact, and confirm that the school has satisfactory capacity to improve.

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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?	3	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3	2
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?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2	
The attendance of learners	1	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
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?	3	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3	
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?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

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

28 May 2009

Dear Students

Inspection of Desborough School, Maidenhead, SL6 2QB

Thank you for the warm welcome you gave the inspection team during our recent visit to your school. We were struck by your impeccable manners and really enjoyed talking to you in formal meetings, in lessons and at break and lunchtime.

The inspection team judges that yours is a satisfactory school with a good sixth form. Your school makes good provision for your personal development and well-being. Nearly all students said that they enjoy school, not least because of the excellent range of after-school activities which are on offer. We were impressed that so many of you take part in extra-curricular sport. Your attendance is exemplary and makes an important contribution to your academic achievement. Relationships between students and teachers are generally very good, and you told us that peer-mentoring schemes have helped to ensure that students of different ages get on well together. The school has improved the quality of its academic guidance and, as a result, many of you are now benefiting from extra support to ensure that you make satisfactory progress. Your sixth-form leaders have worked effectively to improve provision in the sixth form and, as a result, those of you who stay on at the school make good progress.

Inspectors judged the quality of teaching and learning to be satisfactory overall. Although some lessons are good, there is too much variability between different classes. In the best lessons, you are highly motivated because tasks are varied and challenging. In other lessons, where the work is more mundane, you become too passive because there are insufficient opportunities to learn independently. You also told us that some teachers were more effective at managing behaviour than others. We have asked school leaders to ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching, so that more of your lessons include interesting activities that really challenge and stimulate you. We have also asked that they ensure that the curriculum fully meets the needs of all learners, so that all of you can fulfil your potential. You can help by making sure you always arrive punctually at school.

Thank you again for your contributions to the inspection. We wish you and your school every success in the future.

With very best wishes

Yours faithfully

Daniel Burton

Her Majesty's Inspector