

Debden Park High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131876
Local Authority	Essex La
Inspection number	341238
Inspection dates	21-22 September 2009
Reporting inspector	Chris Moodie

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11-16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	769
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Joan Westbury
Headteacher	Mr Christian Cavanagh
Date of previous school inspection	30-31 October 2007
School address	Willingdale Road Loughton Essex IG10 2BQ
Telephone number	0208 508 2979
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by five additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 29 lessons or parts of lessons. In four of these observations a member of the school's leadership team joined the inspector. Inspectors briefly visited several other lessons, and held meetings with students, governors, senior leaders, classroom teachers and other staff. They looked at many of the school's policies, assessment data, monitoring records, incident logs and other documents, including students' work. Inspectors analysed questionnaires returned by 74 parents, 23 members of staff and 100 students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the extent to which attainment has risen since the last inspection
- how teaching and learning meets the needs of individual students
- how well boys perform when compared to girls
- how effective the school has been in improving standards in mathematics.

Information about the school

Debden Park High School is a specialist performing arts school, serving an urban area which contains pockets of deprivation. The school is part of the Kemnal Trust and is actively involved in partnership with other local schools. The proportion of students receiving free school meals is in line with the national average. The numbers of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average. The percentage of students with recognised special educational needs and/or disabilities is above average. The school has recently been awarded the Gold Artsmark. The school was the subject of special measures following its inspection in January 2007. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors removed the school from this category in October 2007, after one monitoring visit.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

1

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

1

Main findings

Debden Park High School provides an outstanding quality of education for its students. The improvement since the last inspection has been significant and much of the school's work is now exemplary. The leadership team, led by an inspirational head teacher, have created an environment in which students enthuse about learning. As one boy told inspectors, 'I can't wait to get up in the morning so that I can come to school'. This attitude is typical of a great number of students, and many spoke of how rapidly the school has improved. After a period when standards were low, current data and students' work show that outstanding progress has occurred over the past two years. Attainment is now above the national average at the end of Year 11. The school is meticulous in their tracking of individual students, and as a result students are aware of how well they are doing and have high aspirations for their own futures.

Teaching is outstanding and the leadership team have been very effective in targeting their energies and resources towards improving the quality of lessons. Where teaching is exceptional, students' individual needs are met from the start of the lessons. The school is ambitious about making this a consistent feature of teaching and recognises this as a route to further raising standards. Lessons are supported by a creative and dynamic curriculum, of which teachers are very proud. This curriculum has evolved to meet the needs of students and is a driving force behind the school's successes. The school is a calm yet vibrant place. Corridors and shared areas are orderly and students are very welcoming and polite. Classrooms are exciting places for young people, and teachers lead lessons skilfully and generate an enthusiasm for learning that is infectious. Many of the lessons visited were of a very high quality, and the exceptionally high standard of behaviour of almost every student contributes significantly to their progress. When teachers ask questions the students are desperate to respond, and enjoy demonstrating their new found understanding. They listen to their peers patiently, and enjoy celebrating one another's successes. The precise and deliberate nurturing of such positive attitudes and dispositions has paved the way for the school's recent improvement. Students feel very safe in school and are confident that their views are valued and acted upon. They make a great contribution to the life of the school and this is especially evident in their work in the performing arts.

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Staff know the students very well. Sophisticated and effective systems are in place to ensure that additional support, either academic or pastoral, is provided when it is needed. Opportunities are continually sought to involve students in a rich and exciting curriculum which recognises individual strengths and develops new interests and passions.

The leadership group is central to all of the school's activities. A combination of ambition, passion and expertise has enabled the school's senior leaders to assemble and mobilise a workforce with a common purpose – that of maximising the life chances of every student in the school. This shared vision is apparent in all teaching, support and administrative staff and has an enormous impact on the experiences that students enjoy at the school.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching by:
 - consistently providing work and tasks which are matched to the abilities of all learners throughout all lessons
 - making the effective use of assessment strategies a consistent feature of every lesson.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

Students have made outstanding progress since the previous inspection. Standards have risen rapidly from below to above average in a short period of time. Inspectors analysed the school's current data and student's work. Standards continue to rise across the school and a significant majority of subjects are now above average. The few subjects that remain average receive significant support and data indicates that these are likely to improve to above average in 2010. Students across the school frequently make better than expected progress. This represents a considerable improvement for the boys who were under-performing until the 2009 examinations. Students actively enjoy lessons and take pride in their work, for example one told an inspector that she was never ill because that would mean missing out on drama.

Students feel safe in school because they are confident that adults will take action to help them should any problems arise. Prefects and peer mediators are given responsibilities which they take seriously and carry out effectively. In addition, all older students recognise that they are role models for their younger counterparts, and are protective of their well-being. For example, a Year 8 student told inspectors that she had been very well looked after by older students when she first joined the school, and that this had continued in her second year. The involvement of outside agencies and local emergency services means that students have a heightened

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awareness of how to keep themselves safe. A diverse range of extra-curricular clubs and activities are well attended. Students are very clear about how to maintain a healthy life style. In the canteen at lunchtime many students opt to eat healthy foods and are well informed about the benefits of a balanced diet and the dangers of drugs and alcohol abuse.

Students thoroughly enjoy school, attendance rates have improved considerably in the past two years, and punctuality is very good. A striking feature of the school is the consistently high standard of behaviour. Students are cooperative and relate to one another well. They recognise the value of good social skills and this is apparent inside and outside classrooms; at break times the outside areas of the school are pleasant and relaxed, as students socialise and play happily. The ‘thought for the week’ is considered with care and reflection, and students can empathise with people who live in different circumstances to themselves. Carefully planned curricular opportunities allow students to increase their knowledge and understanding of a range of different cultures, and they are both curious and appreciative of the diversity that they find.

These are the grades for pupils’ outcomes

Pupils’ achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attainment ¹	2
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	1
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	1
The extent to which pupils feel safe	1
Pupils’ behaviour	1
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	1
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils’ attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching across the school is at least good and much of it is outstanding. In the exceptionally high standard lessons teachers purposefully engage

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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the students' interest and enthusiasm throughout the lesson. Critically, they provide work and tasks which are well matched to students' abilities. As a result, students in these lessons are independently motivated, make very good progress and attainment is high. This was particularly evident in the performing arts and in some science lessons. In other lessons, students completed the same initial work and tasks before meeting material that challenged them at a later stage of the lesson. Teachers make good use of assessment data and strategies have been adopted in many parts of the school that guide students towards improvement. Teachers with responsibilities in this area of the school's development have been effective and plan to secure this good practice across all departments. Students appreciate the feedback they receive from teachers and particularly value the verbal discussions on how they can improve and attain higher standards.

The curriculum provides a stimulating and motivating framework for all of the school's activities. It is focused on providing students with the key skills of English and mathematics whilst offering them the opportunity to expand their learning in a range of subjects. Statutory requirements are met and teachers are active in seeking fresh ways to raise standards and maintain the engagement of their learners. For example, in physical education, students visit stables and local golf courses to meet their own particular interests. The impact of the school's specialist performing arts status is significant. Teaching methods which have proved successful in this area are encouraged in other subjects, and students respond very positively. Primary schools use and enjoy the facilities and the local community are invited to high quality performances. The school was recently successful in winning a national competition which resulted in performances at the National Theatre in London. Year 9 students are mentored and supported very effectively so that they can make appropriate choices for Years 10 and 11.

Pastoral care is very strong. Vulnerable students are identified rapidly and supported well in school and through links with a wide range of outside agencies. Students who need additional help with their work have individual programmes which are tailored to their needs. Support staff are very effective in delivering these programmes and establish strong and productive relationships with students. Regular reviews ensure that any students at risk of falling behind in their studies are identified quickly and support is provided. Systems for improving attendance are extensive and have been successful in identifying patterns and providing appropriate support. Transition arrangements and induction procedures help new students to settle in quickly, and the care that students show for each other is a key element.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	1
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	1

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The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	1
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's success is a product of the very effective senior leadership team. Under the direction of an exceptional head teacher, and with considerable strategic support from the Kemnal Trust, the school has become outstandingly effective. Secure and sophisticated data and assessment systems are in place. These allow the school's leadership to raise standards rapidly by targeting their resources where they are most needed. School leaders carefully monitor the progress of groups of students and this has been successful in narrowing performance gaps between groups – as seen in the recently improved standards amongst boys. A commitment to providing each member of staff with an individual professional development programme has improved the quality of teaching and student outcomes.

The leadership team have a proven track record of success and their self evaluation is very accurate. All levels of leadership are monitored and staff are held to account for their performance. This approach continues with the governors, their determination to raise standards has been instrumental in the school's success. Governors are committed to continued improvement and support the school very capably. Safeguarding procedures are good and the school is beginning to evaluate the impact of these systems, some of which represent exemplary practice. The school liaises with outside agencies systematically and acts swiftly to support students and their well-being. Communication with parents and carers is of a high standard, and the school has the support of a very large proportion of its stakeholders. With such strength at all levels of the school's leadership, its capacity for sustained improvement is outstanding.

The expertise that has been built in the school is being used well to support other local schools, and this provides staff with additional professional development opportunities. Elsewhere in the community, the school is an active and positive presence. Students develop an outstanding approach towards their local, national and global communities through a range of curricular activities, many of which are targeted at enhancing global understanding and cohesion. The school's finances are very effectively managed and deployed. In light of the outcomes for students, the school provides outstanding value for money.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and	1
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driving improvement Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	1
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	1
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	1
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	1
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

As illustrated in the table below, an overwhelming majority of parents are happy with their children's experience at the school. There are no areas where significant numbers of parents or carers expressed concern about the effectiveness of the school or its leadership.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Debden Park High School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 74 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 769 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	46%	38	51%	1	1%	1	1%
The school keeps my child safe	26	35%	47	64%	1	1%	0	0%
The school informs me about my child's progress	24	33%	46	63%	3	4%	0	0%
My child is making enough progress at this school	19	27%	51	72%	1	1%	0	0%
The teaching is good at this school	23	32%	49	68%	0	0%	0	0%

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The school helps me to support my child's learning	17	24%	51	72%	3	4%	0	0%
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	14	19%	55	76%	3	4%	0	0%
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	19	26%	52	72%	1	1%	0	0%
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	30%	52	70%	0	0%	0	0%
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	25	34%	43	59%	5	7%	0	0%
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	16	23%	49	70%	5	7%	0	0%
The school is led and managed effectively	35	48%	38	52%	0	0%	0	0%
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	37	51%	35	48%	1	1%	0	0%

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools inspected between September 2007 and July 2008

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	39	58	3	0
Primary schools	13	50	33	4
Secondary schools	17	40	34	9
Sixth forms	18	43	37	2
Special schools	26	54	18	2
Pupil referral units	7	55	30	7
All schools	15	49	32	5

The data in the table above were reported in The Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2007/08.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.■ The quality of teaching.■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.



24 September 2009

Dear Students,

Inspection of Debden Park High School, Loughton, IG10 2BQ

This letter is to tell you about the outcome of your school's recent inspection. First I would like to thank all of you for the welcome we received when visiting your school and especially those students who spoke to the inspection team.

Debden Park High School provides you with an outstanding education and looks after you very well. The headteacher and his entire staff have your best interests at heart in all that they do and because of this you are making exceptional progress. You contribute enormously to your own successes, and your attitudes towards learning are exemplary. All inspectors were very impressed by the very high standards of your behaviour and how well you cooperate with one another. This means that teachers can concentrate on helping you to learn and because teaching is very good, this in turn means that you are making outstanding progress – well done!

You feel safe in school and are confident that someone will help you if necessary. Many of you are making wise choices in the canteen and this will help you to lead healthy lives – lots of you already participate in sports and exercise. Your enjoyment and talents in the performing arts means that your school is a very special place. The inspection team thoroughly enjoyed the two days with you and have asked that your teachers continue to improve teaching by:

- making sure that your work and tasks are suited to your abilities from the start of each lesson
- giving you as much feedback as they can so that you are always aware of how you can improve.

May I thank you once again, and wish you all the best in your futures.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Moodie
Lead Inspector.

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