

Denbigh School

Burchard Crescent, Shenley Church End, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire MK5 6EX

Inspection dates

15–16 January 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, leaders and governors have created a positive culture in the school. Pupils are keen to succeed, take pleasure in their learning and make a full contribution to the life of the school.
- Leaders have high ambitions for the school. They have strong integrity and recognise that some aspects of the school need further development for their ambitions to be met.
- Governors hold leaders to account effectively. They challenge leaders through their sharp and incisive questioning.
- Subject leaders make an effective contribution to developing pupils' learning in the subjects they manage. Similarly, heads of house keep close tabs on the pupils in their houses to support pupils in overcoming any barriers to success.
- Broadly speaking, the progress of current pupils is strong, and in some subjects it is very strong. It is improving in science and modern foreign languages, following carefully planned changes to the curriculum.
- Key stage 4 pupils' attainment is above average in English, mathematics and the suite of GCSE subjects known as the English Baccalaureate (EBacc).
- Teaching, learning and assessment are generally effective and, in some areas, such as mathematics, are impressive. Teachers make good use of their strong subject knowledge to engage pupils.
- Around the school, pupils behave very well. They have good relationships with their peers and teachers. Many pupils benefit from the extra-curricular and leadership opportunities which the school provides.
- Pupils say they feel safe, and, although this is a large school, staff know pupils well. There is a strong sense of harmony and order in the school.
- A large majority of Year 11 pupils choose the school sixth form. It provides effective support for all students that is bespoke and carefully planned. New approaches introduced to reduce variation between the rates of progress made in different subjects are having a positive impact.
- In some classes, teaching does not enable disadvantaged pupils to make the strong progress they need to catch up with their peers. Similarly, most-able pupils are not always provided with enough challenge.
- Some senior leaders are not precise and timely enough in identifying the approaches that are working most effectively.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that:
 - the very strong practice seen in some subjects and classes, including in the sixth form, is found more consistently across the school
 - disadvantaged pupils catch up, and the most able fulfil their potential across all subjects.
- Ensure that all senior leaders promptly and precisely identify approaches that are having the most positive impact and use this to prioritise their next actions.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Denbigh School has a positive and outward-looking culture. Most pupils achieve well and flourish at the school, taking full advantage of the wide range of opportunities the school provides. Staff and pupils praise the school and are proud to be members of the school community.
- The headteacher, senior leaders and governors have a strong sense of moral purpose. They are committed to improving the educational experiences of pupils in Milton Keynes and work closely with other schools to achieve this aim. They are accurate in their judgements about the quality of teaching and whole-heartedly recognise that some aspects of this school need further development to meet their own high standards. In response, they have rightly made substantial changes and introduced some new approaches this academic year. These are beginning to have a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress.
- The senior leadership team has evolved over the last two years, with some existing members successfully taking on new areas of responsibility. Several new senior leaders have joined the team, some of whom are making a strong contribution. However, there are inconsistencies in the effectiveness of this team. Some leaders are not prompt enough or sufficiently precise in identifying the approaches that work best. This has meant that a number of follow-up actions have not always been well focused, and improvements in some areas have not been timely enough.
- There are substantial strengths in subject leadership across the school. New and existing subject leaders have high standards. They diligently focus on ensuring that pupils acquire strong subject knowledge, are taught well and make strides in their learning. They keep a sharp oversight of the taught curriculum in the subjects they line manage.
- The leaders of the five 'houses' in the school make a strong contribution. They have a detailed understanding of how well pupils are achieving across all the subjects, making good use of this information when delivering assemblies that are focused on learning. Heads of house play a pivotal role in pulling together a package of bespoke support that will enable pupils to overcome any barriers they have to success.
- The leadership of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is impressive. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has a highly developed understanding of how best to support pupils who have a range of additional needs. There is strong evidence that effective leadership, including strong oversight of the impact of additional funding, supports pupils with SEND in making strides in their learning. Of note is the way the SENCo has developed effective approaches to track the small steps in progress that are made by pupils with SEND.
- The leadership of disadvantaged pupils is a priority for the school. The focus for the school's work is rightly shifting, with greater emphasis than hitherto being placed on ensuring that disadvantaged pupils fulfil their academic potential. This approach is more embedded in some subjects and in some aspects of the school than it is in others. For example, it is having a stronger impact on pupils in key stage 3. One reason for this is the strong collaboration with primary partner schools. This means

that leaders are aware of any gaps in learning that disadvantaged pupils in Year 7 may have.

- The curriculum promotes effectively success in a range of academic subjects. This academic year, senior leaders have implemented carefully planned changes to the curriculum in order to support pupils' learning and progress in some of the EBacc subjects, notably in science and modern foreign languages. Leaders are dedicated to providing pupils with the solid academic grounding they will need to achieve highly in a range of A-level subjects, as well as to meet the entry requirements of top universities.
- The breadth of GCSE subjects on offer outside of the EBacc is impressive and enables pupils to pursue their interests. Extra-curricular opportunities and clubs are often linked to these subjects. They assist pupils in extending their specialist expertise and honing their practical skills.
- This school is well managed. Many systems, including those for managing pupils' behaviour, are implemented effectively. This makes for an orderly and harmonious environment, where pupils feel safe and well cared for.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effective. All four elements are closely tracked, and this has enabled the school to ensure that all aspects are equally well developed, including the spiritual dimension. Of note is the way the school has enhanced this aspect, for example through providing a dedicated space for prayer or reflection. Opportunities to lead, including the chance for pupils to sit on a local governing board committee, enable pupils to gain insight into democracy and other British values, as well as refining pupils' communication skills.

Governance of the school

- Governance is a strength of the school. The recently appointed chair of trustees has a particularly sharp and insightful understanding of what the school's priorities should be. He has stringently challenged the school about the pace of some improvements as well as the progress made by both disadvantaged pupils and most-able pupils.
- Minutes from the meetings of the standards committee and the curriculum committee indicate that governors that sit on these committees, including the chair of the local governing board, hold leaders to account effectively. They use their understanding and knowledge of the school, including the curriculum, to question leaders incisively.
- Well-considered changes have been made to governance structures to enable the smooth transition from being a stand-alone convertor academy to the lead school in a multi-academy trust. Some aspects of this transition are still being worked out. For example, governors acknowledge there is more work to do to ensure that there are clear lines of accountability between members of the local governing body and trustees. There are strong plans in place to achieve this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. There are strong and well-rehearsed systems in place to ensure that pupils receive the support they need, including from the local authority. Support provided is vigilantly monitored by designated leaders.

- Staff are kept informed of the safeguarding issues that are receiving a national focus and also ones that are most relevant to pupils at the school. The heads of house are particularly attuned to the signs that pupils may be being groomed to join criminal gangs and monitor this carefully. They also make sure that information about these issues is shared with pupils. There is a useful two-way flow of information between the police and the school about pupils who may be vulnerable to exploitation of this kind.
- The school is in the process of reviewing some of its safeguarding processes and policies, so that they are even tighter. For example, the staff code of conduct is currently being revised so that it brings together information on staff conduct that exists within a number of different guidance documents.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Practice in teaching, learning and assessment is generally improving and, in some subjects and classes, it is particularly effective. Improvements in teaching in science and modern foreign languages have been rapid. Subject leaders rightly acknowledge that there is still more work to do in these areas.
- Effective support has enabled individual teachers to develop their practice. However, in a number of classes, across a range of subjects, teaching does not always enable disadvantaged pupils to catch up with their peers or enable most-able pupils to fulfil their potential.
- Pupils benefit from teachers' strong subject knowledge and often gain deep knowledge and understanding through the effective ways in which teachers transmit this knowledge. Of note is the way pupils question their teachers in order, for example, to find out more, seek clarification and check to see if their assumptions are correct. Sometimes teachers' responses to the penetrating questions most-able pupils ask are not detailed and thought-provoking enough.
- Pupils are keen to achieve and want to extend their knowledge and skills. They listen carefully in class and take note of teachers' high-quality explanations. In subjects such as mathematics and history, interesting and detailed explanations, as well as the careful sequencing of topics, mean that pupils acquire deep knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils are often provided with detailed advice and feedback on their learning, which helps them develop. Of note is the helpful guidance they receive from teachers about the best way to tackle examination questions.
- Teaching in most practical subjects enables pupils to hone and develop their practical skills. Pupils apply the knowledge they gain from teachers' demonstrations well. Many make effective use of the expertise they have gained from hobbies and/or extra-curricular activities when carrying out practical tasks.
- In a number of subjects, but not all, there is a helpful emphasis on the subject-specific vocabulary pupils need to demonstrate and deepen their knowledge. This is beginning to have an impact on the quality of pupils' explanations and evaluations. In English, for instance, pupils are increasingly confident in using words relating to form, structure and literary devices.

- This academic year, there has been a focus on class teachers developing approaches to support the progress of pupils identified as falling behind. In many cases, these plans are having a positive impact, often because teachers know their pupils well. However, some plans are having a stronger impact than others.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Some aspects are exceptional, such as pupil leadership opportunities and the extra-curricular activities offered.
- In most classes, pupils are keen to learn and want to succeed. However, in some classes, where teaching is less strong, some pupils do not take pride in their work and they do not engage in learning well enough.
- Pupils participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities and trips, many of which are linked to curriculum subjects. These activities provide pupils with a wealth of knowledge and understanding about different places, people and ideas. They also develop pupils' practical capabilities and self-confidence. Leaders are currently developing systems for collating information about the groups of pupils who access these additional activities.
- Leaders have collated strong evidence indicating that the school is effective in meeting most of the nationally agreed standards for careers education. However, for a small number of standards, evidence has not been pulled together as well as it has for the majority. The oversight of careers is rightly in the process of being strengthened. Pupils value the personal careers advice they receive and the chance to meet employers at the annual careers fair.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good, and most pupils have positive relationships with teachers and their peers. It is not outstanding, because, in lessons where teaching is less effective, pupils' behaviour is not always in line with the school's high expectations, especially but not solely in key stage 4. Sometimes pupils talk over teachers and make unhelpful comments.
- Pupils behave extremely well around the school and there is an orderly atmosphere. Pupils socialise effectively in communal areas. Staff diligently supervise communal spaces, using their supervision time to converse with pupils and thus further strengthen pupil-teacher relationships.
- Behaviour and attendance are well led and managed. The heads of the five houses play a strong role in this. There are also well-functioning systems in place which collate information about pupils' behaviour and attendance. Heads of houses carefully scrutinise this information and use it to arrange bespoke support for pupils. They know the pupils for whom they are responsible very well and are keenly aware of each individual's needs. As a result, attendance was above average last academic year and there were no significant differences in the attendance of different groups.

- Pupils say that incidents of bullying are infrequent and, on the rare occasions when they do occur, they are dealt with well. They cite the role that pupils play in preventing bullying, including a pupil consultation group which helps shape policy and practice in this area.
- Over the last couple of years, there has been a reduction overall in fixed-term exclusions. However, recently there has been a rise in the number of fixed-term exclusions, because leaders have used them judiciously to re-establish their high behaviour expectations. There is evidence that this approach is working well.
- Close collaboration with leaders means that pupils do well in the alternative provision the school uses. School leaders hold regular meetings with leaders from both alternative providers as part of their ongoing checks on how well pupils are learning and behaving while they are educated off site.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils generally do well at the school. They make increasingly strong progress as they move through from Years 7 to 9. Broadly speaking, the progress of pupils in key stage 3 is generally stronger than in key stage 4. Pupils make particularly impressive progress across both key stages in mathematics and history.
- Effective teaching means that pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, generally attain well. The proportion achieving a good pass grade and above in both English and mathematics GCSE examinations was well above average in 2018 and in 2017.
- The school has a strong academic ethos, and a higher-than-average proportion of pupils take subjects included in the EBacc qualification. Pupils' attainment in the EBacc is above average.
- In 2018, pupils' progress overall in GCSE examinations was average. It was not as strong as it had been over the last couple of years, when it was significantly above average. Progress in science, modern languages and some non-EBacc subjects was lower than average. Progress in science and modern foreign languages was also below average in 2017. In some subjects, disadvantaged pupils' progress had dipped when compared to the previous year.
- Leaders have made changes to the way the curriculum is implemented to strengthen outcomes in subjects where progress was not strong enough in 2018 and 2017. In addition, some new methods of teaching have been introduced. Work in pupils' books and the school's own information show that the progress of current pupils is broadly good across most subjects and is improving in science and languages.
- Work in books and evidence from the school's own tracking show that disadvantaged pupils currently in school generally make good progress towards their challenging targets. However, in some subjects, but by no means all, disadvantaged pupils do not make the very strong progress they need to close the gaps with other pupils in the school.
- Most-able pupils in 2018 did not make the strong progress that they had made previously, particularly in non-EBacc subjects. In part, this was due to some changes in the qualifications offered. For example, the school stopped offering a vocational

computing qualification in 2018 and introduced more GCSE qualifications. Improving the progress of most-able pupils is rightly a priority for the school this academic year. The progress made by this group of pupils currently is impressive in some subjects but in others, although improving, it is not yet strong enough.

- Pupils with SEND are well supported though a range of additional programmes as well as the assistance they receive in class from teaching assistants. They make particularly strong progress in the bespoke programmes they take, such as programmes to improve reading. Due to the effective support they receive, which is carefully monitored by the SENCo, the progress of pupils with SEND is similar to that of other pupils in the school.
- Similarly, pupils make strong progress in Year 7 booster programmes organised for pupils who join the school with lower-than-average attainment in their key stage 2 assessments.
- Most pupils move on to education, training or employment when they leave the school. The breadth and depth of their studies means they are well prepared for their next steps.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Like elsewhere in the school, there have been improvements in the sixth form. Last academic year, the scope of improvements was broad and included raising the criteria for entry. More recently, leaders have focused on ensuring that students make above-average progress in a wider range of subjects and qualifications. To this end, students receive regular reports on their effort and progress.
- The school works very closely with students, so that they can cope with the demands of new two-year A-level courses. Leaders carefully track the progress of current students. New approaches to tracking mean that leaders have a sharper picture of students' current progress. Broadly speaking, current Year 13 students are making better progress from their starting points compared with their counterparts last academic year.
- Early information from A-level examinations in 2018 shows that progress overall was above average. Progress for students on academic courses was well above average and stronger than it was for those on vocational courses. This was largely because of the very strong progress that students made in A-level mathematics, physics and chemistry. Progress in most other A-level subjects was at least in line with the average. However, in one or two subjects which had a high number of entries, such as English literature, progress was below average.
- This academic year, a number of subjects have introduced new approaches to teaching that are beginning to pay dividends. For instance, changes have been made to the way coursework is taught in English literature, and teachers have received carefully focused training from an A-level examiner.
- Teaching is generally strong and is especially effective in mathematics and most science subjects. It is improving in several other subjects, due to the changes that have been made. Teachers make good use of their subject knowledge to ask

demanding questions, and students often respond with detailed answers, which include knowledge that they have acquired through research.

- However, in a small number of subjects, improvements are not as fully embedded as they are in the majority. In addition, students on some vocational courses are not always challenged enough. Leaders are aware of these differences and are working closely with subject leaders and teachers to iron them out.
- Recruitment to the sixth form from other schools is impressive, with approximately half of the sixth form made up of students recruited externally. On average, about 75% of students in Year 11 choose the school's sixth form, which offers an impressively wide range of mainly academic qualifications. There are no significant differences between the outcomes from students joining from other schools and those recruited from the main school. One reason for this is that recruitment, induction and support packages are tailored to the individual.
- Leaders have rightly focused on reducing the proportion of students who do not continue their studies in Year 13 at the school, having completed Year 12. The proportion is gradually reducing, although it remains higher than the school would like. Many do not transition into Year 13 for positive reasons. For example, some embark on higher-level vocational courses offered at the local college. Students say they like taking their AS qualifications at the end of Year 12. They see them as an effective staging post on their post-16 journey and sensibly use their results to inform their next steps.
- The 16 to 19 study programmes are generally delivered well, with some aspects such as re-sits for English and mathematics GCSE being better delivered than others. Last academic year, the number of students accessing work experience was too low, and changes are afoot to improve this. However, students benefit from visits to employers and the opportunities to listen to talks from local businesses.
- Students in the sixth form are positive about their experiences, especially the additional support they receive. They are well prepared for their next stages, because of the effective mentoring and study-skills programmes. Many also benefit from educational trips and visits to cultural events, which encourage them to think more deeply. An increasing number of students get offers from, and go on to, top universities, including Oxford and Cambridge.
- Students say they feel safe and well looked after. The school is in the process of strengthening signing-in procedures, so that leaders have an even more accurate record of who is on site at any given time.

School details

Unique reference number	136468
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10085499

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1697
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	468
Appropriate authority	Local governing body
Chair of the local governing board	Mr Bruce Hawthorne
Headteacher	Mr Andrew Squires
Telephone number	01908 505 030
Website	http://www.denbigh.net
Email address	headteacher@denbigh.net
Date of previous inspection	14–16 May 2009

Information about this school

- The school is a larger-than-average-sized comprehensive with a bigger-than-average sixth form.
- It is a national teaching school and along with St Paul's Catholic School is the lead school in the Tommy Flowers SCITT (school-centred initial teacher training).
- In March 2011, the predecessor school with the same name converted to become an academy. The predecessor school was graded outstanding when it was inspected in May 2009.

- In September 2014, Denbigh School was established as the lead school for the Enigma Maths Hub, working across Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire. It provides professional development for mathematics teachers from early years to post-16.
- In 2017, the school became the lead school in a new multi-academy trust (MAT), known as The Denbigh Alliance multi-academy trust. The other school in the MAT is in the process of being built and is scheduled to open in 2020.
- There have been changes to governance structures following the creation of the MAT. The school has a chair of trustees and a chair of the local governing board. Both these appointments have been made in the last 18 months. The headteacher was appointed in 2014.
- The school has a vertical tutoring system and is split into five houses, each one led by a head of house.
- In September 2015, the school increased its pupil admission number from 200 to 260.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils eligible for pupil premium funding is below the national average.
- The proportion of pupils with SEND is below average. The proportion with education, health and care plans is broadly in line with the average.
- A lower-than-average-proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language. Just over half of the pupils are White British and the other half come from 15 of the 17 ethnic minority groups.
- The school makes use of two alternative providers: four pupils are currently placed at Bridge Academy and four at Milton Keynes College.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was initially a section 8 inspection and was subsequently deemed a section 5 inspection.
- Inspectors gathered evidence from short visits made to lessons on five separate occasions. Inspectors also undertook a total of approximately 40 longer observations. In most instances, inspectors were accompanied by members of the senior leadership team. Inspectors also attended an assembly and a tutor time.
- Pupils' behaviour was observed in lessons, around the school and during breaktimes. A telephone call was made to The Bridge, which is one of the two alternative providers used by the school.
- Inspectors scrutinised a selection of books on day one and also on day two of the inspection. On day two, inspectors also reviewed work belonging to members of the sixth form. Inspectors met separately with a group of key stage 3 pupils, a group of key stage 4 pupils, a small selection of disadvantaged pupils and a group of sixth-form students.
- Inspectors met separately with the headteacher on several occasions. Inspectors also met with senior leaders for a range of meetings focusing on different issues, including safeguarding, the curriculum, outcomes, leadership of teaching, as well as behaviour and attendance. Several meetings were held with the senior leader responsible for the sixth form. In some of these meetings, he was accompanied by other sixth-form leaders.
- Meetings were also held with the chair of the local governing body (who is vice-chair of the trustees) accompanied by the vice-chair of the local governing body, a group of subject leaders, heads of houses, newly qualified teachers and trainees. Inspectors also met the special educational needs coordinator, the careers leader and the pupil premium champion. A phone call was made to the chair of the trustees.
- Inspectors considered the 397 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View. In addition, inspectors scrutinised the school's own parental questionnaires.
- Inspectors evaluated key documents, including the school's strategic-planning documents, information on current pupils' progress and assessment approaches, curriculum information, minutes of governing body and trust meetings, reports of attendance and behaviour, records of the checks made on staff when they are appointed, and records relating to pupils' safety and academic progress.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Peter Rodin	Ofsted Inspector
Patrick Harty	Ofsted Inspector
John Burrige	Ofsted Inspector
Ian Tustian	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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