

Inspection of a school judged good for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Denbigh School

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

Inspection dates:

26 and 27 November 2024

Outcome

Denbigh School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Anthony Steed. This school is part of The Denbigh Alliance multi-academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Sue Collings, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by John Cove.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils feel happy and safe at this school. The renewed vision of 'aspire, innovate, achieve and belong' is highly evident. This is because the school is ambitious for all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These ambitions are largely realised. Leaders have acted swiftly to address any areas where pupils' outcomes fall below leaders' high expectations, for example in the sixth form.

Most pupils told inspectors that they develop a sense of belonging and enjoy the challenge of learning. Many pupils value deeply the care given to them. A large team of expert 'associate staff' provide excellent support for learning. In addition, the pastoral team provides specialist support to pupils, addressing issues such as mental health concerns, friendship matters and the challenges of growing up.

Pupils' behaviour is strong. Staff make their high expectations clear, and pupils rise to meet these. Staff establish routines effectively. As a result, lessons are purposeful and industrious. Highly self-motivated sixth-form students act as excellent role models for younger pupils, studying purposefully together during non-timetabled lessons. Many sixth-form students relish the opportunities to support younger pupils in lessons and individually with reading coaching. This enables sixth-form students to practise vital leadership and organisation skills.

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

The school implements an ambitious curriculum from Year 7 to the end of sixth form. Pupils achieve well, particularly in the English Baccalaureate suite of subjects. Students in the successful sixth form study a broad range of academic subjects and a growing number of vocational qualifications. The school's processes to identify pupils' needs are precise, and these needs are well known by staff. However, the school rightly recognises that there are still some aspects that could improve further. For example, not all teachers adapt the curriculum for pupils with SEND fully effectively. This means these pupils do not always learn as well as they could.

Expert teachers have strong subject knowledge and present information clearly to pupils. The school has precisely identified what it needs pupils to learn and when in the curriculum. Despite this, teachers' checks on pupils' learning vary. In some subjects, such as science and mathematics, teachers skilfully ensure that pupils acquire knowledge and skills, which they build on subsequently. However, in some other subjects, these checks are less effective. This hinders the progress some pupils make through the curriculum.

The school gives reading a high priority. 'Literacy champions' in each subject promote the school's 'word consciousness' strategy. All staff focus on developing pupils' specialist vocabulary. Expert support helps those who have fallen behind in reading to catch up quickly. Some pupils receive small-group tuition, while others receive individual support so they can access learning fully.

Pupils have positive attitudes towards school. The school takes a proactive approach to attendance. As a result, absence is low, including in the sixth form. Dedicated staff support pupils who need it. This includes, but is not limited to, providing support for those whose attendance is lower than the school's high expectations. A small number of pupils access specialist support elsewhere. The school has robust oversight of these pupils' education and diligently seeks to guide them back to full-time education in school where appropriate.

The school develops pupils' wider personal skills comprehensively. A carefully designed personal, social and health education curriculum covers all the essential knowledge and skills pupils need to prepare them for life in modern Britain. The school is rightly aware that it needs to improve staff expertise further to deliver this subject fully. A wide range of opportunities exist for pupils to develop their talents and interests. Many pupils relish these and make the most of the wide range of creative, sporting and academic clubs and trips on offer. Applications to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme are usually plentiful, and sixth-form students capitalise on this scheme to broaden their volunteering and community service experiences.

The trust and governing council have undergone many changes since the previous inspection. These changes have strengthened the support and challenge given to the school. Trustees and governors set and maintain the school's ambitious mission and vision. Governors know the school well, and they check that the school is doing all it can to continue improving. Staff are proud to work at the school. They value the thoughtful

approach the school takes to introducing new initiatives in the best interests of the pupils. One member of staff, typical of many, told inspectors, 'The school has a soul; we are seen, just like the pupils, we feel part of the Denbigh family.'

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Not all teachers adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND. This means some pupils with SEND do not learn and remember critical knowledge as well as they could. The school needs to ensure that teachers' practice contributes strongly to all pupils knowing more and remembering more.
- In some subjects, teachers' checks on pupils' learning need refining. This means that for some pupils, gaps or misconceptions in knowledge and skills are not identified. The school must ensure teachers check, identify and address missing or insecure knowledge, skills and understanding so pupils achieve as well as they can.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be good for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school of the same name, to be good for overall effectiveness in January 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	136468
Local authority	Milton Keynes
Inspection number	10341675
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,761
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	470
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Cove
CEO of the trust	Sue Collings
Headteacher	Anthony Steed
Website	www.denbigh.net
Dates of previous inspection	15 and 16 January 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of The Denbigh Alliance multi-academy trust.
- The current headteacher took up their post in September 2024.
- The current chair of the local governing council took up their post in September 2024.
- The school uses three registered and two unregistered alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to the headteacher and members of the senior leadership team.
- The lead inspector met the CEO and the education director of the trust. She also met the chair of the trust, the chair of the local governing council and some governors.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke with teachers and pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with groups of pupils and observed their behaviour at breaktime and lunchtime.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspectors took account of a range of other information, including the school's development plan, school policies and minutes from meetings of the governing body.
- Inspectors met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through the online staff survey. Inspectors also took account of the views of parents and carers expressed through the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Linda Culling, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Marieke Forster

Ofsted Inspector

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Ofsted Inspector

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