

Debden Park High School

Willingale Road, Debden, Loughton, IG10 2BQ

Inspection dates 1–2 May 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected
	This inspection:	Good 2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Teaching is good across the school and it is regularly outstanding. Because of this, students, including those who require support, make good progress and achieve well.
- Students gain good examination results, particularly in English, mathematics and science. This enables the large majority to move successfully to the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Teachers have high expectations for their students and they, in turn, are interested in, and engage well, with their lessons.
- Exemplary behaviour, high attendance figures and low incidents of bullying attest to the school being a safe and secure place to learn.
- The headteacher and senior team have been highly effective in improving teaching, learning and behaviour.
- Both the academy trust and governing body have robust systems in place to challenge leaders and monitor how successful they are in improving the school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Activities are not always precisely matched to the needs of students who find learning difficult.
- On occasions, there are not enough opportunities for high attaining students to work independently and undertake challenging activities that would develop their thinking skills to the full.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 35 lessons, nine of which were joint observations with senior leaders. In addition, the inspection team made a number of short visits around the school.
- Meetings were held with four groups of students, the Chair of the Governing Body, the chief executive of the school trust and a representative of the local authority and school staff, including subject leaders. Inspectors also held telephone conversations with parents.
- Inspectors analysed the 71 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), emails from parents and the 28 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- They observed the work of the school and looked carefully at numerous documents, including checks on teaching, minutes of governing body meetings, case studies relating to exclusions, support for vulnerable students, and policies and records relating to students' achievement, attendance, punctuality, behaviour, safety, bullying and safeguarding.

Inspection team

James Coyle, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

John Ubsdell

Additional Inspector

Alan Lee

Additional Inspector

Jennifer Carpenter

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average sized-secondary school.
- The school converted to academy status in May 2011 and is part of the Kennal Trust chain of academies. When its predecessor school, Debden Park High School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be outstanding.
- The great majority of students are of White British heritage. The proportion of students from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average.
- Very few students speak English as an additional language.
- About one in eight students is supported through school action, which is in line with the average. About one in every 14 students is supported at school action plus or has a statement of special educational needs. This proportion is below the national average
- Just over one in three students is eligible for the pupil premium, additional funding provided for children in local authority care, children of service families and those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. This is above the national average. There are no children from service families currently on the school's roll.
- The school has established arrangements with Epping Forest College and Grace Academy for students in Key Stage 4 to take alternative work-related courses there.
- The school has specialist status for the performing arts. It has also recently acquired 'Teaching School' status.
- Students are entered early for GCSE performing arts and are given multiple entry opportunities for GCSE mathematics.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and learning by:
 - providing more opportunities for students, especially the more able, to work independently in all subjects
 - increase the proportion of the most able students who achieve A and A* grades in English and mathematics
 - ensuring that students who find difficulty in learning are given support that is as precisely matched to their needs in all classes as it is in the very best.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- In most year-groups, students have attainment levels on entry to the school that are in line with those found nationally. The Year 11 cohort in 2012 had below-average attainment on entry. Most make progress that compares very well with national figures, notably so for those who are disadvantaged. Achievement is not outstanding because not all students make rapid and sustained progress across all subjects.
- By the time they have reached the end of Year 11, students are well prepared for the next stage of their education, having achieved passes at GCSE, including English and mathematics that are above the national average.
- The school has used its additional funding for students who are eligible for the pupil premium very effectively to provide pastoral support, one-to-one tuition and revision camps. In 2012, the progress of this group of students was good in both English and mathematics. Gaps in attainment between this group and all students nationally are narrowing rapidly because of the effectiveness of this additional teaching and support. These students' attainment in English was in line with all other students in the school and with all students nationally. In mathematics, their attainment was one third of a grade below other students in the school, and just below all students nationally.
- The progress of the small number of students from minority ethnic groups and those who speak English as an additional language is monitored carefully, and is above that of other students in the school.
- Reading is a priority for the school. Regular initiatives such as 'Read of the month' encourage students to read regularly and for pleasure. Information from the librarian shows high levels of lending to all age groups. As a result of booster sessions and initiatives paid for by government 'catch-up' funding in Year 7, students make very rapid progress. Reading levels are good and students are able to read with confidence and develop their literacy skills.
- Good skills in writing, communication and mathematics were evident in students' work across a range of subjects. In two outstanding Year 9 English lessons, for example, students were engaged in role play in order to explore the feelings of characters in *Romeo and Juliet*. Using listening and questioning skills and teamwork they delighted in performing, using sophisticated language to describe the character Mercutio's actions and feelings.
- Applied and vocational subjects such as performing arts and physical education provide suitable learning programmes for those students who take them. They gain very good results, which allow them to continue their education.
- Two local colleges provide students with alternative vocational courses, including basic skills provision in English, mathematics and science and appropriate work-experience placements. Students who attend this provision achieve well and progress to courses at a higher level.
- Students are entered early for GCSE performing arts at the end of Year 9 and they attain good results. In addition, all students are given multiple opportunities to enter for GCSE mathematics, starting at the end of Year 10. Those who attain the higher grades progress to additional mathematics courses in Year 11.

- Disabled students and those who have special educational needs are identified when they move from primary school and individual plans are devised and targets set. They make good progress because the intervention tutor works with all their subject teachers and monitors their performance carefully, liaises with parents and ensures that they receive extra support. However, activities for this group of students are not always consistently matched to their needs across all subjects so that they promote and develop confidence, skills and learning.

The quality of teaching is good

- Most teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations of their students and good subject knowledge. Their planning closely meets the needs of all their students and they check to make sure that students understand what they are doing.
- In an outstanding Year 11 English lesson, students worked in pairs to carry out an analysis of a piece of work applying GCSE marking criteria. As the lesson progressed, students applied terms such as 'interpret' and 'evaluate', guided by checks and individual guidance from the teacher, gaining insights to what is required for the higher levels of attainment. Eventually, working on their own, they used the knowledge and understanding gained to write their own piece applying the criteria. However this form of assessment is not common practice in many lessons.
- Individual support is provided by teaching assistants, who provide booster sessions. This support is very general and addresses emotional and social needs as well as encouraging students' speaking and listening skills. However, there is inconsistency in the way their work is planned with subject teachers, which means the support to individual students in some lessons does not consistently reach the high standards seen in the very best.
- Evidence from the parents' survey indicates that they consider teaching to be good.
- Not all teachers provide opportunities for students to review what has been learnt before moving on with the lesson, and not all plan work of appropriately difficulty so that students, particularly the most able, make rapid progress and learn to work independently.
- Most students are aware of the level at which they are working and what they need to do to improve because teachers generally make good use of termly progress weeks when lessons are used for students to focus on what they can do to improve and move forward to the next level. However, not all subjects provide students with the kind of precise oral and written feedback needed to push their learning forward at an accelerating rate.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

- Students display exemplary attitudes to what goes on in the classroom and to their learning. They are prompt to lessons and arrive ready to do their best. They treat each other and staff with respect.
- Leaders have exceptionally high expectations of behaviour, attendance and conduct at school. Their strong and effective support systems result in high attendance figures, low exclusion rates, little incidence of bullying and excellent manners in and around the school. Improvements here, over time, have been marked.
- Attendance and progress of those students who attend the colleges for other courses are

monitored carefully and are equally excellent.

- Students say that the school deals quickly with bullying when it does occur, either in the form of name calling, racist, physical, homophobic or bullying via the internet and mobile phone. Students in Years 7 and 9 say they all know the school's rules of behaviour and that teachers are always available to help them if they need it.
- Students know where to go if they are unhappy, sad, worried or frightened, especially students new to the school in Year 7, who were able to mention specific members of staff as their preferred contact point. Students know how to keep themselves safe and spoke confidently about dangerous areas such as railways and rivers.
- In a range of lessons observed across the school during the inspection, students displayed a strong sense of what is right and wrong. They delight in celebrating each other's success and give of their time freely to support each other. All are aware of the school's performing arts specialism and become engaged at various levels at various times during their time at the school. They have performed in various venues, including Wembley Stadium, the Royal Albert Hall and the National Theatre, building an awareness of the arts, confidence and talent. In Year 11, the student voice leadership team provides a student forum and earned responsibility which enables students to offer confidently a range of well-informed ideas and opinions on spiritual, social, moral and cultural issues.
- Staff and parents endorse the positive view held by students about behaviour and safety at the school.

The leadership and management are outstanding

- The headteacher and all leaders work exceptionally well together and share an uncompromising commitment to improving achievement for all students. They have focused on sharing the most effective teaching and learning as widely as possible in order to realise this ambition. The impact of their work is becoming evident in many subjects. As a 'Teaching School', and working closely with the Trust, leaders have devised well-considered and effective strategies for bringing all teaching up to the level of the very best.
- The school's very effective performance management system, together with its focus on recruiting only the best teachers and its robust self-evaluation, drives improvement planning. The excellent opportunities, provided through its developing expertise as a 'Teaching School', for teachers' professional development have resulted in improved outcomes for students and consistently good and better teaching. Weak teaching has been entirely eliminated.
- The school offers a much-enriched range of subjects and this is kept under continuous review in order to ensure that it fully meets the needs of students and the local community. In particular, its performing arts specialism, which results in early entry to GCSE in Year 9, has met with great success.
- The provision of additional courses in English, and also in mathematics, where early entry is also used particularly successfully, builds on students' good performance at GCSE and ensures progression to the next stage of education, training or employment. In addition, students benefit strongly from additional literacy and numeracy sessions, funded through the Year 7 'catch-up' programme, to strengthen their core skills in Years 7 and 8.
- The Parent View survey findings indicate that parents have very positive views about the school.

They are completely confident that the leaders are effective in building and maintaining good relationships with them as well as ensuring that all students are treated equally and that there is no discrimination.

- Statutory safeguarding requirements are met, including off-site checks on students' attendance at college placements.
- The school enjoys very good relationships with both the local authority and its sponsor, the Kemnal Trust. As a 'Teaching School', it works closely with the local authority to support other schools across the county, including recent secondments by the headteacher to schools requiring improvement. Most recently, the local authority is supporting the school in a consortium bid to develop a sixth form for schools in the area. It already provides safeguarding training for governors.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- The governing body and the Trust together provide very effective oversight of the work of the school. Both challenge and monitor the effectiveness of school leaders in maintaining success and driving improvement rigorously. Governors know how well the school performs and where teaching is good, and what is being done to improve it where it is not as strong as in other areas. A single governors' committee oversees systems for managing teachers' performance and ensures that any promotion or rise in the headteacher's or other teachers' salaries are directly related to their impact on students' achievement. It ensures the efficient management of financial resources, including the use of pupil premium funding, and knows that the school has used this funding to achieve good results in English and mathematics at the end of Year 11. It works particularly hard to encourage parents' sense of involvement with the school through regular newsletters and meetings at school performances.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	136555
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	411855

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

Type of school	Academy converter
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	832
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	James Lillingston
Headteacher	Christian Cavanagh
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	020 85082979
Fax number	020 85006843
Email address	admin@dphs-tkat.org

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