

Debenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	124860
Local Authority	SUFFOLK LA
Inspection number	293131
Inspection date	22 January 2008
Reporting inspector	John Mitcheson HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	543
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr R Boulter
Headteacher	Mr M J Crawshaw OBE
Date of previous school inspection	24 September 2001
School address	Gracechurch Street Debenham Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 6BL
Telephone number	01728 860213
Fax number	01728 860998

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Introduction

On this one day inspection, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: teaching and learning, personal development and well being, care guidance and support, leadership and management and the school's specialist status in science. Evidence was gathered from the school's own self-evaluation, national published assessment data and the school's own assessment records. Other evidence included the scrutiny of curriculum and planning documents, observation of the school's work, interviews with staff and pupil and parents' questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but HMI found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Debenham Church of England Voluntary Controlled High School is a smaller than average sized 11-16 year old comprehensive school serving a rural area of north Suffolk. The vast majority of its 543 students are from White British backgrounds. The level of socio-economic disadvantage is below what is found nationally and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below average. A significant number of pupils have learning difficulties and disabilities and the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is slightly above the national average. Attainment on entry to the school is above average. The school has been a specialist science college since 2005 and is regularly over-subscribed.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. Its mission is 'to provide a top quality education for pupils of all abilities in a caring, challenging, supportive and attractive environment in which all members of the community are valued and where Christian moral values are encouraged'. It does this very well indeed by placing a high value on every individual pupil and providing the right environment in which pupils respect each other, learn good manners and show an eagerness to succeed. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school, many consider it 'fantastic'. The essence of its success is its small size and the people in it, one parent commenting that 'the school is small enough to have a family feel about it and all the pupils and staff have a genuine concern for the school and each other'. In this caring and supportive environment, pupils make outstanding progress and attain standards that are consistently well above the national average. The school's record of academic excellence has led to local and national recognition as one of the highest performing state schools in the country.

In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2007, well over 90% of pupils attained the expected level in English, science and information and communication technology (ICT). Eighty eight per cent of pupils met the expectations in mathematics. GCSE results are equally impressive; over 87% of pupils achieved five or more C grades, and most notably, nearly 37% of all grades were A* or A. The number of pupils achieving five A* to C grades including English and mathematics is well above what is achieved nationally. Similar results have been achieved in the past three years. The proportion of Year 9 pupils attaining levels 6 and 7 in 2007 was well above the national average. In Key Stage 4, 19 pupils who sat the GCSE mathematics examination at the start of Year 11 achieved either an A or an A*. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make outstanding progress. Almost every pupil achieved five or more A* to G grades, which is exceptional, and over 85% of pupils progressed to further study in local sixth forms.

Pupils' personal development and well-being, including their social, moral, spiritual and cultural education are outstanding. All students study religious education in Years 10 and 11 and results in the GCSE short course are exceptionally high. Weekly assemblies include spiritual and cultural elements and opportunities to celebrate pupils' achievements. Behaviour is exemplary, exclusions are rare and very effective peer-mentoring has reduced incidents of bullying. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school. They attend regularly and say it is a friendly place 'where you can be absolutely sure that you will do well'. Healthy food at lunchtimes, regular physical education lessons and participation in an extensive range of sports activities all contribute to a healthy lifestyle. A significant number of pupils adopt responsibility as prefects, house captains and junior sports leaders. Their involvement in supervision duties, organisation of inter-house sport competitions and liaison with local primary schools is exceptional. An active school council represents the views of pupils and contributes ideas to help to improve school life.

The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and contributes directly to the high standards achieved. Observation of lessons during the inspection and a scrutiny of monitoring and evaluation records confirmed the school's view that teaching and learning is at least good and often outstanding in most lessons. Results show that pupils achieve highly in all areas of the curriculum and there are no weak-performing subjects. Experienced and knowledgeable staff know individual pupils well; relationships are nurtured and expectations are very high. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves, share their views, explore ideas and explain what they have found out. The quality of discussion in lessons is of a high quality because time is spent

developing pupils' speaking and listening skills. Teachers' assessment of pupils' progress is very effective. They know what individual pupils are capable of and regularly monitor how well they are doing against the challenging targets set for them. Daily staff briefings are used to raise concerns about the welfare of individual pupils, which helps to identify any potential under-performance.

The school's own evaluation judges the curriculum as good but inspection found it to be outstanding. The vast majority of learners are well-served by a curriculum that promotes their development as responsible, articulate and confident young people. It gives them opportunities to achieve outstanding results in a range of subjects and endows them with the necessary literacy, numeracy and ICT skills needed for further study or the world of work. An outstanding enrichment programme that is very much appreciated by pupils adds significantly to their personal development and well-being. Despite its rural location, the school has embraced vocational learning. In partnership with other schools and a local college it has introduced a number of courses that appeal to a growing number of pupils. All Year 10 pupils participate in a two-week work experience and benefit from clear advice and guidance on future careers.

Leadership and management are outstanding. The school's success is due to the exemplary leadership of the headteacher. He has engendered a very special ethos in the school where high quality care and support for every individual pupil act as the foundations for academic success. He and his senior leadership team are particularly effective in taking decisive action that leads to sustained improvement. Specialist status in science is used very effectively to raise overall achievement and extend the school's role in the local community. Senior leaders, including a head of pastoral care, combine well as a team to ensure that pupils achieve their very best. All safeguarding arrangements are in place. The school works with a wide range of external agencies to integrate pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and a small number of looked after children. Experienced governors fulfil all of their statutory duties and provide very effective strategic leadership. They have ensured that the school has made continued and sustained improvement since the last inspection and achieved outstanding value for money. There is no complacency. Further improvements are actively pursued through rigorous self-evaluation and development planning. This, combined with systematic monitoring and evaluation by subject leaders, demonstrates that the school has outstanding capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Maintain the outstanding performance of the school by building on the key issues identified in school self-evaluation and development plans.

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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
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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?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	1
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	1

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

23 January 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Debenham CE VC High School, Debenham, IP14 6BL.

Earlier this week I visited your school and found it to be outstanding. Your input was vital in helping me to make this judgement, so thank you for allowing me to join you in lessons and to talk with some of you, particularly the two house-captains who escorted me around the lunchtime clubs and activities. I also spent time with some of your teachers in lessons, met the chair of governors and read many letters from parents. Throughout all this, your behaviour was exceptional and you made me very welcome.

I was impressed with every aspect of your school. It is exceptionally well-led by your headteacher and his senior managers. They and your teachers provide you with a top quality education. I know from talking with you and reading the comments made by your parents that this is valued and greatly appreciated. The school creates the right environment for you and your friends to learn in and attain exceptionally high results. In return, you respond by behaving exceptionally well, applying yourselves to your studies and volunteering your time to represent the school and help others in the local community.

Your governors and senior leaders are committed to seeking further improvements to your school. You can help them by contributing your views and ideas to your school council representative and ask them to share them at school council meetings.

Best wishes

John Mitcheson

Her Majesty's Inspector