



Debden Park High School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 131876
Local Authority ESSEX
Inspection number 293870
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mark Phillips HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary	School address	Willingdale Road
School category	Community		Loughton
Age range of pupils	11–16		Essex IG10 2BQ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	0208 508 2979
Number on roll (school)	870	Fax number	0208 418 1234
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Stephen Barnes
		Headteacher	Mr Michael Moore
Date of previous school inspection	13 February 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
11–16	10–11 January 2007	293870

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Since it was founded in 1999, Debden Park High has grown to become an average-sized comprehensive school. It is located in the Broadway ward of Loughton. Whilst the overall economic profile of pupils is in line with the national average, pupils come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The very large majority of pupils are White British and almost all speak English as their first language. The proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need is in line with the national figure.

The school has been a specialist performing arts college since September 2005. When it was last inspected in 2001, it was about to move into its present, purpose-built accommodation (constructed under the Private Finance Initiative) and the first cohort of pupils was in Year 8.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing, or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

The quality of education and care provided for pupils at Debden Park High School is not good enough. The most important reason for this is the school's failure to adequately support and retain a stable teaching staff. Many changes of teachers and middle managers have meant that there has been discontinuity in the curriculum, and key information about pupils' work and progress has not been passed on. Strategies for supporting staff with the improvement of teaching, learning, and behaviour have been inconsistent. All this has led to a decline in the results that have been achieved by pupils. When they arrive at the school, the standard of pupils' work is at national expectations, but by the end of Year 9 and when they take their GCSEs it is well below the national norm. Targets for pupils' achievement have not been met. Not surprisingly, there is much dissatisfaction amongst parents about the school in general and the way that it is led and managed in particular.

There is some good teaching at Debden Park High School, as we saw during the inspection. Parents and pupils are quick to give praise where it is due. One Year 11 pupil spoke with enthusiasm about the way that his teacher had used drama and movement to help the class learn key technical terms in music. The same pupil added that 'teachers are at their best when they've been here for a while'.

There are good opportunities for pupils to contribute to their community, particularly through the specialist performing arts provision, where there has been more stable staffing. Overall though, pupils' personal development and well-being are inadequate. One of pupils' main frustrations is the way that behaviour is managed in lessons and around the school. They say that too much emphasis is placed on minor matters of uniform, for example, and not enough effort is made to deal with more serious behaviour issues that arise because of poor teaching. Because of this, pupils do not always feel safe. There are signs of some pupils' disaffection in the graffiti and damage that can be seen in the otherwise impressive school building. The failure of the school's behaviour policy, and the extent to which learners enjoy their education, is reflected in the extremely high levels of pupil exclusions and in the rising levels of absence.

A parent wrote to the inspection team that 'This school needs urgent attention. It could and should be very good.' The local authority identified that the school needed support in March 2006, increasing the amount of help further in the following term. However, the school has not made an adequate response to this.

What the school should do to improve further

- Establish rigorous leadership at all levels that provides challenge and support to ensure that high quality outcomes of care and education for pupils are achieved.

- Provide stability and continuity for pupils by developing and retaining a strong teaching and support staff.
- Ensure high-quality learning experiences for all pupils through a well-planned curriculum and by eliminating inadequate teaching, raising the quality of teaching to that of the best.
- Implement an inclusive school behaviour management strategy that is fair, applied consistently, and promotes pupils' learning and enjoyment in school.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

The progress that pupils make during their time at Debden Park High School is inadequate. When they join the school in Year 7, the standard of their work is broadly in line with that of pupils nationally. However, by the time they get to the end of Key Stage 3 their work in English, mathematics and science is well below the national norm. The school has consistently failed to meet its targets for Year 9 pupils' achievement over the past three years, and the standard of pupils' work has declined over that time.

There are some subjects where pupils make satisfactory progress at GCSE. Geography results have been good for two years running, and last year considerable improvements were shown in physical education, history and art. In drama, music, and expressive arts pupils performed soundly in 2006, reflecting strength in the school's specialist status. However, results in food technology, resistant materials, religious education, and sociology all fell well short of expectation as did those in mathematics and science. This means that the school's overall performance at GCSE is well below the national average.

In 2006, the number of pupils that gained GCSEs at the highest grades was well short of the target that had been set. Pupils' achievement at Key Stage 4 has declined considerably over the past three years. This decline can be seen in the results of all pupils including both boys and girls, and those with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 4

The personal development and well-being of pupils is inadequate. Their spiritual and cultural development is unsatisfactory. Little spirituality is provided through assemblies. A 'thought for the day', although read to pupils, does not develop as a topic for discussion or reflection. Their understanding of other cultures is limited. Many pupils socialise well, being confident and good-humoured in conversation; however, the behaviour of others shows that their moral and social development overall is unsatisfactory.

Many pupils behaved appropriately in those lessons seen during the inspection. However, there are also a significant number who are disrespectful to other pupils and adults. This sometimes poses risks to the safety of others, worrying parents and affecting the emotional health of some pupils. Attendance rates are below the national

average. During the inspection, attendance fell further and more than one in ten pupils was absent. Pupils' attendance, attitudes and behaviour show that they do not always enjoy their education.

The school council allows pupils to express their views and have an influence on school life. Some older pupils have responsibilities such as being active listeners and prefects. Pupils take part in performances, work with local elderly residents and raise money for charities. These pupils make a good contribution to the community and the specialist performing arts status plays an important part in this. However, other pupils are not so community-minded, as can be seen by their attitudes and behaviour.

Underachievement in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science means that pupils do not adequately develop the key skills that they will need for their future working lives. In 2005 and 2006 the work experience programme failed to provide placements for a number of pupils.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

The quality of teaching and learning is inadequate. There are too many unsatisfactory lessons where the pace of learning is slow and pupils are not challenged sufficiently because teachers do not plan lessons in enough detail. Work is not marked regularly enough and pupils are not well informed about what they have to do to improve their work. In these lessons some pupils respond with poor behaviour and disrupt the learning of others. The school knows this is too often the case.

Where teaching is better, particularly in some humanities and performing arts lessons, work is challenging and well matched to pupils' abilities. Expectations are clearly communicated to pupils. They receive regular assessment of their progress and how to improve. In these lessons, pupils respond positively, enjoy their work and make satisfactory progress. Pupils gave examples of how the better comments from teachers, together with opportunities to evaluate their own work, were helping them to improve.

Older pupils, whilst appreciative when they are taught well, are critical of the disruption and weaker teaching they have experienced during the time of high staff turnover. This, together with weaknesses in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching, has led to poor learning outcomes for pupils.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Curriculum provision is inadequate. In Years 7 to 9 the school offers a full range of subjects that meet national expectations and provide the opportunity to study a second modern language, although in practice staffing issues mean that this is not available to all. The expressive arts GCSE course is being piloted as a Year 9 entitlement for all pupils for the first time this year. There is a wide range of GCSE options for pupils in

Years 10 and 11 together with alternative vocational pathways. Pupils like the range of subjects on offer but are critical of curriculum changes that take place when teachers leave the school. This is because schemes of work are not detailed enough, nor are they rigorously monitored and evaluated. This all leads to discontinuity in pupils' curriculum from year to year.

The assessment arrangements for citizenship do not meet statutory requirements. The quality of personal, social and health education varies, depending on the enthusiasm and skill of individual form tutors. There is not enough time allocated to physical education in Key Stage 4.

Beyond the school day there is a good range of clubs, visits and extended learning activities to enjoy. The efforts that staff put into these opportunities are appreciated by parents and pupils.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 4

The quality of care provided by the school is inadequate. Frequent changes of teacher have prevented pupils from enjoying continuity of care and guidance. Pupils are set targets but their understanding of how these can be achieved is limited. Pupils say that they are told to 'make more effort' or 'listen more in class' rather than having clear, specific areas to improve. There is insufficient classroom support for pupils whose first language is not English, and pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and do not receive all the classroom learning support that they should.

Formal procedures for safeguarding and risk assessments are in place but parents report that some incidents of bullying and racism are not reported or dealt with effectively. As a result, some pupils do not feel safe. Logs of such incidents are kept but the governing body is not always informed of them and therefore legal requirements are not met.

Strategies aimed at increasing attendance rates and reducing exclusion rates are not effective. Attendance rates have fallen; exclusion rates are very high and continue to increase. During the school year 2005–06 over one in ten pupils were excluded from school at least once.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Overall, the leadership and management of the school are inadequate because standards of care and education are too low and the school has declined since the last inspection. Over half the parents surveyed during the inspection expressed dissatisfaction with the way that the school is led. Members of staff do not always feel supported by the school leadership. Newly-appointed teachers speak favourably about the collegiate ethos that exists within departments but, nonetheless, severe staffing instability has meant that teamwork across the school has been difficult to establish and sustain,

particularly in the core subjects. A notable exception to this is in the specialist area of performing arts.

Management is inadequate. Initiatives are not always followed through, and strategies such as tracking pupils' progress and schemes of work are in their infancy. The school's self assessment of its own performance recognises that there are problems but does not acknowledge the seriousness of the situation. Recent appointments include a second deputy headteacher, although both deputies still carry a significant teaching load. New subject leaders have been appointed for all core subjects. They have identified what needs to be done and show good intentions. However, it is too soon to judge if they can make the significant difference to standards that is required. The school leadership's track record and the school's performance since its last inspection show that the capacity to make improvement is inadequate.

The governing body has a realistic understanding of the issues that the school faces. The chair of governors has challenged school leaders at an informal level but collectively governors have not been critical enough and have overseen the school's decline. Governance is therefore inadequate and the value for money provided by the school is unsatisfactory.

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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	4
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	4
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4
The behaviour of learners	4
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	4
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	4
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	4
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	4

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.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	4
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	No
Does this school require special measures?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 January 2007

Dear Pupils

Debden Park High School, Willingale Road, Debden, Loughton, Essex, IG10 2BQ

You may remember that we visited Debden Park High School earlier this term. I am writing to you now to let you know the results of our inspection.

Firstly, I'd like to thank those of you that talked to us and showed us your work over the two-day visit. We were pleased that you felt able to talk to us openly, and with confidence, about the good things that are happening at your school as well as the issues that concern you. You spoke very positively about the performing arts, for example. However, there are some things such as the large number of teachers that come and go at the school, and school discipline, that you are very concerned about. Your parents share these views, and so do we. Standards are not good enough at the moment, and need to improve quickly. You should be doing better in your tests and examinations, and the behaviour of some of you means that other pupils do not always feel safe.

To help the school put this right, and to give you a better education, we have asked Mr Moore and the governing body to concentrate on four things:

- Be strong in the way that they challenge everyone at the school to achieve high standards of education and care for you, the pupils.
- Support your teachers to become established at the school, and provide you with stability and continuity as you go through your education.
- Make sure that every lesson is well-taught, challenging, and allows you to enjoy and participate in your learning.
- Make sure that rules about behaviour are fair and help you to learn, enjoy your education and feel safe in school.

These are big challenges, but your school will get help in facing up to them. This is what we call putting the school into special measures. However, the school will not be able to do this without the support of you and your parents. Everyone will have to pull together if things are to improve. We'll be playing our part too, by coming back regularly to see if things are improving quickly enough.

We wish you well in your school and with your future plans.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Phillips

Her Majesty's Inspector