

Debden Park High School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	131876
Local Authority	ESSEX LA
Inspection number	316453
Inspection dates	30–31 October 2007
Reporting inspector	David Jones HMI

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 which gives Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools the authority to cause any school to be inspected. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	791
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs J Westbury
Headteacher	Mr C Cavanagh
Date of previous school inspection	10 January 2007
School address	Willingdale Road Loughton Essex IG10 2BQ
Telephone number	0208 508 2979
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Age group	11-16
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Introduction

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

Description of the school

The school is of average size and serves an area on the northern fringe of London that enjoys a range of social and economic advantages. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is average although the proportion from minority ethnic groups and the numbers that do not have English as their first language are below average. The ratio of girls to boys has been below the national average for the last three years. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is below average, similarly the number with a statement of special educational need is below average.

Founded in 1999, Debden Park moved to new purpose-built Private Finance Initiative (PFI) buildings in 2001. The school has been a specialist performing arts school since September 2005. The school was inspected in January 2007 and found to require special measures. Significant improvement was required in leadership and management, the quality of teaching and learning and the management of behaviour.

At the end of February 2007 the Local Authority (LA) entered into a contract with the principal of Kemnal Technology College, a National Support School (NSS), to lead the support for Debden Park. The principal is a National Leader of Education (NLE), a title awarded by the National College for School leadership.

The school was monitored once by HMI in June 2007.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures. The school now provides a good education for its pupils and satisfactory value for money; it has made outstanding progress since being made subject to special measures.

All of the areas requiring improvement that were noted in the last inspection have been addressed with a relentless drive and clarity of vision. The partnership with Kemnal Technology College has been particularly fruitful; a new substantive headteacher is in post and significant improvement has been effected in the leadership and management of all aspects of the school's operations. Leadership and management are outstanding

Successful Key Stage 3 intervention strategies were introduced in the spring term and these have been further developed. The 2007 GCSE results, however, were disappointing and reflected the weakness in educational provision reported in the previous inspection. Outstanding pupil tracking procedures have been introduced; standards and achievement have risen significantly and are now good although they vary between different subjects. Provision is inclusive and pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make good progress.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory with a significant proportion of lessons good or better. The improvements secured in teaching have been a key factor in the enhanced quality of provision now available. Staff, pupils and parents are very positive about the changes brought forward and the resulting improvements. Provision in the performing arts faculty, the school's specialist area, has been a key strength during this difficult period. The range of successful courses provided by the faculty has been further developed and other subjects have taken up the effective teaching strategies commonly utilised in the performing arts. Some inconsistencies remain between departments in the use of assessment for learning and marking; however, performing arts, science and physical education are leading the way on this matter. The range of curriculum opportunities is good and developing rapidly. Care, guidance and support are effective and as a result the pupils' personal development is good and so is behaviour. Pupils comment that they enjoy their education, feel staff treat them with respect and value the interaction they have with senior staff around the school.

The school's capacity to make further improvements is outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Increase the proportion of good teaching.
- Improve pupils' achievement in all departments to match that of the most successful.
- Refine the use of assessment for learning and marking to encourage the further development of independent learning opportunities.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

The outcomes of the 2007 national tests for pupils aged 14 show significant improvements. The proportion of pupils who obtained the expected level in English is likely to be above the national average whilst that for mathematics and science will be just below the national figures. The proportion of pupils obtaining the higher Level 6 is likely to be close to the national figures in English and science but above average in mathematics.

The provisional results of the 2007 GCSE examinations were disappointing. Nearly one in three obtained five higher grade GCSE passes but only a quarter of those entered obtained five A* to C grades including English and mathematics. Despite these weaknesses, impressive GCSE results were obtained in art and design, English literature, applied business studies, drama, music, dance and media studies. In January 2007 the last inspection found achievement to be inadequate. Eight months later inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and the school's robust assessment database, finding that the majority of pupils to be making good progress. In addition, a review of the very positive results of the early entry GCSE and modular examination courses in a range of subjects, found that the outcomes already secured, of these public examination courses to be published in July 2008 represent good achievement by a significant number of pupils.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

The overwhelming majority of pupils now enjoy coming to school. They are very proud of the way their school is improving and are bubbling with newfound loyalty and enthusiasm. Their views are succinctly summed up in the comments made by one Year 11 pupil, 'Everything is so much calmer. People smile when they are here; pupils want to learn and teachers want to teach. It's so great to be in a school that previously pupils resented. Now, they are proud to say they come here'. Pupils speak equally highly of the approachability of the teaching staff and new leadership team, the respect accorded to them and the creation of a much more positive climate for learning.

The standard of behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection; almost all lessons were very orderly and the pupils' attitude to learning was positive. The number of days lost through exclusions has fallen by 90% since March. As a result of stringent monitoring procedures, attendance is close to the national average. Parents can now have access to their children's attainment and attendance records via the school's website. Punctuality has also improved and pupils' timely arrival at school and at lessons helps their teachers to make full use of the available time.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and pupils with interests in the performing arts often enliven assemblies with dramatic insights into major issues. Although pupils' attitudes to work are broadly positive, too many remain passive and their lack of curiosity limits progress in some lessons. Pupils have adopted healthy lifestyles and safe practices; good quality school meals are popular and physical education provision is extensive. Opportunities for pupils to contribute to the community are good. Year 8 pupils support the school office and Year 11 pupils train to be 'active listeners' with younger pupils. In addition, school productions, some of which are performed abroad, develop pupils' social skills and confidence. Pupils' attitudes to learning, their satisfactory basic skills and good preparation for the world of work prepare them soundly for their life beyond school.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory with some important strengths. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection and is the result of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of lessons coupled with very effective systems to address any weaknesses in teaching.

The school's senior and middle managers analyse effectively how learning is developing in lessons and use common criteria to evaluate the quality.

The strengths of good lessons include sharing clear learning objectives with pupils, and then using these towards the ends of lessons to assess pupils' learning and help them to evaluate their own progress. Clear and concise teaching uses a wide variety of learning activities and resources that motivate the pupils to learn. Teachers have high expectations and the work challenges pupils of all abilities. Assessment criteria are used effectively to help pupils understand what is needed to achieve a particular National Curriculum level or GCSE grade. Concluding parts of lessons are well planned to review progress and seek greater pupil understanding. Pupils enjoy the good lessons and take the opportunities to be actively involved in their learning. In lessons where pupils' learning was outstanding, the precise expert teaching coupled with clear guidance about how to improve motivated all pupils to tackle challenging tasks very successfully.

Weaknesses in otherwise satisfactory lessons include a slow pace for introductory activities and insufficient opportunities for pupils to use their initiative or take responsibility for their learning. In the very small number of lessons where pupils' learning was inadequate, tasks did not match the range of pupils' learning needs, class management was not effective or pupils were not clear about what they were meant to achieve.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

Curriculum opportunities are good and are improving rapidly. Vocational courses have been extended for pupils entering Year 10 to include applied science, BTEC dance and information and communication technology (ICT) courses in digital applications (CIDA and DIDA). There are also opportunities for those pupils for whom a full range of GCSE courses is not applicable to study vocational courses in construction, engineering and hair and beauty at the local college. The school has ambitious plans to extend these further with an increased offer of BTEC vocational courses. As befits its performing arts specialist status, all pupils have discrete classes in dance, drama and music in years 7 to 9. Recently most pupils have successfully completed an early entry expressive arts GCSE. The more able pupils are encouraged to take GCSEs early in maths and English and participate in theatre, dance and music groups.

Citizenship is now taught as themes through the humanities department and the school has plans to ensure that the statutory requirements for its assessment and delivery are fully met. The difficulties with modern foreign languages identified in the last report have been tackled robustly with new staff, close links with other schools and the local authority and the appointment of a French assistant.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities has improved significantly and as a result they make progress as good as their peers. All pupils are now assessed for their reading and spelling skills prior to arriving at the school. There is an exciting and effective programme of support for Year 8 pupils with literacy problems through a specially designed expressive arts course. Pupils are well supported in class by teaching assistants. Subject staff benefit from a range of available information on pupils with learning needs, which clearly detail appropriate support strategies. However, the special educational needs department has not yet conducted a thorough review and analysis of the GCSE performance of these pupils. The detailed work and support for numeracy is not yet as comprehensive as it is for literacy.

Across the school there is a very good range of well attended and much appreciated enrichment activities, particularly in music, dance, drama and PE, which make a strong contribution to the pupils' enjoyment of school life.

The school's specialist status as a performing arts college is now having a major impact on many aspects of the school's work, particularly in raising staff and pupil expectations. The strategies developed by the department to make pupils 'active learners' is now having a significant and positive effect on attitudes to learning in the classroom. The school has developed a good relationship with feeder schools who make regular use of the excellent drama, music and dance facilities and benefit from specialist subject teaching.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Good procedures for ensuring pupils' day-to-day health and safety, child protection and safe staff recruitment are in place. Close links with a wide range of external agencies and very good internal teamwork, closely involving the four pastoral managers, ensure effective care and guidance is available for all pupils, particularly the vulnerable and disaffected. This strong level of support also contributes to pupils' good personal development and good achievement.

Pupils are well informed about the options available in Years 10 and 11. In addition, good links with local sixth forms, further education colleges and the Connexions Service ensure pupils receive appropriate advice about the choices available when they leave at the end of Key Stage 4.

The school collects and uses effectively an impressive range of data on pupil progress. Well targeted and effective intervention strategies have been put in place including close monitoring of underperforming groups, mentoring of individual pupils, revision clubs, study skills workshops and closer liaison with parents. All pupils have target grades and the majority know exactly what they are and what they need to do to achieve them. Many teachers use assessment data to plan their lessons with effective questioning and marking helping to provide additional challenge and supportive feedback, although this remains inconsistent.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The partnership with Kemnal Technology College working with the staff and governors of Debden Park has brought outstanding leadership to the school. The senior management team has been rejuvenated and significant responsibilities have been devolved effectively to middle managers. A substantive headteacher has been appointed and a new chair of governors has assumed the leadership of the governing body to whom the local authority has returned delegated authority. In order to maintain the continuity of the very effective support provided, the governing body has indicated its intention to join the Kemnal Trust on its inception in January 2008. Governance is good.

Excellent leadership and management have had a significant impact in raising achievement and supporting all learners because of particularly well judged use of challenging targets to raise standards. Equality of opportunity is promoted effectively and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can. Leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction, leading to improvement across the school and the promotion of a higher quality of care and

education. Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements. The school's self-evaluation is outstanding because senior staff act immediately on the findings of this robust and ongoing analysis.

The essence of this success, achieved in so short a period, relates clearly to the fact that the LA and the school quickly identified the key weaknesses in provision and took rapid powerful steps to address the causal issues within a coherent framework. Monitoring and evaluation of progress have been robust and remedial action incisive. Leadership has focused explicitly on raising the quality of teaching and the pupils' learning whilst providing enhanced curriculum opportunities for them to succeed.

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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?	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

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	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
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

1 November 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Debden Park High School, Loughton, IG10 1BQ

It was a great pleasure to visit your school recently and on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to remove the Category of Concern known by you as 'special measures'. As you will all be aware, the school has made outstanding progress this year and the inspectors agree with the headteacher that even more is possible.

As you know, we took a number of opportunities to speak to you during the inspection and one member of Year 11 summed up much of what you said, 'Everything is so much calmer. People smile when they are here; pupils want to learn and teachers want to teach. It's so great to be in a school that previously pupils resented. Now, they are proud to say they come here'.

To help the school move forward I have asked the headteacher to focus on developing the proportion of very good teaching. Your learning can improve in some subjects and I have asked the school to focus on using marking and assessment to give you even clearer feedback on your progress. You can contribute too if you ask for help, pose questions and offer ideas more frequently in lessons.

I thoroughly enjoyed my two visits to Debden Park and wish all of you success in the future.

David Jones

Her Majesty's Inspector