DESBOROUGH COLLEGE est 1894

Consultation about a proposal for Desborough College to become co-educational and admit girls into Year 7 from September 2028

Questions and Answers

This document provides further information about the proposal for Desborough College to become a co-educational school for boys and girls, with girls being admitted into Year 7 from September 2028 and in subsequent years.

The document is divided into the following sections, and you can click on each heading to go to that section of the document:

- Rationale and opportunity
- How Desborough would become co-educational successfully
- Considerations and implications of becoming co-educational
- The consultation and decision process

Rationale and opportunity

1. How would this benefit Desborough College and local community?

Schools are an important part of the communities they serve and need to respond to changing local needs. The proposal would enable girls as well as boys to access a Desborough education and make greater use of the capacity and facilities already available at the school. It would give more local families the opportunity to choose Desborough for their children.

Desborough provides an ambitious academic curriculum alongside strong pastoral care, personal development and enrichment. We believe it is right to consider whether these opportunities should be available to a wider group of young people. Girls and boys would follow the same ambitious curriculum and have access to the same high-quality teaching, enrichment, leadership and personal development opportunities.

Girls are already an established part of the Desborough community through the school's history of admitting female students into the Sixth Form. The school therefore already has experience of educating young men and women together successfully. The proposal would build upon that experience by gradually extending co-education throughout the school.

Desborough College students currently have some experience of learning alongside and engaging in educational activities with female students at Upton Court Grammar School (part of Pioneer Educational Trust) through Pioneer-wide initiatives and through local curriculum consortia.

Desborough's values emphasise connection, mutual understanding, respect for difference, confidence and participation in a wider community. A co-educational school is entirely compatible

with those values. Students would learn, collaborate, lead and participate alongside one another as part of one Desborough community.

Desborough has the physical capacity to accommodate girls. We have sufficient student spaces and facilities to enable the change without reducing the opportunities available to existing students.

Some adaptations would be necessary, particularly around toilets and changing facilities, but the school has sufficient facilities for appropriate provision to be designated or converted for girls. A detailed estates assessment and implementation plan would be completed before any change took effect.

We recognise that some families value single-sex education. This proposal is not based on a belief that single-sex education is inherently better or worse than co-education. Both models can provide excellent education. There would continue to be single-sex secondary education for boys and girls, as well as co-educational schools, within Windsor and Maidenhead for families who particularly value that model. This proposal would broaden the range of choices available to local families, including families who would like their daughters to benefit from a Desborough education.

2. **There would be more places available for girls in Maidenhead than for boys (due to Newlands) – why is that appropriate?**

We continue to engage with the Local Authority on place planning. As part of the Elizabeth Quarter redevelopment, there is an acknowledgement that more school places would be needed. As Desborough College is the closest secondary school to the Elizabeth Quarter development, offering places to both boys and girls will enable families moving to this development to send their children to a local school.

The council shared information in Spring 2025 that the cohort starting secondary in September 2028 is the only one with more girls than boys, which will likely lead to higher numbers of applications for Newlands Girls' School in 2028. Admitting girls at Desborough College will support the local need for places for girls in this year group and future years.

The proposal is to maintain Desborough College's current Pupil Admission Number (PAN) but to admit girls as well as boys in Years 7-11. In line with our commitment to the local community, we would continue to engage with the Local Authority and other schools in the place planning process, ensuring our admissions and pupil numbers reflect local needs.

3. **Have other schools become co-educational?**

In England, most secondary education was single sex until the 1970s. Today, most schools in the country are co-educational (mixed gendered). It is estimated that about 90% of pupils completing Key Stage 4 in state-funded schools are in mixed schools, with single-sex schools representing approximately 10%. Of the approximately 3400 secondary phase schools (including all-through schools), fewer than 150 are boys only, and around 200 are girls only.

Of the ten secondary schools in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, four (40%) are single sex. As a result, within the Local Authority, there would be other single sex schools available to parents for both boys and girls if this type of education is preferred.

How Desborough would become co-educational successfully

4. Are there staff and leaders at Desborough who have led in co-educational schools?

Yes. The headteacher and all of the senior leadership at Desborough College have worked in mixed schools, as have the majority of teachers at the school. All of the other schools that Pioneer Educational Trust leads and operates are co-educational. There is a significant level of experience and expertise in the organisation of leading and managing co-educational schools.

5. What building adaptations would be required?

Over recent years, Pioneer Educational Trust has invested over £5 million into the Desborough College estate. As a result, there would be minimal building adaptations required, with the school now benefiting from a new canteen, upgraded changing room facilities, gym, playgrounds, and specialist classrooms, including food technology, design and technology, science laboratories, a drama studio, music rooms, art spaces, and a dedicated hub for pastoral care and another for learning support. The school already has multiple sets of toilets and changing rooms. Modifications and refurbishments would be made to the toilets and changing rooms to ensure they are single sex, in line with DfE guidance.

6. What curriculum changes would be required?

The school has expertise in delivering the full National Curriculum. This curriculum is not designed for any one gender and is an entitlement for all pupils, irrespective of their background or identity. Desborough would continue to deliver its ambitious curriculum. Girls and boys would have access to the same broad curriculum, subject choices and academic opportunities and expectations would be equally high for every student. As part of the school's ongoing work to review the curriculum, schemes of work would be reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of a co-educational cohort.

The PE curriculum and associated changing arrangements would be carefully planned to ensure suitable provision for all students.

As part of the transition, the school would review the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of a co-educational cohort, and we would carry out the necessary consultation with parents and carers, as required by statutory guidance, before any changes are introduced.

7. How would Desborough support the first co-educational Year 7 cohort?

Desborough College would prepare early by working closely with primary schools and providing open events where parents and carers would have the chance to meet staff, ask questions and input their ideas well before joining.

Desborough would plan the first year with care. Pastoral structures, form groups and the timetable would be designed with a mixed cohort in mind. Pupils would have trusted adults and clear routes for support from day one.

Preparations for the site would be made well in advance. Changing rooms, toilets and other facilities would be adapted and ready before the first cohort arrives, and we would communicate with pupils and parents on these plans.

Desborough would review its offer to ensure that it is broad and inclusive. Enrichment, clubs, sport and pupil leadership would reflect the interests of all pupils, and we would seek the views of the first cohort as it develops.

Importantly, we would gather feedback from pupils, parents and staff during the first year and adjust our approach in response. This would be a highly collaborative process with all our stakeholder groups.

8. **How would Desborough support the boys-only year groups as younger groups are co-educational?**

Pupils already at Desborough would continue to follow the same broad and balanced curriculum that has been planned for them. Our expectations of them, academically and personally, would not change, and their teachers, tutors and pastoral teams would remain in place.

Because the school would grow into co-education in one year group at a time, existing pupils would not experience a sudden change. Leaders would continue to plan cross-year activities such as house events, clubs, sport, performances, mentoring and leadership roles. These would help new and existing pupils get to know one another and would give older pupils the chance to act as role models. Existing pupils would also be communicated with and listened to as plans develop, so their views can be considered as the change is introduced.

9. **How would Desborough support staff to teach and support co-educational classes, especially staff who have worked in single-sex schools for a long time?**

We have a strong staff body, and we do not expect co-education to change the subject expertise or pastoral care needed to deliver Desborough's curriculum and support pupils' personal development and wellbeing. Good teaching is good teaching, and the fundamentals of high expectations, clear explanations, strong relationships and consistent routines would be the same.

As part of the process of change, we would engage in careful planning. Workforce planning and professional development would be part of the implementation process so that every member of staff feels confident and prepared before the first co-educational cohort arrives.

Desborough would also benefit from being part of Pioneer Educational Trust, where professional development is a strength. Staff already learn alongside colleagues within the school and across Pioneer's other schools through shared training programmes, subject networks and opportunities to observe practice.

10. **Would the first Year 7 cohort definitely be those students who join in 2028 (the current Year 5)?**

That is our proposal based upon an assumption that the Department for Education would make their decision in spring 2027. This would mean that the first co-educational Year 7 cohort at Desborough would be current year 5 pupils, and parents would apply for a Year 7 place in autumn 2027.

If the Department for Education decision was significantly delayed, it is possible that the first co-educational cohort would be delayed until September 2029. We would confirm this before September 2027 so that parents know whether Desborough would be co-educational in September 2028 before they make their admissions preferences.

We are also consulting upon the necessary changes to our admissions arrangements, with our proposed policy for September 2028 available here. The Department for Education requires that we determine these by 28 February 2027; if their decision about co-education has not been made by then, we can apply to vary the admissions arrangements.

Desborough would make sure to keep families and the community informed throughout the process.

11. Would the uniform change?

The school's current uniform for boys would remain unchanged. The school would review the uniform item list to ensure it offers appropriate, practical and affordable options for all students, including girls, and retain the strong and recognisable Desborough identity. Pupils, parents and carers would be consulted as part of any review, and any changes would be introduced with plenty of notice and with cost in mind. Existing pupils would not be expected to replace their current uniform as a result of this change.

Considerations and implications of becoming co-educational or remaining a single-sex school

12. What are the considerations and implications of remaining as a boys' school?

The following have considered if Desborough is to remain a single-sex school:

- Families who want a place for a daughter and a son at the same school currently cannot achieve that at Desborough, which affects how well the school serves the local community;
- If parental preference for co-educational schools continues, the school's numbers may fall, which would put pressure on the school's finances and on the breadth of what it can offer;
- A smaller and less stable roll could limit the range of subjects, especially at post-16, and make it harder to recruit and retain specialist staff;
- Boys at a single-sex school have fewer natural opportunities to learn and work alongside girls, which reflects the environment they will enter in later life; and
- A school that does not reflect local demand may be less sustainable in the longer term.

We recognise that a boys' school has strengths, and this consultation asks for views on how those weigh against the considerations outlined above.

13. What are the considerations and implications of becoming co-educational?

The following have considered if Desborough were to become co-educational:

- To ensure continuity of identity and ethos, we propose that Desborough's values, high expectations and strong identity would remain at the heart of the school. Because co-education would be introduced gradually, the existing culture would carry forward, and we would involve pupils and parents in shaping it;
- To reduce any feelings of uncertainty for existing pupils and families, the proposal is to change to co-education gradually, beginning with Year 7 only. Girls will continue to be admitted into the sixth form. Existing pupils would keep their curriculum, staff and expectations, and we would communicate clearly with them throughout;

- In the event of admitting a small first cohort of girls, we would plan to put in place strong pastoral support, peer networks, mentoring and welcoming transition activities, and carefully monitor how the first cohort settles, ensuring regular communication with families;
- To ensure the staff are prepared, workforce planning and professional development would form part of the implementation process, with support from other Pioneer schools that have co-educational experience (see question 9);
- We have considered that some changes would need to be made to the school's facilities and site. Changing rooms, toilets and other facilities would be adapted before the first cohort arrives, with capital planning built into the implementation process;
- In planning for a mixed cohort, we would proactively review and update safeguarding and behaviour policies, and put in place staff training to ensure a safe and positive culture for all. Our approach would be informed by effective practice already existing in other co-educational Pioneer schools;
- To continue to ensure positive educational outcomes, we would carefully and proactively monitor attainment, attendance, behaviour and wellbeing for each cohort, and act quickly where necessary to support every pupil to achieve their potential; and
- Our proposal has been designed to minimise disruption and ensure affordability by planning a phased implementation and funding within the school's plans. Progress would be monitored and reported to governors and trustees.

The consultation and decision process

14. Who is able to respond to the consultation?

Anyone with an interest in the proposal is welcome to respond. We especially want to hear from:

- Parents and carers of current Desborough pupils;
- Parents and carers of children in local primary schools, particularly current Year 4, 5 and 6 pupils;
- Current pupils;
- Desborough staff and governors;
- Other schools, colleges and education providers in the area;
- Local residents, community groups and other interested organisations; and
- The Local Authority, local councillors and MP

You can respond by:

- Completing the online questionnaire that is available here
- Emailing your views to: consultation@desborough-college.net
- Writing to the Headteacher at the school address (Shoppenhangers Road, Maidenhead, SL6 2QB).

The consultation runs from 1 October 2026 to 13 November 2026.

15. How will consultation responses inform the decision about whether to proceed?

Every response will be read and taken seriously. After the consultation closes, the trust will analyse the responses and produce a report that summarises the views received, the key themes and any concerns raised. This will be considered alongside other evidence, such as pupil numbers, local demand, educational and financial considerations, and the practicalities of implementation.

The consultation is not a vote. It is a way of making sure the decision-makers understand the range of views, and it may lead to changes in how the proposal would be implemented, or in whether it goes ahead. We will publish a summary of the responses and explain how they were taken into account in the decision.

16. Who would make the decision about whether Desborough becomes co-educational?

The trust board of Pioneer Educational Trust, which is responsible for Desborough, would consider the consultation outcome and decide whether to proceed. Because this would be a significant change to an academy, the trust must submit an application to the Department for Education, and the final decision would rest with the Regional Director. Any changes to admission arrangements would also need to follow the statutory admissions process as set out in the School Admissions Code.