

Inspection of a good school: Desborough College

Shoppenhangers Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 2QB

Inspection dates:

16 and 17 May 2024

Outcome

Desborough College continues to be a good school.

The headteacher of this school is Andy Murdoch. This school is part of the Pioneer Educational Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Antonia Spinks, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Mark Jervis.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils benefit from the recently broadened curriculum and reshaped pastoral programmes throughout the school. These aim to help pupils to succeed academically and become well-rounded individuals. Most pupils gain the knowledge and skills needed for later life. The revamped sixth-form study centre supports students in working more responsibly and independently.

Most pupils enjoy their learning and achieve well. Outside of regular lessons, pupils can access a broad range of extra-curricular activities, clubs and trips. The house system is an important aspect of school life, and pupils enjoy the opportunities it provides to participate in competitive activities, such as speedball.

Pupils generally conduct themselves well. They are polite and friendly. Pupils understand the behaviour systems and say they work most of the time. Lessons are sometimes interrupted by a minority of pupils, but staff usually deal quickly with any poor behaviour. Social times are orderly, but there is some boisterous behaviour in corridors during lesson transitions. Bullying and discriminatory language are never tolerated. If they happen, any incidents are dealt with quickly. As a result, pupils feel confident that pastoral staff will help resolve issues.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Pupils, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve well in most subjects. Over time, GCSE results in mathematics and science have been above national averages. The school

has taken effective actions to raise standards in the small number of subjects where pupils do not achieve as well. In English, for example, current pupils are now gaining secure knowledge and skills through the carefully planned and well-delivered curriculum. The school has responded to a rather mixed set of A-Level results in 2023. New leadership has improved students' attendance and instilled higher expectations for independent study.

Overall, the curriculum is well planned and delivered. Staff know their subjects well and teach with enthusiasm that engages pupils. They mostly plan activities that build on what pupils have been taught before and check carefully that important knowledge has been learned. The 'fast start' routine is consistently embedded across the school, supporting pupils to revisit previous learning. Sixth-form students benefit from precise feedback and tailored support, which helps them achieve well. Some subjects have new leadership, and consequently, the curriculum thinking is less well developed, and pupils' learning is not always as secure.

The school is prioritising improving the support that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive. Staff receive regular training and are well informed about these pupils' needs. Many pupils achieve well as a result of the support they receive. However, staff do not consistently adapt their teaching to support pupils with SEND to achieve their very best. Sometimes, these pupils struggle to complete their classwork because it is not broken down into small enough steps for them to be successful.

The school is successfully fostering a culture of reading. The library lessons in key stage 3 are a standout feature, enhancing pupils' reading fluency and comprehension. Pupils' development in reading is meticulously checked through their reading logs. Weaker readers receive focused additional support, including phonics assistance, which aids in their rapid catch-up. Pupils now read together in morning tutor time, but there are some variations in the implementation of this new initiative.

The newly developed behaviour policy sets high expectations for pupils' conduct. The pastoral team follows up quickly on any poor behaviour and bullying. Staff provide targeted support for those pupils who need further help to improve their behaviour or attendance. However, the behaviour of a minority of pupils continues to fall short of the school's expectations. This happens most frequently in cover lessons and when staff do not implement the behaviour policy as consistently as leaders intend.

The school has made changes to strengthen the provision for pupils' personal development. Morning tutor times have been extended to provide more time for pupils to gain important life skills. The personal, social, health and economic curriculum is comprehensive and well planned, including in the sixth form. Pupils learn to value and respect diversity, form healthy relationships and how to stay safe.

Pupils are well prepared for life beyond school. Careers guidance is extensive, helping pupils sustain their post-16 education or training. Sixth-form students receive an extensive support programme to prepare them for applications and interviews. As a result, high proportions of students successfully enter further education, employment or training.

The trust provides valuable expertise and support to school leaders, governors and staff. Staff benefit from extensive training and leadership development opportunities and appreciate the steps leaders take to reduce their workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Consistent practice is not yet embedded in some areas of the school's provision. This includes the use of assessment in some subjects and the implementation of some aspects of the tutor time reading programme. As a result, there are variations in pupils' learning and experiences. Leaders should ensure that the good practice within the school is shared and that approaches are refined to achieve consistency across the school.
- Staff do not consistently adapt their teaching for pupils with SEND. This means the achievement of these pupils is variable. The school should ensure that staff are equipped with the knowledge and skills to adapt their teaching and rigorously check that pupils with SEND learn as well as they could.
- Some pupils have not yet developed the positive attitudes to learning and the school's values that leaders intend. As a result, their behaviour in lessons and around the school falls short of the schools' high expectations. The school should continue to raise the expectations of behaviour and ensure that all staff implement the behaviour system effectively.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in February 2019.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' is used to mean pupils with SEND; pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	138879
Local authority	Windsor and Maidenhead
Inspection number	10321963
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	727
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	79
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Mark Jervis
Headteacher	Andy Murdoch
Website	www.desborough.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 February 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Since the last inspection, the school has had two headteachers. The current headteacher joined the school in September 2022.
- The school officially joined the Pioneer Educational Trust in April 2023, although it had been working with the trust for two years prior to this date.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.
- Some students in the sixth form attend some of their lessons in other schools as part of a local consortium arrangement.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with a range of leaders, including the headteacher and senior leaders. They also met with representatives from the trust and the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and look at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils work in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- In addition, inspectors considered a range of information, including the school's plans for improvement and behaviour records.
- Inspectors considered the views of members of staff who responded to Ofsted's online staff survey. The views of parents were taken into account from the responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey and free-text responses. Inspectors met with groups of pupils formally and informally to discuss their views of the school and considered their responses to the Ofsted survey.

Inspection team

Mark Bagust, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Jane Cartwright

Ofsted Inspector

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