

Inspection of Denefield School

Long Lane, Tilehurst, Reading, Berkshire RG31 6XY

Inspection dates: 1 and 2 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Previous inspection grade Good

The headteacher of this school is Edwin Towill. This school is part of The Denefield School Single Academy Trust. The trust is overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Trevor Keable.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is an inclusive and caring school, which is ambitious for all its pupils. There are high expectations of what pupils can achieve, including those with additional needs. Pupils study a rich range of subjects in all key stages. They produce work of an increasingly high standard in Years 7 to 11. This includes many pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils achieve well. A few pupils follow a personalised curriculum. These are carefully put together, based on what is in each pupil's best interests.

Pupils appreciate the school's excellent pastoral provision. This support helps pupils to meet the school's high expectations, including of behaviour. Consequently, pupils behave well. They are polite and respectful to each other, and to adults.

The school's 'Success For Life' programme helps pupils to navigate the increasingly complex world they live in. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and healthy, including online and in relationships. They also learn about people who are different from themselves. The school does not shy away from discussing sensitive subjects with pupils. It approaches these themes very thoughtfully. The sixth-form programme is appropriate but does not yet have the depth seen lower down the school.

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

Over recent years, the school has developed its curriculum, so that it is more ambitious for all pupils, including in the sixth form. Subject teams have used research to refine their thinking. They have clarified what pupils must know and remember at each point. In addition, they often draw on real life experiences to bring the content to life for pupils. Across the curriculum, teachers have secure subject knowledge, and their explanations and demonstrations are clear. Most teachers select appropriate activities which help pupils to remember important knowledge and check this is the case. Teachers' checking for pupils' depth of understanding is still evolving.

Where subject teams have precisely considered how knowledge and skills connect over time, then teachers expose pupils to a range of complex questions and problems. This allows pupils to demonstrate how effectively they can apply what they have learned. However, this is not yet consistent in key stages 3 and 4, though much stronger in the sixth form.

Staff are committed to establishing inclusive classrooms, so that all pupils can learn together. The school has clear expectations for classroom routines. These underpin positive and calm lessons and positive relationships in lessons. The school identifies the needs of pupils with SEND accurately. This information is shared with staff. In most cases, teachers use this information to make effective adjustments for individuals. However, there is some variability and sometimes pupils' needs are not met as well as they could be. In these cases, pupils with additional needs could achieve more highly.

The school places a high priority on reading and has a very well-considered strategy in place. Pupils who are not yet fluent readers make strong progress. Staff swiftly and precisely identify their gaps, and they receive targeted help. Sixth-form students also provide support through the buddy reading programme. Pupils are exposed to high-quality novels during their tutor reading programme. The well-stocked and well-used library is a hub of reading which is open to all.

Pupils' wider personal development is very important to the school. The quality of provision is excellent in key stages 3 and 4. It is evolving in the sixth form. Pupils explore spiritual, moral, social and cultural themes through the school's 'Success For Life' programme and through the wider curriculum. Careers education activities are carefully thought through and run from Year 7 to Year 13. They support all pupils to make appropriate and informed choices about their next steps. Pupils value careers education and guidance.

The school runs a wide range of trips, in this country and abroad. There is also an extensive and very popular extra-curricular programme. The school recognises it would benefit from more continuity of provision between the main school and the sixth form. For example, personal development is currently evolving to provide more leadership opportunities for sixth formers. Staff aim that this will inspire younger pupils and bring the whole school community further together.

Trustees know the school well and hold leaders to account robustly. They take their statutory duties extremely seriously and always put pupils first. Staff benefit from thoughtful professional development. Teachers at the start of their career receive strong support. The school has taken action to promote staff well-being and help reduce workload. Staff enjoy working at the school and are proud to do so.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Assessment is not yet used consistently well. It is not always focused on the depth and connectedness of pupils' understanding of what they have been taught. Consequently, there are some gaps in pupils' knowledge that hinders their success as tasks become more complex. The school needs to develop its assessment approaches and ensure that all staff are supported to implement them consistently well.
- In some areas of the curriculum, pupils with SEND do not fully access learning activities. Consequently, these pupils do not achieve as highly as they could. The school should ensure that all staff implement appropriate and effective adaptations for pupils with additional needs.

- Strategies for promoting personal development in the sixth form are not yet fully embedded. This means that some sixth-form students do not always develop the range of independent and age-appropriate personal and social skills they could. The school should ensure that all students take part in a range of meaningful opportunities, where they can take responsibility and contribute to the school and the wider community.

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 special educational needs and/or disabilities (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	137777
Local authority	West Berkshire
Inspection number	10268785
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1132
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	157
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Trevor Keable
Headteacher	Edwin Towill
Website	www.denefield.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is a single academy trust.
- The school uses two registered and two unregistered alternative providers to meet the needs of a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- 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 the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the school, members of staff and pupils. The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the trust and some trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, languages and art. 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 looked at samples of pupils’ work.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 and puts pupils’ interest first.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. They considered parents’ and carers’ responses to Ofsted’s online survey, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also took account of responses to the staff and pupil surveys.

Inspection team

Mary Davies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Ben Bond	Ofsted Inspector
Ginny Rhodes	Ofsted Inspector
Jason Philipsz	Ofsted Inspector
Philip Wayne	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Kearsy	Ofsted Inspector

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