

Inspection of an outstanding school: Dacorum Education Support Centre

30 Tenzing Road, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire HP2 4HS

Inspection dates: 24 and 25 May 2023

Outcome

Dacorum Education Support Centre continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive and flourish attending Dacorum Education Support Centre (DESC). They learn to behave and improve their self-esteem. All pupils have had negative experiences in their previous schools. Most successfully return to their original school after working through a 12-week programme. Others are well supported to move to another appropriate placement. Some older pupils remain at DESC for up to two years, gaining GCSEs and other qualifications.

Pupils have a warm relationship with the adults in charge. The youngest have good behaviour clearly modelled, for example taking turns and listening to others. Older pupils' lessons are more relaxed to help build their confidence, but with high academic expectations. Pupils understand and follow the two simple rules, 'let learners learn, let teachers teach' and, 'be in the right place at the right time'.

Behaviour is excellent because staff know the pupils well. Pupils are supported to be able to avoid the things that make them upset or angry. When pupils are showing negative behaviour, staff calm them down quickly and get them back to learning. Clear, consistent systems and routines help this be highly effective. Bullying is rare but dealt with effectively when it does happen. Pupils feel, and are, safe.

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

Pupils are successfully re-engaged in education. They learn how to improve their behaviour. They, and teachers in their home/next schools, receive excellent support and guidance. As a result, most pupils succeed in their long-term school placements.

Staff undertake comprehensive assessments of pupils' academic and social and emotional needs. They work closely with families to ensure that barriers to learning are addressed. They provide pupils with high-quality interventions, for example finding texts that will motivate pupils to read.

Pupils in key stage 4 benefit from small, specialist rooms for learning, with lots of break out spaces. Their curriculum is well designed, addressing previous gaps in learning, leading to GCSEs wherever possible. Teachers deliver high quality-education. Interventions help engage pupils with learning and improve important skills, such as reading and mathematics, very well.

Many pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders make sure that individual plans are detailed and appropriately updated during pupils' time at DESC. Work for all pupils, including those with SEND, is individually adapted as needed. As a result, pupils make excellent progress towards their own targets.

The key stage 4 pupils work in 'pods' each morning, focusing on personal, social and health education (PSHE). Key themes that pupils need to know about, such as peer pressure, are repeated regularly. Leaders ensure that a range of cultural themes are also covered, such as religious celebrations. Pupils go on many relevant and inspiring trips out to places, such as museums. Pupils develop strong teamwork skills working with the Prince's Trust, with several achieving national awards over the last few years.

Pupils are well prepared for adulthood and future employment or education. Work placements give them tasters of future possibilities. They volunteer, for example, with organisations for disabled riders. Pupils move to a range of destinations, to mainstream sixth forms, colleges, and apprenticeships. Leaders support pupils after they have left DESC, both in giving advice about those back in school, and being a point of contact for pupils post-16.

DESC's work goes well beyond that of being a school. Their outreach services and programmes to support pupils struggling in mainstream schools have a positive impact on a wide set of pupils. These are valued by local headteachers.

Leaders work together as a close team. Staff feel very well supported. Leaders have adapted the appraisal process to focus on individual projects as part of the overall development plan. Staff highly value this and the other training they receive. Governors bring a wealth of skills to effectively support and challenge school leaders.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff have had extensive training in how to support vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils. They are highly vigilant for any concerns. They know, and can spot, the signs that pupils might be at risk of harm.

Leaders work closely with different agencies, including children's services and youth offending teams.

All appropriate actions are undertaken in a timely way when there are concerns about pupils. Staff teach key topics such as knife crime and gang awareness on a regular basis to help pupils understand the risks these present.

All appropriate employment checks are made on members of staff.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in January 2013.

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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	131100
Local authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	10199985
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral unit
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	41
Appropriate authority	Local authority
Chair	
Headteacher	Sara Lalis
Website	www.desc.herts.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	14 and 15 September 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is based on two sites, the registered site and that for key stage 4 at Barncroft Campus, Washington Avenue, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, HP2 6NG.
- The school provides outreach services and alternative provision placements, funded by both the local authority and by individual schools.
- Some of the alternative provision placements are a 12-week programme, aiming to either re-integrate pupils into their original school, or find an appropriate other placement.
- Some pupils are placed at the school for a short time having been excluded from other schools.
- Pupils in key stage 4 attend DESC full-time, although they may be dual rolled with another school.
- There are currently six pupils who are solely on the DESC school roll. There are 35 pupils who are dual rolled with another school.
- The school uses four unregistered alternative education providers to supplement a small part of some pupils' education.

Information about this inspection

- 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 met with the headteacher and other members of the leadership team. They met with members of staff. They also spoke with members of the governing body, local headteachers and local authority representatives.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and PSHE. For each subject, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, examined pupils' work and spoke with teachers and pupils.
- Inspectors also visited a range of other subject lessons and spoke to pupils. An inspector visited two of the alternative education providers.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors scrutinised the single central record and a wide range of documentation, including safeguarding files. Inspectors spoke to leaders, including the designated safeguarding leaders, staff and pupils.
- Inspectors considered the four responses, including free-text responses, to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View. They considered the 37 responses to the Ofsted staff survey and the 9 responses to the pupil survey.

Inspection team

Tessa Holledge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Steve Mellors

His Majesty's Inspector

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