

Inspection of an outstanding school: Didcot Girls' School

Manor Crescent, Didcot, Oxfordshire OX11 7AJ

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 November 2022

Outcome

Didcot Girls' School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Didcot Girls' School is a vibrant and happy place to work and learn. Parents and pupils are extremely positive about the school. Leaders' aim is to 'empower girls to become resilient and to fulfil their potential as future leaders'. Staff and pupils work together to make this aspiration a reality. Pupils achieve exceptionally well both academically and in terms of personal development. This includes those who are disadvantaged and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, and relationships are respectful, including in the sixth form. Bullying is extremely rare and staff deal with it very well. Pupils receive high-quality care and support, and pupils feel safe in school. They know that their voices are heard.

Pupils embrace the school's values of respect, inclusivity and having high expectations. They work hard in lessons but also participate enthusiastically in all aspects of school life. The selection of activities outside the classroom is extensive, including clubs, leadership opportunities and trips. The 270-strong 'Young Voices' choir is just one example of the commitment pupils show to the school, and also the joy these activities bring. As one pupil said, 'This is a community, not just a school.'

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

The school is highly ambitious for every pupil. Leaders value academic success and strong personal growth equally. They are committed to nurturing and inspiring interests across the board. They want the girls to have as many choices as possible when they leave. Pupils therefore study a wide range of subjects. Sixth-form students have 30 options about what to study, thanks to the trust's shared provision. Subject leaders have mapped out what pupils must learn at each point thoughtfully. Teachers use their strong subject knowledge and expertise to ensure that new learning is presented and practised in interesting and effective ways. Teachers carefully check pupils' understanding before moving on. They also provide helpful feedback to pupils. Consequently, pupils can remember what they have learned and can apply it fluently. They build the strong

foundations and confidence required to take on increasingly complex tasks. They consistently produce work to a very high standard.

Pupils with SEND receive excellent support. They follow the same curriculum as their peers. Teaching is adapted for pupils expertly based on clear information about their needs. These pupils participate well in class and produce high-quality work. When needed, pupils receive personalised academic or emotional support. Leaders provide effective interventions in school. They also work with external specialists and partners on bespoke programmes.

The school values reading highly. Staff are well trained and know pupils' reading ability. This helps teachers to select texts and approaches appropriately. Pupils enjoy reading in class and for pleasure. If pupils need help with reading, staff accurately identify the nature of any gaps. These pupils then receive timely and targeted support from specially trained staff.

Pupils' exemplary behaviour is fostered by the school's culture. There are shared high expectations for behaviour. Rules are clear and responses to incidents are consistent and fair. However, such incidents are rare. This is because good character, decency and respect, for themselves and others, are embedded in the fabric of the school. Consequently, lessons are calm and the atmosphere around the site is positive, purposeful and friendly. Where pupils need help to meet these expectations, staff provide effective support.

Pupils' wider development has a high priority, including in the sixth form. The personal development curriculum is very well organised. Pupils enjoy discussing the different topics and do so very maturely. The range of clubs and activities provided outside lessons is impressive, with many suggested or led by pupils. The school's 'Leadership Ladder' provides pupils with a raft of ways to demonstrate their values and good character. Pupils are challenged to take responsibility for themselves and others. They wear the badges they earn with immense pride. Careers education is strong. Pupils are very well prepared for the future. Many sixth-form students progress to university courses or apprenticeships, often returning to inspire the next generation. Leaders successfully ensure that disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND are similarly aspirational and have equal access to all parts of the personal development programme.

Those responsible for governance and senior leaders have taken practical steps to streamline teachers' workload. Leaders support staff very well. They have established a collaborative and respectful working environment. With the trust, they provide highly valued training and leadership programmes. Staff are exceptionally proud to work at the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding is a strength of the school. Governors take seriously their safeguarding duties. They work closely with staff to embed a strong culture of vigilance supported by

robust policies and procedures. The designated safeguarding leader (DSL) and her team are high profile in the school. They provide effective safeguarding training and updates. Staff know what to do if they have concerns about pupils. Record-keeping is thorough. Safeguarding staff work tenaciously to secure support for vulnerable pupils. Parents say that their children feel safe in school. Pupils trust that staff will take seriously their concerns and deal with them well.

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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in November 2015.

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	138490
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10199471
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Girls
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1562
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	215
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Marcus Gover
Headteacher	Georgina Littler
Website	www.didcotgirls.oxon.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 and 25 November 2015, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the Ridgeway Education Trust.
- The school uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school shares its sixth form, known as Didcot Sixth Form, with the nearby boys' school, St Birinus School. That school is inspected separately. In this inspection, inspectors took account only of the provision for the girls in the sixth form. There are 215 female students who attend this provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 11 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 carried out deep dives in the following subjects: English, science, history and music. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding leader, examined school records and discussed safeguarding cases.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documentation, including governor minutes, policies and records for behaviour management, attendance and bullying. Inspectors also reviewed documents related to the alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors observed pupils at different times during the school day, including form time, assemblies and breaktimes and lunchtimes.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of pupils from different year groups and considered their responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors met with the special educational needs coordinator to discuss the provision for pupils with SEND. During the lessons visited, they looked at the support these pupils were receiving.
- Inspectors considered the responses to the confidential staff survey. They took account of the responses to the online survey for parents, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Mary Davies, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Taj Bhambra	Ofsted Inspector
John Burridge	Ofsted Inspector

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