

The Dorcan Academy

St Paul's Drive, Covingham, Swindon SN3 5DA

Inspection dates 26–27 November 2013

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected	
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an academy that requires improvement

- Students' attainment is broadly similar to the national average. It is higher in English than in mathematics, but the gap between the two subjects is closing. There are some indications that progress is starting to improve in English and mathematics across the school, including at GCSE level. Given their starting points, achievement for all groups of students requires improvement.
- Teaching is too variable in quality and some is characterised by low expectations and a slow pace. Marking of work does not always offer sufficient advice to students about how they can improve. While better lessons offer opportunities for students to work independently, this is inconsistent. However, teachers have good subject understanding and foster positive relationships.
- Leaders and managers have developed effective methods to check up on the academy, using assessment data and the checks undertaken on classroom activities. However, senior staff do not utilise this information with sufficient rigour to eliminate the inconsistencies in teaching, promote better classroom practice and accelerate students' achievement.
- Governors have a developing understanding of the academy's strengths and weaknesses and are starting to ask relevant questions. However, they do not yet sufficiently challenge the academy to raise achievement.

The academy has the following strengths

- Behaviour is good and classrooms are calm places to learn. Students relate well to one another and are courteous and mature. They report bullying of all kinds, including homophobic bullying, is virtually unknown and any incidents are quickly 'nipped in the bud' by staff.
- The academy offers a wide range of subjects and activities to meet students' needs, aptitudes and interests. It offers very good advice and guidance and provides good opportunities for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 35 lessons taught by 34 teachers and undertook 17 joint observations with senior staff.
- Inspectors held discussions with students, teachers, the headteacher, senior and middle managers and representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors examined numerous school documents, including policies, assessment information, planning documents and records of all kinds.
- The views of 37 parents and carers were analysed through the Ofsted Parent View website.

Inspection team

John Carnaghan, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Paula Sargent	Additional Inspector
Beverly Dobson	Additional Inspector
Ian Tustain	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- This is an average-sized comprehensive school. It became an academy in December 2011.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium (additional funding for looked-after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those from service families) is above the national average.
- The proportions of pupils from minority ethnic groups and those whose first language is not English are below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs supported through school action is average. The proportion of pupils supported at school action plus or with a statement of special educational needs is also average.
- The school has alternative provision in the Oakfield Project for a small group of vulnerable Key Stage 4 students who face social and emotional issues.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress in English and mathematics.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise students' attainment and accelerate their progress by ensuring that more teaching is at least good by:
 - making sure that all lessons challenge students fully and run at a brisk pace
 - marking work so that it provides clear guidance to all students in all subjects about the next steps in their learning
 - planning lessons so that they provide students with varied, interesting experiences that promote an independent approach to their learning.
- Leaders, managers and governors should build on already established methods that check up on the academy to ensure that teaching has greater consistency, fewer weaknesses and provides a higher proportion of good and outstanding lessons.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Students' attainment, including in English and mathematics, is similar to the national average. Although there have been some fluctuations since the academy was established at the end of 2011, and there was a rise in attainment in some areas in 2013, this was inconsistent and English and mathematics attainment levels at the end of Key Stage 4 remained largely static.
- The rate of progress made by students is similar to that of students across the country. The academy has made slow headway in improving the quality of teaching. In consequence, students make no better than satisfactory progress in too many lessons. This is reflected in the limited gains made in the proportions of students meeting the national expectations for progress in English and mathematics in 2013; these success rates remain at average levels.
- Challenge for higher attaining students in lessons is inconsistent, but is best in English and mathematics where the proportion of students making faster than expected progress rose significantly last year. Given their starting points, students' achievement requires improvement.
- The school uses assessment data effectively to identify students who need additional support and students speak warmly of the mentoring and other assistance that they receive. The work of teaching assistants is particularly effective in supporting disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs and enables this group to make similar progress to their peers. This helps to ensure consistency of progress across all groups of students, promotes equality of opportunity and ensures that there is no discrimination.
- Students who receive additional Year 7 catch-up funding benefit from a number of initiatives that seek to raise their attainment, particularly in reading and writing. The school uses assessment information to keep careful checks on these students' progress and this confirms that these students make good gains in basic literacy and numeracy skills. This provides them with better access to the mixture of subjects they encounter in secondary education. The achievement of students who were entered early for GCSE mathematics has been analysed by the school and found to be no better than other students; in consequence, there are no early entries planned for 2014.
- The academy checks very carefully on the small number of Years 10 and 11 students who attend the off-site Oakfield centre for their education. Progress information on each individual is carefully gathered and compared with progress of students of a similar age in the academy; this indicates their achievement differs little from that of their peers.
- Students in receipt of additional pupil premium funding benefit from a number of well thought out initiatives to accelerate their progress. Their attainment is similar to, or better than, pupil premium students nationally. In comparison with their peers at Dorcan, in 2012, students were two terms behind in English and four terms behind in mathematics. However, in last summer's GCSE examinations, this gap narrowed.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teachers' lesson planning is inconsistent. One consequence of this is that some lessons do not provide sufficient challenge for all groups. Another result arising from ineffective planning is that learning objectives are unclear or insufficiently rigorous.
- Time planning is a weakness in some lessons, leading to students not always being challenged to work at their optimum pace. This means there are too many pedestrian lessons where learning is no more than adequate and the rate of progress requires improvement.
- Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to question pupils to establish what they have grasped and what needs coverage in greater depth. Opportunities to question, to develop students' deeper thinking, are missed in weaker lessons. As a result, tasks and explanations are not regularly reshaped to promote better learning.
- In some lessons, students are the recipients of learning rather than active, independent

participants. Teachers do not always do enough to foster independent learning or to build students' problem solving skills. This is regrettable because student behaviour and appetite for learning are usually strong.

- Marking of students' work is variable. Some is thoroughly undertaken and students receive good advice about their next steps. However, in too many books, marking is infrequent and does not offer enough analysis of how well students are doing or provide clear guidance about what requires improvement.
- There are strengths in teaching, too. Staff promote a positive climate for learning and manage students with assurance; their good subject understanding and love of their subject frequently inspires confidence in students.
- Some teachers promote independence well. For example, a Year 10 history lesson on Puritan England was taken by four students who had prepared a presentation and tasks for the rest of the class to develop their understanding. The teacher, acting in role as a student, asked relevant questions, kept the pace high with subtle interventions and checked all students were fully on board with their work. An excellent atmosphere promoted collaborative learning and ensured that all made good progress.

The behaviour and safety of pupils is good

- Students in this academy are courteous and welcoming. Students from all backgrounds get along notably well together and have positive, appreciative relationships with staff.
- Behaviour around the school is calm and sensible, replicating that in lessons. Students report very little disruption to learning and most know and appreciate the clear, stepped sanctions that are in place to address any minor difficulties.
- Very occasionally, behaviour in lessons can be too passive; for example, sometimes students will complete what is asked of them, but do no more than that, failing to demonstrate their usually strong thirst for knowledge.
- Students report that the school is a safe place where students and staff are always available to offer help if required. They are well briefed on keeping safe in their everyday lives and, for example, have a good grasp of how to avoid the potential dangers of the internet.
- Parents, staff and students agree that bullying is most unusual. Students say that staff react quickly and effectively if they suspect any victimisation. Students are aware of all types of bullying and show a mature approach, understanding the possibility of, for example, homophobic bullying, while reporting that it does not occur at Dorcan.
- Students agree that the quality of pastoral care and advice at the school is a great strength. The school offers good opportunities for students to play their part in promoting a harmonious community, for example by training in peer mediation.
- The academy has thorough procedures for monitoring attendance and reducing absence rates. As a result, attendance for all groups at the school has improved over the last year and is now running at similar levels to the national average. Effective systems for managing recalcitrant behaviour and the good support for students who have difficulties in this area have significantly reduced exclusions.

The leadership and management requires improvement

- The headteacher and senior leaders have worked closely together to improve the accuracy and frequency of the checks they make. The academy has sophisticated methods to follow up on students' progress and to maintain a view of the quality of teaching. Leaders and managers have started to use this information to support students. It is also used to challenge staff and to help build a skilled team of teachers, but this process has been too slow to impact on students' achievement. However, these systems ensure the academy has the capacity to improve.
- The reason for the limitations to the impact of leadership and management is because senior

staff have not followed up on inconsistencies in teaching with sufficient rigour. The result is that there is wide variation in the quality of teaching and too many lessons do too little to promote rapid progress. Variations in the way staff plan lessons and mark books have not been fully addressed.

- As a stand-alone academy, Dorcan receives effective statutory support from the local authority.
- Middle managers are beginning to become more involved in whole school issues and to take responsibility for elements of the well-structured school improvement plan. However, there remains some inconsistency in the rigour of their approach too, so that, for example, the effectiveness of some departments in promoting higher achievement is considerably stronger than in others.
- The range of subjects Dorcan offers meets the needs of its learners and offers a great flexibility of choice to students. There is a good variety of academic and vocational options in Key Stage 4 that engage students' interest, including the introduction of new subjects such as psychology. Intervention programmes are well planned to develop students' competence in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The academy provides very good information and advice for students as they end their time at Dorcan. Year 11 students spoke appreciatively of the guidance they have received about future pathways; almost all students leave Year 11 to go on to further education and training. A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, including in sport and the arts, promote moral, social and cultural understanding. A well-planned taught programme, including in assembly and tutor periods, promotes these areas as well as encouraging spiritual reflection and consideration for others.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Members of the governing body make regular checks on the school through visits, meetings with staff and analysis of student performance data. They bring a range of useful skills to the academy; these are supplemented by regular training. Governors have developed a largely accurate picture of where improvements are required in teaching and learning and how teachers' performance is linked to their salary progression. They know the place of performance management in ensuring teaching weaknesses are tackled. They have a reasonable grasp of achievement at the academy, but are less secure of where this stands in relation to national norms. This undermines their confidence to challenge the more optimistic elements of the academy's self-evaluation. Members approve how pupil premium funding is allocated and review the impact of this to ensure it provides good value for money. A designated governor keeps a close eye on health and safety and helps to ensure that the academy meets all safeguarding requirements.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	137684
Local authority	N/A
Inspection number	426795

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	909
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Bell
Headteacher	Scott Sissons
Date of previous school inspection	N/A
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