

The Dorcan Academy

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

Inspection dates	10–11 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Requires improvement
Outcomes for pupils	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- The achievement of the pupils at key stage 4 has declined over the past two years. Currently, predicted results for 2016 GCSE examinations, though better, are still far too low when considering the pupils' starting points.
- The leaders of the school have not recognised the potential of the older pupils and so their learning targets have been set too low.
- The curriculum limits pupils' opportunities to excel in some subjects.
- The most able pupils and boys of all abilities are not achieving as well as they should because teachers are not challenging them effectively.
- The quality of pupils' learning varies markedly, dependent on the subjects they take and who teaches them.
- Pupils do not have the confidence to ask for the support they need to build on their prior learning.
- Governors have not been rigorous enough in challenging and holding the leaders to account. Until recently, they have not been asking the right questions.
- Leaders do not analyse and tackle the root causes of misbehaviour so a small minority of pupils continue to disrupt learning.
- Leaders and teachers have accepted quiet politeness as a sign of pupils being engaged in their learning when often they have simply switched off.

The school has the following strengths

- The headteacher, since her appointment at the start of the school year, has been relentless in tackling the areas where there has been poor teaching and learning.
- The pupils are safe at the school and well cared for.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are achieving well. Parents are fully involved with the setting of their education, health and care plans.

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than it might in all the circumstances reasonably be expected to perform.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase pupils' progress so that by the end of key stage 4 achievement is at or above the national average.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by teachers:
 - having the highest expectation of what pupils can achieve, particularly the most able and boys
 - working to the same high standards and thereby improving pupils' learning experiences in all subjects
 - raising the self-esteem and confidence of the pupils so that they participate fully in their learning, understand their potential, and can ask for support when they need it.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management, including governance, by ensuring that leaders:
 - monitor the impact of planned changes to the curriculum on pupils' development
 - set aspirational targets for pupils and rigorously monitor and evaluate pupils' achievement information to ensure that they succeed
 - analyse and tackle the root causes of misbehaviour so that pupils do not continue to display poor behaviour
 - relentlessly monitor the impact of their plans, policies and practice to ensure that they have a positive outcome on improving the quality of education
 - quicken the pace of change.

An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management requires improvement

- The school's leaders have failed to recognise the potential of too many pupils in the school, especially the most able; as a result, their achievement is not good enough.
- The curriculum is broad but has not been balanced. The limited time given to subjects across the curriculum has held back progress in a range of subjects such as geography, history and modern foreign languages. This has restricted the opportunities for pupils when moving on to continue their education, employment or training. Pupils are offered extra-curricular activities related to sports, performing arts and personal development, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. As yet, the impact this has on achievement within the wider curriculum has not been evaluated.
- Leaders, including governors, have failed to monitor the quality of teaching and learning rigorously and any required improvements have not been managed quickly enough. As a result, achievement at key stage 4 has not improved and some groups of students, in particular the most able and boys, have not made the progress of which they are capable.
- Similarly, leaders have not analysed the reasons for consistent misbehaviour by a small group of pupils. As a result, there continue to be incidents of inappropriate behaviour that are detrimental to pupils' progress.
- The targets set for teachers have not been challenging enough. Teachers have not been held to account for pupils' performance or for raising the quality of their own teaching. The current arrangements are more stringent and better aligned to individual development needs.
- The new headteacher has a clear vision of what the school needs to do to improve and has led a major overhaul of policies and practice. All staff are now held firmly to account. The impact of this on pupils' achievement is more noticeable in Years 7 and 8 than in other year groups.
- The headteacher is a good communicator and role model. She has encouraged dialogue and built a structure that ensures that responsibilities are understood and monitored at all levels. The middle leaders have embraced the accountability measures that have been put in place and are developing the necessary leadership skills to make sure there is more consistent practice.
- New staff within the leadership team are beginning to make an impact on improving the quality of teaching and learning by providing effective training and introducing strategies to improve pupils' achievement.
- The pupil premium funding is being used effectively so that disadvantaged pupils are now making more rapid progress. This is monitored carefully by all teachers and, if there are signs of underachievement, interventions are put in place to support their learning. This has meant that the gap between their attainment and that of other pupils in the school is reducing and, in Year 7, the gap no longer exists.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development well, using assemblies and tutor time for particular programmes and events.
- The school is seeking to make stronger links with parents and carers through informal gatherings such as afternoon tea or coffee mornings. External agencies, such as the police, are engaged with the school to ensure that all pupils are supported and feel safe.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors have made some changes to the structure of the governing body, including appointing new governors who bring a range of useful and much-needed skills.
 - Over time, however, governors have not been effective in holding leaders to account, especially with regard to pupils' achievement.
 - Governors have not been effective at scrutinising the targets set for staff and overseeing the pay awards granted, although this is now being done more rigorously.
 - Governors have not reviewed effectively the use or impact of pupil premium funding on the progress of disadvantaged pupils.
 - There has been an over-reliance on headteachers, past and present, to provide governors with information. Too often, this has been accepted without question. The new headteacher has instigated training so that governors now understand what questions to ask of school leaders, to hold them to account for the performance of the school.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school's processes are systematic and well managed. Staff are trained in the identification and reporting of risk. The most vulnerable pupils are

cared for and their well-being is a priority. The school's liaison with external agencies is effective. Pupils feel safe.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment requires improvement

- Teaching is too variable as assessment information is not used precisely enough to plan learning. This means that some pupils are not provided with work that builds on prior learning, which limits the progress they make.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of the most able pupils. These pupils are not being stretched or helped to deepen their thinking.
- Pupils are not being supported or encouraged to be confident and resilient learners.
- The school has introduced the systematic analysis of assessment information. There is a particular focus on identifying and dealing with underachievement, making sure that pupils are provided with the necessary guidance to do better. Although there is still work to be done in routinely ensuring that pupils understand the criteria against which they are assessed, these improvements are having a positive impact, especially for the pupils in receipt of the pupil premium funding.
- The school's policy on marking and feedback, which is relatively new, is being followed by the majority of teachers. In English and art pupils are making more rapid progress as a result of teachers' specific comments and instructions for improvement.
- Many teachers are skilled in questioning the pupils and developing their thinking or correcting misunderstandings. In the teaching where this is not effective, progress is slow and pupils' confidence in the subject is low.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are well supported because teachers' knowledge of their needs is secure and the work planned for them is appropriate. As a consequence, they make rapid progress.
- The Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium funding is being used very well. There has been a particular focus on making sure that reading is at the right level to engage pupils in learning which is proving to be very successful.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare requires improvement

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The relationships between pupils and teachers are generally very good. In discussion, pupils demonstrated the respect that they have for staff, particularly their tutors.
- Pupils are aware of the impact of bullying, both physical and emotional. They report that bullying is rare and, when it does happen, it is followed up swiftly with effective actions to remedy the situation. The school logs reflect this.
- The school uses assemblies and tutor time to make sure pupils learn about the different beliefs, faiths and cultures and to recognise that prejudicial attitudes should not be tolerated. This includes a developing awareness of the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Older pupils have deepened their understanding of fundamental British values as they have followed election procedures and learned about aspects of democracy, including government and law. The school makes use of external agencies, such as the police force, to reinforce the relevance of the topics studied.
- Pupils are well informed about risks, especially those associated with the internet. As a result, pupils feel safe and able to keep themselves and each other safe; this includes an understanding of safer sexual practices.
- Pupils are taught well about healthy living in subjects such as food technology and physical education. A community nurse supports these areas of the curriculum as well as providing effective individual support for pupils' emotional and physical well-being.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils requires improvement.
- Pupils' conduct is good when the teaching is effective; when pupils are disengaged and bored or

struggling to understand, their behaviour deteriorates. Although behaviour at breaktime is generally good, on occasion pupils are disrespectful of each other. However, these occasions are relatively rare.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning also vary according to the quality of teaching. Some fail to engage with lessons, do not take pride in their work and lack the resilience to correct and improve unless pushed to do so.
- Pupils respect the school and there are no signs of graffiti or litter. Noticeboards and other displays are in pristine condition and provide motivational material or celebrate the success of present and past pupils.
- The pupils wear their uniform with pride and have been involved in choosing a new uniform for the September 2016 intake.
- School leaders have successfully focused on improving attendance and reducing persistent absence for all pupils. Attendance has risen and is slightly above the national average. Persistent absence has decreased, although it remains slightly above the national rate. Whereas the attendance of disadvantaged pupils was well below that of their peers, this gap has reduced significantly as a result of actions taken by the school.
- The school uses two local centres for support with alternative provision. One centre is based at a local secondary school but is a collaborative venture between four schools, including The Dorcan Academy. The school receives a weekly report on the attainment of those pupils attending. Pupils attend the local college once a week to ease transition and enable them to continue studying their subjects to a higher level. The other provision is for the most vulnerable pupils. Pupils attend for a period of time and study an academic curriculum. Reintegration takes place when the pupils are ready. Pupils who have attended previously have been reintegrated successfully into their mainstream school.

Outcomes for pupils

are inadequate

- In 2015, the proportion of pupils gaining five GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and mathematics was well below the national average.
- While last year's GCSE results in English and mathematics were a little below the national average, pupils' attainment in other subjects, including science, humanities and languages, fell well below. In only a few subjects, including resistant materials, did pupils achieve very well.
- The performance of boys in the 2015 GCSE examinations was well below that of girls.
- Targets for all pupils and, in particular the most able, are not high enough. The school has failed to recognise what can be achieved by each pupil and has relied over-heavily on matching whole-school targets with the national average rather than focusing on what each cohort could achieve.
- The school's current information shows that Year 11 pupils are continuing to make slower progress than should be expected. The attainment of the most able and pupils of middle ability in key stage 4 is significantly below what it should be, given their starting points. The culture of underachievement that has dogged the school for a number of years has had a negative impact on these pupils. There are signs of improvement at key stage 3. Relentless analysis and support are making a positive difference for the younger pupils.
- The progress of the pupils in receipt of the pupil premium is improving. The gap between these pupils and the others in Year 11 has halved in both English and mathematics. The gap closes further as the age of the pupils decreases to the point where, in Year 7, they are progressing at the same rate as their peers.
- Pupils who have special educational needs or disability are performing in line with their potential and, in Year 9, these pupils are making better than expected progress.
- Lower-ability pupils make progress that is in line with their potential and, in some cases, make progress that is above expectations. The special educational needs staff work with these students and the strategies that they use are having a beneficial impact.
- Pupils at the alternative provisions are making good progress in their subjects.
- All pupils find places to move on to with regard to education, training and employment. However, the level of the qualifications that they study may not match their potential, reflecting their underachievement at the school.

School details

Unique reference number	137684
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10002417

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

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	887
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Bell
Headteacher	Sherryl Bareham
Telephone number	01793 525231
Website	www.dorcan.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@dorcan.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	26–27 November 2013

Information about this school

- The current headteacher was appointed in September 2015.
- The Dorcan Academy is smaller than the average-sized secondary school.
- A small number of students attend alternative provision at Oakfield. A few students attend the local authority's provision for education other than at school (EOTAS).
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds.
- The proportion of pupils supported with additional government funding, known as the pupil premium, is above the national average. This funding is provided for those known to be eligible for free school meals and children looked after.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above the national average.
- The academy meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for students' attainment and progress.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited 43 lessons, of which 12 were observed jointly with senior leaders.
- A wide sample of pupils' work from all year groups and a range of subjects was scrutinised.
- Inspectors talked with pupils from Years 7 to 10 in formal meetings, as well as with pupils informally across the site.
- Meetings were held with a number of senior and middle leaders and a small group of governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Information and other documentary evidence was scrutinised, including that relating to safeguarding, assessment, school self-evaluation and development planning.
- Inspectors took account of the 45 responses to the Ofsted online Parent View survey and the 39 responses to the online staff survey.

Inspection team

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