

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



10 January 2018

Mrs Sherryl Bareham
Headteacher
The Dorcan Academy
St Paul's Drive
Covingham
Swindon
Wiltshire
SN3 5DA

Dear Mrs Bareham

Serious weaknesses first monitoring inspection of The Dorcan Academy

Following my visit to your school on 14 December 2017, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the outcome and inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's most recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to have serious weaknesses in May 2016. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Evidence

During this inspection, I met with you, senior leaders, the chair of the governing body and two other governors. I scrutinised documentation including records relating to pupils' outcomes and I evaluated the school's action plans. I made short visits to lessons to talk to pupils and determine the quality of their work.

Context

Since the inspection of May 2016, there have been extensive staffing changes. Two deputy headteachers have left and the leadership team has been restructured. Eight new middle leaders have been appointed, including in mathematics and science. A new chair of the governing body was appointed in June 2016. The great majority of the current governors have been appointed since that time.

The quality of leadership and management at the academy

Since the previous inspection you have made widespread changes to the staffing structure of the school. Your restructured leadership team is eager to develop

teaching, learning and assessment and secure improved outcomes for pupils. Senior leaders have credible plans in place to improve the school and they are clear about their roles and responsibilities. They have ensured that teaching is now more consistent.

Senior leaders systematically evaluate the impact of their plans and policies. They monitor the quality of teaching closely and provide coaching to help teachers improve their practice. Teachers across the school now share common expectations of pupils and help pupils follow established routines.

You are keeping the curriculum under review and ensuring that it provides pupils with sufficient breadth of experience. Pupils in key stage 4 are benefiting from the changes you have made to the curriculum. Pupils are now studying a suitable balance of subjects. You have developed pupils' extra-curricular opportunities. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme at the school, for example, has expanded and is flourishing.

You have introduced a new system for assessing pupils' progress and setting targets. Middle leaders are using this system to raise teachers' expectations of pupils and to hold teachers to account more effectively for the progress that they make.

Many middle leaders are new to their roles. Some have already been successful in improving the quality of teaching in their areas of responsibility. In some cases, though, more support is necessary and you are taking steps to provide this.

Pupils' progress, measured across eight GCSE subjects, remained below average in 2017. However, pupils' progress in some subjects improved. For example, in GCSE English, pupils made better progress because teaching was more focused on the key skills necessary to succeed. However, pupils' progress in GCSE mathematics did not improve and was below the national average for pupils with similar starting points. Last year, turbulence in staffing in mathematics hindered pupils' progress. New leadership in the mathematics department, and the appointment of several new specialist mathematics teachers, have stabilised the situation.

The progress of the most able pupils remained below average in the 2017 GCSE examination results. However, there are signs that the most able pupils currently in the school are making better progress. In Year 9, for example, these pupils are being challenged more effectively as a result of the raised expectations of staff.

You have identified a number of initiatives aimed at improving the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Many of these initiatives have only recently been introduced. New leadership of this area of the school's work is coordinating these actions. However, so far there has been insufficient impact on the outcomes for this group of pupils. You, and your governors, recognise that this is an important priority for the future.

Pupils are quick to identify the new school uniform as one of the improvements at the school since the previous inspection. They are proud to wear it and show pride in many aspects of the school. Pupils are now more willing to go to extra lessons designed to help them improve their work. They appreciate the extra support their teachers are offering to help them catch up in a range of subjects.

At the start of term, you introduced a new system to manage pupils' behaviour. Pupils and teachers believe that this system is leading to improved conduct in lessons. The rate of fixed-term exclusions initially rose as a consequence of your higher expectations of pupils' behaviour. The number of exclusions is now falling because pupils' behaviour is improving. While most pupils regard the introduction of this system as a positive step, some believe it is not being applied consistently by staff.

The new chair of the governing body used a review of governance to identify gaps in governors' knowledge and experience. He has successfully filled those gaps by appointing suitably skilled governors. The governing body is now effective in challenging senior leaders about the performance of the school. In particular, governors have a better understanding of assessment data and so they are well informed about the progress of groups of pupils.

You have sought and gained support from other organisations. The Excalibur multi-academy trust has provided effective advice and support to the school, particularly in the leadership of English. Other valuable support has been provided by the Swindon Teaching School Alliance and the 'Swindon challenge' organisation.

Following the monitoring inspection, the following judgements were made:

Leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation.

The school's action plan is fit for purpose.

The governing body's statement of action is fit for purpose.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Swindon. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector