

The Dorcan Academy

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

Inspection dates

20–21 November 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Pupils make slower progress than their peers in other schools. This has been the case for a number of years. However, the gap is now closing.
- Standards of literacy are not high enough. Even the most able pupils regularly make spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. This undermines the quality of their work.
- Disadvantaged pupils make substantially less progress than other pupils. This is because, in the past, the school's plans to help them have been ineffective.
- Teachers do not have high enough expectations of pupils, particularly the most able. Too often, teachers accept superficial answers from pupils, rather than challenge them to deepen their thinking.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too inconsistent. Pupils are stretched in some subjects and allowed to coast in others.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has improved significantly since the last inspection. This is because leaders are ambitious for the school and have shown great doggedness in steadily moving towards their goals. As a result, behaviour and attendance have improved markedly and standards are now following.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. There is little disruption to learning. They also conduct themselves sensibly around the school site and at lunchtimes. Relationships are generally warm and friendly. Pupils are proud of the changes in their school.
- Pupils are making good progress in a number of subjects. In English, pupils are reaching good standards as a result of teaching that stretches them. In mathematics too, pupils are reaching standards broadly in line with those in other schools.
- Leaders make sure that the range of subjects pupils experience is broad and relevant to them. They have also ensured that the broader aspects of the curriculum, including personal and social education, are valued and are strong.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and hence raise standards, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers have equally high expectations of what pupils can achieve, particularly the most able pupils
 - raising standards of literacy so that all pupils have high standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar
 - embedding the recently revised programme of support for disadvantaged pupils so that they can achieve as well as their peers.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher is showing determination and resilience in steadily improving the school, piece by piece. She is overcoming staffing and financial challenges to put the building blocks in place. Under her leadership, the school has improved substantially since the last inspection.
- Senior leaders are experienced and knowledgeable. They have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they understand that there is more to do before the school reaches the heights they aspire to. Their plans are ambitious but pragmatic.
- Leaders have shown they have the capacity to improve the school further. They have successfully addressed poor behaviour and are having significant success in raising attendance.
- Leaders are successful in improving behaviour and attendance because they take a careful and thoughtful approach and because they implement initiatives with an attention to detail. They use the information available to them well to make sure that they are targeting their efforts effectively.
- Senior leaders are successfully leading improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have a good understanding of the current strengths and weaknesses of teaching and work closely with teachers to help them to improve. Teachers appreciate the support and training they receive. Improvement in the quality of teaching was initially slow to take hold; however, there is now tangible progress.
- Senior leaders are now asking more of their middle leaders. And middle leaders are rising to that challenge. Some are relatively inexperienced, but all are focused on improving their departments. The school is investing heavily in training middle leaders. As a result, middle leaders are able to lead improvements in the quality of teaching in their departments with increasing skill and confidence.
- Leaders ensure that the support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is effective. The additional funding that the school receives to support pupils is well targeted and pupils' progress is closely monitored. Where pupils are struggling, their support programme is adjusted to help them.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum that is appropriately broad and values all aspects of a pupil's education. They have not shied away from ensuring that there is academic rigour, and that the most able are well prepared for higher education. As a result of their decisions, a significantly higher than usual proportion of pupils in key stage 4 continue to study a foreign language, for example. Moreover, performing arts and physical education (PE) enjoy a high status across the school.
- Leaders make sure that personal, social and health education (PSHE) is well planned and delivered. Pupils learn to reflect about themselves and their place in the world and to learn about the values that underpin our society. Pupils value this and enjoy taking part in activities.
- Leaders have put a significant emphasis on the quality of careers education and

independent advice and guidance. They have undertaken a detailed audit of their provision. They are now working with colleges and employers to inspire pupils about their futures. Pupils of all ages enjoy these opportunities and their expectations for their own futures rise as a result.

- Leaders recognise that the funding that the school receives to ensure that disadvantaged pupils get the additional support they need has not been used effectively, and that standards remain low for this group of pupils. They have now revised and implemented new plans. It is too soon to judge the impact of these new approaches.
- Leaders acknowledge that arrangements for assessing pupils and tracking their progress were not fit for purpose. New procedures have been devised and are being implemented. However, the delay has slowed the rate of improvement of the quality of teaching.

Governance of the school

- The board of trustees has been revitalised since the last inspection. A substantial proportion of the board are new appointments and they have been chosen specifically for the skills and experience they can bring. This has strengthened the board significantly. They challenge school leaders robustly and are persistent when necessary.
- Trustees know the school well and understand issues that face the community. They monitor the life of the school closely through reports from school leaders and directly, by visits to school, so that they can evaluate improvements first hand. They are keen not to use the external context as an excuse for low standards and express a keen desire to raise standards and improve the life chances of children in the area.
- Trustees have a good overview of safeguarding. They go well beyond their statutory role and work with leaders and ensure the safety of pupils in the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that keeping pupils safe is at the forefront of the minds of all staff. There is a culture of vigilance across the school. Leaders and teachers understand the social context of the school well and work closely with external agencies to keep pupils safe when they are out of school.
- Pupils say they that feel safe and their parents agree. Pupils are taught about how to keep themselves safe, including online safety. Pupils know whom to go to in school if they have a concern or are feeling unsafe.
- Leaders make all the necessary checks on the suitability of staff before they are allowed to work with pupils. All the school's safeguarding records are well kept. Staff are well trained and know what to do should a pupil disclose a concern.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching is too inconsistent across the school. It has improved since the last inspection but remains too uneven to be considered good. The best teaching is characterised by high expectations. Here, teachers are ambitious for their pupils, set challenging tasks and ask searching questions. However, too often, teachers do not challenge pupils to think for themselves enough. The result is that both pupils and teachers settle for second best.
- Where teaching is weaker, teachers spoon-feed pupils and deny them enough opportunities to think through complicated problems from start to finish, or to structure their extended answers.
- The most able pupils are regularly not stretched or stimulated as much as they should be. Teachers accept answers from them that are good, but are not the best. When these pupils are pushed a little harder, they respond positively to the challenge and produce work of the highest quality.
- The quality of teaching has been affected by issues of teacher recruitment and retention. Some pupils report that this has had an impact on their progress. Leaders have now addressed this issue and pupils report a significant improvement.
- Teaching is consistently good in English. Teachers ask a lot from pupils and they get a positive response. As a result, pupils' vocabulary and ability to comprehend texts develops rapidly through the year. Pupils' progress is also enhanced by the precise and targeted advice they get from teachers on how to improve their work. In technology too, teachers have a good understanding of exactly what pupils can do and the next steps in their learning. Pupils also value the precise feedback they get from their teachers.
- Teaching is more consistently challenging pupils in key stage 3, particularly in Years 8 and 9. This is the result of changes to the curriculum, which are raising expectations for all groups of pupils. In Year 7, some pupils, particularly the most able, do not get off to a flying start, because they are not given work to stretch them when they first arrive. This sets the tone and allows pupils to think that little is expected of them.
- Teachers do not give a high enough priority to spelling, punctuation and grammar. As a result, pupils' work is marred by repeated basic errors. Even the most able, whose writing is often fluent and rich, are vulnerable.
- Teachers meet the needs of pupils who have SEN well. There is good liaison between classroom teachers, teaching assistants and the SEN coordinator. This helps to ensure that pupils are able to make good progress from their starting points.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are increasingly proud of their school. They talk confidently about how the school is improving and they are pleased to be a part of it. They come to school

smartly dressed and ready for the day ahead. Most take pride in their work and ensure that it is presented neatly.

- Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good. It is strongest where the quality of teaching is high and when they are challenged to extend themselves. Then they are enthusiastic and keen to get involved. Where teaching does not meet their needs, pupils are polite and compliant but tend to become disengaged and passive.
- Pupils respond well to the well-structured PSHE programme and are able to discuss their ideas in groups, treating each other with courtesy. Pupils are also taught about how to keep themselves safe online.
- There is a significantly high number of pupils who are disadvantaged or face additional challenges in their lives out of school. These pupils are well supported by a strong pastoral care team. They know their pupils well and support them effectively.
- Pupils are aware of different kinds of bullying, including racist and homophobic and transphobic bullying. They say that bullying is well dealt with by staff. Pupils who are gay and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds said that they felt welcome and safe.
- A small number of pupils attend alternative provision because they were unable to settle into mainstream school life. Liaison between the school and the provision is good and the pupils are able to make better progress as a result.
- Pupils enjoy a rich menu of opportunities for extra-curricular clubs, both in the arts and for sports. The school's Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is particularly popular and successful.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They come to classes with the right equipment and expecting to work. There is little disruption. When there is, teachers use the school's behaviour policy consistently. Pupils enjoy being able to work in lessons without disruption.
- The atmosphere across the school is calm and orderly. Pupils move around the corridors sensibly. Any occasional boisterousness is good humoured. Relationship between pupils and between pupils and teachers are warm and respectful.
- Leaders have made improving attendance a priority. They have had significant success and the rate of absence is now only a little higher than the national average. They have also had success in reducing the number of pupils who are persistently absent. The figure is still too high, but the improvement has been marked.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils have made less progress than their peers in most other schools for a number of years. Each year has seen an improvement, but progress has been slow. Pupils in school now are achieving in line with pupils in other schools in some subjects and year groups, but not consistently so. This is because leaders are helping teachers to raise

their expectations of pupils, but the improvements are not fully embedded across all subjects.

- Disadvantaged pupils are now beginning to make better progress, although they are still achieving less than other pupils. Over the last few years, their progress has been poor, partly because their attendance has been well below that of other pupils and partly because the plans the school had in place to give them extra support were ineffective. The school is now improving in both respects. Attendance is significantly improved, and leaders are focusing more clearly on helping these pupils learn.
- Pupils are now achieving standards broadly similar to those in other schools in English and mathematics. This is an improvement on previous years, when progress had been relatively poor. Pupils are not doing as well in some other subjects. This is because teachers do not ask for the same depth of response. Too often, teachers accept a superficial answer, rather than expecting the pupil to think and respond at a deeper level.
- The most able pupils do not make as much progress as their peers in other schools. This is because teachers do not expect enough of them and teachers and pupils settle for less than the best. Pupils who join the school with lower than average starting points do make progress in line with similar pupils in other schools.
- Pupils who have SEN are making good progress from their starting points. This is the result of accurate assessment of their needs and close monitoring of progress.
- Pupils' standards of literacy are lower than those of pupils in other schools. Their poor punctuation, spelling and grammar prevents them from expressing themselves as well as they should. This is undermining their standards across a range of subjects and does not help to prepare them for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils' final levels of attainment remain below those of pupils in other schools. The proportion achieving standard passes in English and mathematics is a little below national averages and the number achieving the EBacc suite of qualifications is also below that of other schools.

School details

Unique reference number	137684
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10055325

This inspection of the school 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 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	764
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Phil Baker
Headteacher	Sherryl Bareham
Telephone number	01793525231
Website	www.dorcan.co.uk
Email address	head@dorcan.swindon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	10-11 May 2016

Information about this school

- The school is an average-sized secondary school.
- It has a higher-than-average number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant.
- The proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is in line with the national average.
- The proportion of pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- The school is a single convertor academy; however, it is in negotiations to join a multi-academy trust in 2019.
- There are currently seven pupils in alternative provision at two providers: The Oakfield Project and Lackham College.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Some of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation, including minutes of trust meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour data, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with members of the trust, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders and groups of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 76 responses to the online questionnaire. They also took into account the responses to the staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Gary Lewis	Ofsted Inspector
Paul Nicholson	Ofsted Inspector
Carol Hannaford	Ofsted Inspector

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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. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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