

George Dixon International School and Sixth Form Centre

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	103559
Local Authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	336108
Inspection dates	28–29 April 2010
Reporting inspector	Paul Brooker HMI

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1050
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	135
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sir Robert Dowling
Headteacher	Mrs W Brandy (Head) Mr A Hamilton (Acting Head)
Date of previous school inspection	26 September 2006
School address	City Road Edgbaston Birmingham
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The team observed 42 teachers in 34 formal observations, some of which were undertaken jointly with senior leaders, or on learning walks. The inspectors observed the school's work, and looked at the documentation relating to the safeguarding of students, the progress students are making in their learning, the school's own evaluation of its work and school improvement plans, as well as 92 parental questionnaire responses and questionnaires returned by a large number of staff and a representative sample of students. Meetings were held with nominated staff, the chair of the governing body and groups of students.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at the following:

- the impact of the school's work in raising standards and closing the gap in attainment for different groups and against national figures
- the quality of learning across the school and any variation in the progress made by different groups of students
- the effectiveness of the school's care, guidance and support in securing better outcomes for students, including some of the most vulnerable
- the quality, impact and effectiveness of school self-evaluation and the sustainability of the school's recent improvements.

Information about the school

George Dixon International School is a specialist mathematics and computing college located in the Ladywood Ward of Birmingham, an area that experiences significantly high levels of socio-economic disadvantage. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is four times the national average and the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities more than twice the national figure. Students and staff come from an exceptionally diverse range of cultural backgrounds: a very large majority of students are from minority ethnic groups; almost three quarters of students speak English as an additional language with more than 40 different home languages spoken. Student mobility is also extremely high, with almost one in four students joining or leaving the school at times other than the start of the year. There are a large number of newly arrived students at the school who have little or no English. Around one fifth of students are asylum seekers and/or refugees and currently 33 students are Looked After Children.

As a result of the low 2008 GCSE results the school was placed in National Challenge and has, over the last year, been in receipt of significant additional support from local authority. The headteacher has been on long term absence since July 2009. The acting headteacher has been in post since September 2009.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?

3

The school's capacity for sustained improvement

2

Main findings

George Dixon International School faces ongoing challenges that would be overwhelming for many others, but over the years its strong and supportive school community, underpinned by its ambitious governing body and hard-working staff, has demonstrated considerable resilience and determination to promote and sustain improvement. Results have fluctuated since the last inspection, with a significant dip in standards at GCSE in 2008. Attainment is low compared with national figures, but standards are rising. Almost all groups of students make good progress although, in recent years, the progress made by students with special educational needs has been less consistent when compared with their peers. There is also variation in the performance of subjects; mathematics in particular, alongside languages, makes a very strong contribution to the school's results, whereas standards in humanities are too low.

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The safety and well-being of students are paramount in the everyday work of the school, and social cohesion is at the heart of its endeavours. The school draws on its remarkable diversity to create a community where students and adults show tolerance, consideration and respect for one another. Procedures for safeguarding students are exemplary. The result is a safe, calm and positive climate, across the school, in which students are given the self-belief and motivation to succeed. Behaviour around the school is often exemplary and the students' personal qualities are also a notable strength, particularly their social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.

The quality of learning is good because students are well taught and because teachers have high expectations of what students will achieve. In addition, the students' positive attitudes to learning make a strong contribution to their good progress in lessons and over time. eAssessment information is very effectively used at a whole-school level to set challenging targets and to prioritise support for individuals who are falling behind their peers, but it is inconsistently used in lesson planning. The curriculum has obvious strengths, but it does not meet the needs and aspirations of all students. Weaknesses in provision have been identified and are being addressed: since September the post-16 courses have been radically overhauled, pathways for Key Stage 4 students have been reviewed and provision for students with special educational needs has been strengthened. These changes demonstrate that school self-evaluation is rigorous and is effectively used to guide strategic planning and also to quickly implement necessary changes. The school is blossoming under the energetic leadership of the acting headteacher and demonstrates good capacity for further improvement.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Raise standards and narrow the national attainment gap by:
 - reducing the disparity in performance between different subjects within the school
 - using the school's rigorous assessment data to set suitable expectations and challenge for all students in lessons.
- Ensure that the curriculum changes that have been planned or recently implemented meet the needs of the students, in particular:
 - ensure that post-16 provision meets the needs and aspirations of all sixth-form students
 - make certain that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities are accurately identified and are well supported and challenged
 - the planned Key Stage 4 pathways enable students with different aptitudes and abilities to achieve well and be well prepared for later life.
- About 40% of schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**3**

Attainment on entry is very low, but from their starting points students make good progress to achieve standards in their GCSE examinations that are much closer to age-related expectations. Although attainment is below national figures it is improving strongly: in 2009 40% of students achieved at least five A* to C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics, a very significant increase on the previous year. The school is firmly on course to achieve even better results in 2010 and beyond. Almost all groups of students make accelerated progress at each key stage. Published data indicate that girls make particularly impressive progress, as do students who speak English as an additional language and students from Caribbean heritage. The progress made by students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is more variable and is satisfactory; unevenness in their progress is occasionally linked with imprecise planning or untargeted support for their individual needs in lessons. In general, however, the quality of learning is good. Students settle quickly to their work and sustain their concentration well so that little time is wasted. They collaborate well with one another, enjoy their learning and take a pride in their work.

Students' wider personal development is particularly good. They feel safe and are confident that issues that they raise will be dealt with promptly and effectively. Students understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and are happy to take on additional responsibilities so that they can make a positive contribution to their own school community. Around school the students are friendly, courteous and considerate towards one another and also to visitors. In lessons they follow instructions, are keen to volunteer answers and readily collaborate when working together in pairs and groups. Students are mature and sensible when debating ideas and reflecting social, moral or

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political issues. Their positive attitudes promote good progress and help to develop personal qualities that prepare students well for their later lives.

These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	3
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2
Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	3
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	3
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

Teaching is good in most respects and is sometimes outstandingly effective. Although the pace and focus of learning varies between classrooms, most lessons proceed at a good tempo and are soundly based on careful planning and very positive relationships between adults and students. Information and communication technology is well used to structure students' learning. There is a good range of different learning activities and a good balance of teacher-input and independent learning, often in pairs and small groups. The most effective teachers know exactly what each student should achieve and are precise about what they expect from different groups and are then very specific with their questioning, ongoing assessment and the guidance they provide in their marking. However, the school recognises that although teaching is improving strongly, these good features of assessment and marking are not sufficiently embedded in all lessons.

The school articulates and pursues ambitious strategies for its diverse groups,

¹ The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low.

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particularly those who may be subject to discrimination. It provides good care and guidance for students and can point to many striking examples of how it has supported vulnerable individuals and had significant impact on their welfare and achievement. The curriculum is broad and balanced and has been suitably revised to ensure that it provides suitable pathways for students with different aptitudes and abilities. A good range of extra-curricular clubs supports the students' wider interests and development.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	2
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	3
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	2

How effective are leadership and management?

The school's significantly improved performance and new-found confidence is evidence of the success of its leadership in embedding ambition at all levels and driving improvement. This is most evident in lessons, where teachers have high expectations of how students will work and behave and what they will achieve. Underpinning much of this improvement is the more effective use of assessment data, at whole-school level, which is routinely used to analyse any variation between the performance and progress of different groups. Under the strong leadership of the acting headteacher, clear lines of accountability have been established so that performance is carefully monitored and improvements in teaching are driven by middle as well as senior leaders. Procedures for safeguarding students are implemented and reviewed with exceptional rigour. The school makes use of a wide range of different partnerships to promote students' academic development and social well-being and enjoys highly positive relationships with most groups of parents. When students or parents have proved difficult to engage, the school has been proactive and innovative in seeking different ways to support families so that children are not disadvantaged in school.

Equality of opportunity and social cohesion are at the heart of the school's ambitions. Any unevenness between different groups is reducing because the rigorous monitoring of student performance constantly shapes the school's interventions and impact. The promotion of community cohesion is embedded in the school's work and is strongly reflected in the school's social harmony. Students of all ages and from all different backgrounds mix easily and show respect for one another, and newcomers are quickly made welcome. Promoting community cohesion in the wider community is a significant challenge and the school recognises that it does not evaluate the impact of its work in this area with sufficient rigour.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	2
The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers	2
The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Sixth form

Sixth-form students make the progress expected given their starting points and achieve satisfactory success rates. The sixth-form provision is currently in transition; although some students make remarkable progress in studying for the International Baccalaureate, the school has recognised that for too many other students the course did not provide a suitable pathway for further study or employment. Day-to-day management of the sixth form is good; leaders know the strengths and weaknesses of the school's post-16 provision. Plans are in place to expand the highly successful vocational and applied courses on offer so that the post-16 curriculum better meets the needs and aspirations of all sixth-form students. The current courses are well taught and students, many of whom start with only limited English and a range of specific needs, are very well supported in their studies. Sixth-form students are articulate, keen to take responsibility for their learning and to make progress. Their personal development is particularly strong. They make a positive contribution to the school in their roles as young leaders, mentors and council representatives and organise a range of charitable events that involve younger students.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	3
Taking into account: Outcomes for students in the sixth form	3
The quality of provision in the sixth form	3
Leadership and management of the sixth form	3

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Views of parents and carers

A very large majority of parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire are happy with their child's experience at the school, and are positive about their progress and personal development. However, a small minority felt that the school does not take account of their suggestions and concerns, and a few cited specific occasions when communication was poor, when homework was not set or when bullying had occurred. Although there might be occasional oversights, inspectors consider that the school works hard to liaise with parents and to respond quickly to their concerns. The school takes bullying seriously and deals swiftly with any incidents that might occur.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at George Dixon International School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school. The inspection team received 92 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1050 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	31	34	54	59	5	5	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	31	34	48	52	9	10	3	3
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	36	47	51	7	8	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	26	28	54	59	9	10	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	32	35	48	52	5	5	5	5
The school helps me to support my child's learning	27	29	48	52	11	12	4	4
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	25	27	53	58	12	13	1	1
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	28	30	56	61	6	7	1	1
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	24	56	61	9	10	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	34	37	41	45	11	12	4	4
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	19	21	49	53	17	18	2	2
The school is led and managed effectively	22	24	55	60	8	9	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	29	32	53	58	8	9	1	1

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	51	45	0	4
Primary schools	6	41	42	10
Secondary schools	8	34	44	14
Sixth forms	10	37	50	3
Special schools	32	38	25	5
Pupil referral units	12	43	31	14
All schools	9	40	40	10

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above is for the period 1 September to 31 December 2009 and is the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn term 2009 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100. Secondary school figures include those that have sixth forms, and sixth form figures include only the data specifically for sixth form inspection judgements.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement. ■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils. ■ The quality of teaching. ■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupil's needs, including where relevant, through partnerships. ■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



29 April 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of George Dixon International School, Birmingham B17 8LF

Thank you for the friendly welcome that you gave the inspection team and the positive contribution that you made to our recent inspection. We really enjoyed talking to you and were impressed by the well mannered and mature way that you treated us as visitors. Your views, alongside the questionnaire survey responses from your parents, were helpful in confirming our first-hand observations about the school. We were particularly impressed with:

- the good progress that you make in lessons and over time
- the school's friendly but purposeful atmosphere, your excellent behaviour around the school and your positive attitudes to learning in lessons
- the high priority that the school gives to ensuring your safety and welfare
- the improvements that have been made over the last year.

When teaching is good you obviously make good progress and often enjoy your learning, but some areas of the curriculum are stronger than others and we are confident that school knows where provision needs to be strengthened. However, we have specifically asked the school to continue their work on two key areas:

- to raise standards, particularly where they are still too low, so that the school's results are more broadly in line with those found nationally
- to strengthen certain aspects of provision to better meet your different needs, such as the options in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and the support for students with particular learning needs.

You can see that you can have an important role to play, particularly in getting the best possible results for yourselves. We wish you all every success in the future.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker

Her Majesty's Inspector

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