

Dorchester Middle School

Queen's Avenue, Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 2HS

Inspection dates

27–28 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not Previously Inspected	
	This inspection:	Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- This school is a successful learning community in which individual pupils are valued, encouraged and kept safe.
- Pupils are taught well and encouraged to achieve their best; they are therefore suitably prepared for their next schools.
- By the time they leave, most have achieved particularly well in reading and mathematics.
- Because the school aims to give all pupils the best chances in life, there is effective support in place for vulnerable pupils and for those who find learning more difficult.
- The school's provision for disabled pupils and those with speech and language difficulties is particularly effective.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend well. Their attitudes to learning are typically good and it is usual to see respectful behaviour around the school.
- Day-to-day learning is enhanced notably by the wide range of interesting and exciting activities and opportunities available to pupils.
- The headteacher, ably supported by senior leaders, leads the school purposefully and effectively. Together, they check that the school provision is continually improving and have secure plans in place for further developments.
- Governors are enthusiastic and focused on the best outcomes for pupils. They rigorously hold senior leaders to account.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Pupils, notably those most able, are not always helped to move on to more difficult work quickly enough in lessons.
- Although teachers mark work regularly, their feedback is not always precise or frequent enough to help pupils reach the highest standards possible.
- Because subject leadership is not always clear across the two key stages, the monitoring of teaching is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that all pupils are helped to make rapid progress in their learning.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching in 35 lessons, six of which were joint observations with senior staff. Several shorter visits were also made to lessons and tutor-led sessions.
- They observed behaviour in lessons and around the school during breaks. They also held meetings with four groups of pupils of different abilities and from different year groups.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents including the school’s self-evaluation and its plans for improvement, safeguarding information, records relating to achievement, behaviour, safety and attendance and also the minutes of governing body meetings.
- They held meetings with senior leaders, other school staff, a group of seven governors, and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors took into account the 89 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) and two letters from parents.

Inspection team

Jacqueline Goodall, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
Fran Ashworth	Additional Inspector
Margaret Faull	Additional Inspector
Roger Garrett	Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Dorchester Middle School converted to become an academy school on 1 June 2012. When its predecessor school of the same name was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good overall.
- It is smaller than the average-sized secondary school although large as a middle school.
- Nearly all pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils whose first language is not English is well below average.
- The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs supported at school action is above the national average. The proportion supported at school action plus or by a statement of special educational needs is over twice the national average.
- Ten pupils from across the age range with complex speech and language needs are supported through the specialist base on site.
- The school also has a physical and sensory disability base, for pupils from across the age range. There are currently six pupils who are supported through this provision.
- Just under a third of pupils were eligible for the Year 7 catch-up funding which is for those who did not achieve the expected levels in reading and mathematics at the end of Year 6. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the pupil premium (additional government funding for looked-after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and other groups) is below the national average.
- The school meets the current government floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for pupils' attainment and progress by the end of Key Stage 2.
- The headteacher is a local leader of education and a school evaluation partner for two schools in Dorset.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that a greater proportion of pupils make outstanding progress by:
 - making sure that all teachers assess pupils' understanding of their work often enough so that they can plan and fine-tune activities to stretch all pupils, including the most able
 - improving teachers' marking so that pupils in all classes receive frequent, high-quality written feedback to help them move rapidly on to the next stage in their learning
 - ensuring that subject and year leaders check that teaching is of the highest standard.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils join the school in Year 5 with average standards of literacy and numeracy at Key Stage 1. The full range of ability is represented and nearly all pupils make good progress by the time they leave in Year 8.
- Although at the end of Year 6 in 2013 some pupils had not achieved well in mathematics, most have now caught up. The additional help provided through extra funding, such as one-to-one support and small group work, is making a major contribution to this process. Typically, pupils leave the school in Year 8 with a good understanding of mathematics, preparing them well for their GCSE studies later on.
- There is a strong focus on reading and this gives pupils a sound basis for further study.
- Over the last two years, pupils have not made as much progress in writing, but the school has taken steps to improve this area and standards are rising rapidly. For example, English and humanities teaching is linked to strengthen pupils' writing skills.
- Disabled pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Those pupils who attend the speech and language base advance well in their learning because of the excellent provision. The school helps disabled pupils to access lessons and as many other activities as possible; consequently, they also make good progress.
- Pupils entitled to extra government funding usually make similar and sometimes better progress than others in the school. In 2013, however, in Year 6 they were over a year behind others in mathematics and writing standards but around two terms behind in reading. The extra support given to these pupils is helping them to quickly catch up in Year 7. Over time, these pupils are well prepared for their move to the upper school.
- Pupils who speak English as an additional language make very good progress, often better than others in the school.
- Those most able typically make good progress but are not always given work that helps them to succeed at the highest level.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is typically good as confirmed in observed lessons and the school's own monitoring records. School leaders have successfully taken action to reduce the number of lessons that require improvement.
- The relationships between staff and pupils are strong; pupils trust their teachers to help them learn.
- There is an increasing focus on checking pupils' progress regularly. In some lessons, teachers skilfully check understanding and fine-tune activities to move pupils rapidly on to the next level. This practice is not seen in all lessons, which means that pupils are not always challenged to undertake more difficult work when they are ready.
- Although teachers give very helpful verbal feedback in lessons, written feedback after marking is not frequent enough to give pupils the information they need to make rapid progress. In some subjects pupils receive very detailed information, such as in English and design and technology.
- Homework is set and marked regularly. Sometimes pupils have opportunities to research a topic and produce a report or presentation. For example, pupils research the links between science and Pythagoras. The most able pupils particularly enjoy this challenge.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and effective skills in raising levels of literacy and numeracy. Occasionally, they underestimate the ability and confidence of pupils to tackle problems and tasks and give them too much information at the start.
- Pupils with speech and language difficulties are taught expertly within the base so that they make good progress in their learning. Other groups of pupils with special educational needs do not have the same access to specialist support but are given effective additional help by

teaching assistants in lessons and in extra clubs and activities.

- Disabled pupils make good progress because they can access lessons and learning through specialist support and adjustments to teaching and the environment.
- For those entitled to extra funding, additional support such as reading clubs, mentoring and the Achievement for All programme is helping them to succeed. The Forest School also helps raise aspirations and enriches their learning experience.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Attendance is good because pupils enjoy coming to school. The number of fixed-term exclusions is low.
- Pupils appear very smart in their uniforms and their behaviour is typically courteous and respectful. Occasionally, there is evidence of thoughtless pranks such as removing key covers from key boards, but more generally, pupils care for the school environment well and adhere to high standards of conduct.
- The pupils who are disabled and use wheelchairs are confident, feel safe and enjoy school. Other pupils show care and consideration for them.
- Pupils usually arrive for lessons on time with the right equipment. They listen well to instructions and do their best to complete their work tidily. Because they want to succeed, pupils say that they do not like their lessons being disturbed by off-task behaviour; this does happen occasionally when lessons do not hold their interest.
- Most have high expectations of themselves and others so they work well in groups, helping each other. Older pupils model high standards of learning behaviour to younger ones. For example, Year 8 Buddies give encouraging reading support to Year 5 pupils.
- School records show that there is very little bullying and the few incidents that do take place are dealt with swiftly by members of staff. On parent questionnaires, the vast majority say that behaviour is managed well and their children are kept safe.
- Incidents involving racist or other discriminatory behaviour are rare. The pupils know that this type of language can be hurtful although, occasionally, someone may use a word that they do not know is inappropriate.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is good. Safeguarding is given a high priority by staff and governors. The pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in a variety of contexts such as when accessing the internet, using roads and railways, and leading a healthy lifestyle, knowing the risks associated with smoking and the use of drugs.
- In practical lessons, pupils are taught how to reduce risk and can use equipment and machinery safely and confidently.

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher has succeeded in building a learning community in which the interests and aspirations of pupils are nurtured and developed. Following recent significant changes to the senior leadership of the school, the team has become more effective in reviewing the work of the school and making improvements.
- Leadership is not outstanding as it has yet to bring about outstanding teaching and learning.
- Middle leaders carry out their roles conscientiously but do not always check that teaching and learning are of the highest standards because there is some overlap of responsibilities across the two key stages.
- School leaders strive to provide equal opportunities so that pupils achieve as well as possible to maximise life chances and reduce any discrimination. They have increased the range of support available for vulnerable or disadvantaged pupils, often through additional government grants, to help them make at least good progress. The two specialist bases are led and managed very effectively. The way in which special educational needs are met as a whole is under review.

- Staff members are trained well to meet the needs of the pupils. Ongoing and newly introduced programmes are very effective and senior leaders and governors have tackled and reduced underperformance efficiently.
- To promote literacy and numeracy development, the school has decided that pupils are to be taught by their class teachers in Key Stage 2, while retaining specialist teaching such as in French.
- In Key Stage 3, subjects such as mathematics and science are often linked to enable literacy and numeracy skills to be developed more cohesively.
- Opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning through visits and other activities are very well developed and promote social and cultural development. The extensive range of clubs includes art, gardening, Latin, ukulele and Warhammer.
- Sport is extremely popular and extra funding is providing an increase in sport for all, sustaining the Olympic Games aspirations. More pupils are encouraged to participate and to learn new skills such as rowing and windsurfing.
- Pupils are encouraged to reflect on life and all that it means in many subjects. In Year 8, for example, pupils look at apartheid in English, and in science, they marvel at the structure of a leaf viewed through a microscope. Pupils write messages of hope and aspirations on leaves on an indoor tree.
- Although this school is now an academy, it has retained strong links with the local authority bringing about mutual benefits. The school accesses support for literacy and numeracy, for example, and the headteacher contributes his leadership expertise to two other schools. The quality of liaison between first, middle and upper schools is increasingly effective.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The governing body is caring, enthusiastic and focused on raising achievement. Through regular training, governors know how to carry out their roles effectively and they make frequent visits to the school.
 - Governors are very knowledgeable about how well pupils are taught and are achieving, compared with other schools. They have a secure understanding of how the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils are met, including how well extra funding is used.
 - Since becoming an academy, governors have honed their financial skills and managed the school budgets very efficiently. They know what their statutory duties are, including in safeguarding, and carry them out routinely and effectively.
 - Governors have adopted the county model for pay and appraisal and have a clear overview of what they need to do to monitor performance and adjust salaries accordingly.

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	138186
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	441145

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Middle deemed secondary
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9–13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	613
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary-Anne Edwards
Headteacher	Paul Chadwick
Date of previous school inspection	Not applicable
Telephone number	01305 265651
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