

# Dorchester Middle School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	113860
<b>Local Authority</b>	Dorset
<b>Inspection number</b>	357440
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8–9 June 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Karl Sampson HMI

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<b>Type of school</b>	Middle deemed secondary
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–13
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	624
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs F Abbot-Hawkins
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr P Chadwick
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	25–26 June 2008
<b>School address</b>	Queen's Avenue Dorchester Dorset DT1 2HS
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<b>Age group</b>	9–13
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## Introduction

This pilot inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and three additional inspectors. Inspectors carried out observations of two full lessons, and 28 part lessons taught by 30 teachers. A third of the lessons were jointly observed by a member of the school's leadership team. A learning walk comprising a number of short visits to lessons in English, literacy, numeracy and French was carried out jointly with a senior leader. The work of the speech and language unit was observed and inspectors saw parts of homebase time as well as an assembly. Discussions were held with senior and middle leaders, staff, three members of the governing body and different groups of students. Inspectors looked at the school's self-evaluation and planning documents, external evaluations of the school's work, policy documents and pupils' work. They observed the school's work, and looked at 151 questionnaires sent in by parents and carers, questionnaires completed by a sample of pupils from each year group, and 27 completed by staff.

## Information about the school

Dorchester Middle School is a large middle school serving the western side of the town and its surrounding area. It has a nine-place speech and language resource base on site. The school has very strong partnerships with providers across the four to 19 age range through the Dorchester Area Schools Partnership (DASP). Most students are of White British heritage and the vast majority speak English as their first language. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals is below the national average. The proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is above the national average. The proportion of students who have a statement of special educational needs is double that found nationally. The school has achieved the Investors in People and Rights Respecting School awards and holds Healthy School status. The school has held science and mathematics specialist status since 2007. It has met the government's floor targets for Key Stage 2 over the past three years.

There has been considerable change in leadership and management since the last inspection in June 2008 with the appointment of a new headteacher, deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and special educational needs coordinator during this time.

**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

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Achievement</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Leadership and management</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Behaviour and safety</b>	<b>2</b>
Does the school adequately promote the pupils' well-being?	Yes
Does the school adequately promote community cohesion?	Yes
Does the school provide value for money?	Yes

### Key findings

- Dorchester Middle School is a good and improving school. It is well led by a headteacher who has a clear vision for the school's future.
- Good leadership and management are bringing about sustained improvement in many aspects of the school's work. There is a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among staff and a commitment to raising attainment and improving achievement for all.
- Pupils enjoy learning and achieve well. They make good progress in acquiring literacy, numeracy and communications skills and are well prepared for the next steps in their education.
- The school is a strong, cohesive learning community that reflects well its values of cooperation, total inclusion and success for all. As a result, the school provides a positive, caring and nurturing environment in which learners thrive.
- The range and quality of personalised and individual programmes enables pupils in the speech and language unit to make good progress academically and excellent progress in their personal development.
- Behaviour is good, attitudes to learning are positive and pupils exhibit confidence and respect for others, as evidenced by good relationships throughout the school. Pupils say that they feel very safe and their parents and carers agree.
- Teaching is good overall. The best lessons are carefully planned to meet the differing needs of pupils and provide frequent and high-quality opportunities for pupils to participate and drive learning forward. In the weaker lessons, activities are not yet sufficiently finely tuned to challenge the less-able pupils to make similar progress to their peers.
- The use of assessment to support pupils' progress is variable. It is at its best when teachers use incisive questioning to gauge pupils' understanding, deepen thinking and offer clear and detailed guidance about steps for improvement. These skills are not yet shared by all teachers across the school.

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## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Build upon the best practice in the school so that all teaching is good or better by July 2012 and the proportion of outstanding lessons is increased to at least 40% by September 2013. It should improve further its teaching by:
  - rigorously monitoring and using the assessment information for different pupil groups, particularly the least able, to ensure that learning opportunities are carefully tailored to fully meet their needs and maximise achievement
  - extending the use of high-quality dialogue to stimulate more active participation from pupils in all lessons and increase opportunities for pupils to explain their ideas fully, deepen their understanding and drive the learning forward
  - ensuring consistency in the use of day-to-day assessment across the curriculum so that all pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work through high-quality, subject-specific verbal and written feedback.

## Main report

### Achievement

In the large majority of lessons observed, pupils made good progress and achieved well. Pupils are attentive and engage enthusiastically with a wide range of activities. They enjoy active practical learning and respond well when given the opportunity to determine the direction and steer the learning for themselves. They particularly appreciate lessons which offer them frequent opportunities to extend and explain their thinking. All pupils acquire good skills in reading relative to their starting points as a result of a successful whole-school focus to accelerate the progress made in developing skills of literacy and communication. The science and mathematics specialism makes a good contribution to pupils' achievement and enjoyment of school life. It engages students in learning and helps them to gain the skills they need to take the next steps in their education with confidence.

Pupils enter the school with average attainment. During their time in school, they make good progress overall and by the end of Year 8 most pupils attain standards that are above those normally expected. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the main school make the progress expected given their starting points. School leaders know that sometimes activities in lessons are not yet sufficiently finely tuned to ensure that progress is good across all subjects for this group of students to close the gap more rapidly on pupils nationally. In the past, pupils made satisfactory progress at Key Stage 2 which then quickened as they moved through the school. This was most pronounced in literacy. However, improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, recent changes to the leadership and management structure and a more focused approach to intervention strategies and teaching groups are helping to reduce the difference in achievement.

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Consequently, progress for all pupils, regardless of starting point, is accelerating in Years 5 and 6, and variations in performance between different subjects and different key stages are closing.

### **Behaviour and safety**

Pupils' behaviour and safety are good in and around the school; pupils are polite and courteous to each other and staff, and create a calm and pleasant atmosphere. Pupils are active members of a harmonious learning community in which all feel valued and respected. They have a real sense of belonging and enjoy attending each day. Consequently, attendance is above average and pupils are punctual to school and lessons. Pupils say that they feel safe at school because adults care well for them and they are able to seek help and support when they have concerns or feel unwell. They have a good understanding of how to stay safe in and out of school, and they confirm that bullying is rare but when it does occur it is dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils and parents and carers are very appreciative of the excellent range of in-school support mechanisms available to meet a diverse range of physical, learning, social and emotional needs.

Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good, especially in the lessons that engage and motivate them. Pupils report good behaviour over time and show a good understanding of rewards and sanctions. Most parents, carers and pupils agree that standards of behaviour are good. A small minority of pupils who returned the questionnaires, or who spoke to inspectors, said that there are occasions when their learning in lessons can be disrupted by others. Inspectors found that behaviour drops to satisfactory in lessons where the teaching is not sufficiently challenging to capture pupils' interests. This disinterest can manifest itself in low-level off-task behaviour but is usually demonstrated by a more passive attitude to learning because the activities do not fully engage pupils.

### **Teaching**

The quality of teaching is good because a large majority of it enables pupils to make good progress; some is outstanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan lessons well and create engaging learning activities which are enjoyed by most pupils. However, some inconsistency in teaching quality still exists. This is most evident in the quality of marking, assessment and written feedback, which is variable across subjects and does not always make clear how pupils can improve their work. In too many cases, guidance is of limited value providing general comments that do not enable the student to respond to and/or reshape their learning. School leaders recognise that monitoring and evaluation are not yet sufficiently refined to ensure that the very best practice is seen across all curriculum areas.

The best lessons are characterised by innovative and challenging learning experiences that ensure high levels of pupil participation and engage pupils as partners in the learning process. High-quality questioning and dialogue are skilfully used to develop pupils' skills of communication and support them to articulate ideas

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fluently and with confidence. Assessment information is used precisely to plan creative activities that awaken pupils' curiosity and draw them into learning. Imaginative use is made of information and communication technology to develop understanding, and very good literacy and numeracy skills are developed within each subject.

Less effective lessons, where progress is satisfactory, typically have the following characteristics:

- overlong teacher explanations which inhibit opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and to develop and explain their ideas
- some slow-paced learning activities that are insufficiently challenging
- learning activities that do not always match the differing needs of all pupils, and which can lead to off-task behaviour and limit progress
- questioning that rarely delves deep in order to check and develop pupils' understanding, or teachers who are inclined to intervene too readily, which militates against pupils' own evaluation of key learning points.

## **Leadership and management**

The headteacher inspires a strong belief in the school's success and the fulfillment of every pupil's potential is central to the school's ethos. Teamwork and collegiality are evident throughout the school, and the headteacher's vision is shared and implemented by staff at all levels, governors and pupils. The school has been innovative in its development of leadership capacity. A significant number of excellent internal appointments at senior and middle leader level have been instrumental in the school's determined commitment and success to drive up standards. As a result, expectations of pupils' capabilities have been raised through more stringent use of assessment data to set challenging targets and inform teachers' planning so that tasks are now being more closely tailored to pupils' individual needs. This work is underpinned by well-targeted professional development for teachers with a clear focus on improving classroom practice. There is much in place to encourage teachers to improve their practice further.

The school's commitment to equality of opportunity is exemplified by its work to successfully raise attainment at Key Stage 2 and in English where most pupils now make good progress. This work is now being extended to ensure that all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make the same good progress as their peers. The recent appointment of a new special educational needs coordinator and assistant has led to a significant strengthening of practice and facilitated good quality collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants. Analysis of school data and progress seen in lessons show that the impact of this work is already beginning to accelerate the progress made by this group of pupils. Although not yet fully embedded, this information is being used to help all staff identify where to intervene to provide additional support and where new teaching strategies need to be developed to improve learning.

The governing body provides enthusiastic and committed support and makes a

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strong contribution to the strategic direction of the school. Governors visit the school regularly and, through their learning walks and subject links, are knowledgeable about the school. The confidence and expertise of governors in evaluating the performance of all groups of students in relation to national expectations and in holding it to account are growing. Safeguarding arrangements are good. The school takes the protection of its pupils very seriously and effective procedures and training are in place to keep pupils safe.

The school's promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and sits at the heart of this cohesive learning community. It is embodied by pupils' good learning and progress and the effective care and guidance they receive. The school provides a caring environment and a range of personalised programmes of learning provide good support for all students, especially those who are more vulnerable. Strong partnerships with parents and carers, a range of outside agencies and neighbouring schools ensure that pupils' diverse needs are met. Pupils were particularly positive about the quality of support for transition from first school and on to upper school as well as the range of artistic and sporting opportunities that are available. Pupils spoke confidently about the atmosphere of mutual respect that exists across the school and their pride that this was recognised through their 'Rights Respecting School' award. School leaders recognise that pupils' knowledge and understanding about the diversity of British culture is less well developed.



## Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dorchester Middle 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 12 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 151 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 624 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Q1 My child is happy at school	85	56	60	40	4	3	0	0
Q2 My child feels safe at school	89	59	61	40	1	1	0	0
Q3 The school helps my child to achieve as well as they can	79	52	66	44	5	3	1	1
Q4 The school meets my child’s particular needs	79	52	62	41	5	3	2	1
Q5 The school ensures my child is well looked after	93	62	55	36	3	2	0	0
Q6 Teaching at this school is good	91	60	59	39	1	1	0	0
Q7 There is a good standard of behaviour at this school	63	42	81	54	5	3	0	0
Q8 Lessons are not disrupted by bad behaviour	35	23	86	57	20	13	1	1
Q9 The school deals with any cases of bullying well	65	43	61	40	7	5	0	0
Q10 The school helps me to support my child’s learning	70	46	73	48	7	5	0	0
Q11 The school responds to my concerns and keeps me well informed	74	49	67	44	4	3	2	1
Q12 The school is well led and managed	85	56	61	40	1	1	0	0

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 all 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	46	48	6	0
Primary schools	6	47	40	7
Secondary schools	12	39	38	11
Sixth forms	13	42	41	3
Special schools	28	49	19	4
Pupil referral units	14	45	31	10
All schools	10	46	37	7

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 are for the period 1 September 2010 to 31 December 2010 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## 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"><li>■ The achievement of all pupils.</li><li>■ Behaviour and safety.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of leadership and management.</li></ul> <p>and taking into consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ how well the school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.</li></ul>
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.**

10 June 2011

Dear Pupils



### **Inspection of Dorchester Middle School, Dorchester DT1 2HS**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We were very impressed by the way in which you welcomed us and were so eager to show us the work of your school.

We found out that:

- Dorchester Middle School is a good school
- behaviour is good because of the way you work hard and the way you respect and look after each other
- you feel safe and trust adults that they will sort things out
- teaching is good and you receive good support to help you learn and ensure you make good progress
- you really appreciate the work of your teachers
- school leaders, teachers and governors are all determined that you should have the opportunity to succeed
- your school is led and managed well.

To make your school even better, we have asked your headteacher and teachers to share their best ideas and learn from each other to improve teaching so that it is more consistently good or outstanding. They are aware that your lessons do not always fully match your individual needs, and have good plans in place to ensure that everyone makes the progress of which they are capable. They can achieve this by:

- making sure that all lessons best meet your needs and provide you with challenging learning activities which enable you all to make good progress
- allowing you enough time to develop and explain your ideas in lessons and take greater responsibility for your own learning
- making sure that teachers consistently give you high-quality feedback on your work so that you always know how to improve in each subject.

All of you can certainly help your teachers by responding to their comments and using the feedback that they give, so you improve your learning and the quality of your work.

Yours sincerely

Karl Sampson  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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