

Dorcan Technology College

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	126450
Local Authority	Swindon
Inspection number	381238
Inspection dates	23–24 November 2011
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,023
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ms Jacquie Rains
Headteacher	Dr Scott Sissons
Date of previous school inspection	4–5 February 2009
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. Inspectors observed 39 lessons taught by 38 different teachers, conducted three 'learning walks' and made 10 short visits to lessons and tutorial sessions. Meetings were also held with five groups of students, staff and the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors also looked at a range of documentation including policies, data and analyses, records of the college's monitoring, minutes of governing body meetings and questionnaires completed by 79 staff, 107 students and 102 parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The attainment, learning and progress of all students, in particular those who are more able.
- The extent to which improvements in teaching and the use of assessment identified at the last inspection have been sustained and are now consistent across all subjects and classrooms.
- The effectiveness of the school's tracking systems and the quality of support for different groups of students.
- The impact of strategies to develop engagement with parents and carers and to promote students' attendance.
- The accuracy of school self-evaluation and the effectiveness with which leaders and managers at all levels, including governors, are tackling identified weaknesses and driving improvement.

Information about the school

Dorcan Technology College is larger than the average secondary school and has held specialist status in technology since 1999. The very large majority of students are from White British backgrounds with approximately 11% from a wide range of minority ethnic groups, which is below the national average. Few speak English as an additional language, although this varies between different year groups and the overall proportion is increasing; notably a larger group of Nepalese students are now attending the school. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is average. Similarly, the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is average, however, a below average percentage have a statement of special educational needs. The school holds a number of awards including Sportsmark, Healthy Schools status and International School status.

The school is set to become an academy on 1 December 2011 and will be known as Dorcan Academy.

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

3

Main findings

Dorcan is a satisfactory and improving school which provides an exceptionally high standard of care, guidance and support for all of its students. Consequently, students feel safe in school, behave both responsibly and courteously, attend well and make a good contribution to the school and wider community, for example, as ambassadors, career or peer mentors and junior sports leaders.

Attainment, which has risen significantly since the last inspection, is now broadly average overall. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities and those who are vulnerable make good progress because of the good curriculum, close monitoring of their progress, and skilfully targeted support and intervention.

However, this is not consistent across the school and progress, though improving, for middle ability and more-able students is satisfactory. Nevertheless, students are well equipped for life beyond the school with all leaving having attained five or more A* to G GCSE grades, and for almost all students, this measure included English and mathematics. This, together with above average attendance and excellent support and guidance prior to and after leaving the school, ensures that almost all enter and remain in education, employment or training.

The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, although an increasing proportion of teaching is good and sometimes outstanding. However, the good and outstanding practice is not fully shared across the school. All teachers make use of usually accurate assessment information to identify what students of differing abilities within a class will learn in each lesson; these are known as the learning outcomes. However, these are not always successfully transferred into the work that is set in lesson plans. Consequently, all students within a class tend to be set the same activity at the same level, rather than tailored to meet differing needs of groups, and the expectations of what students can achieve are not always high enough. In the most effective lessons, learning moves at a brisk pace, students are actively involved and have frequent opportunities to work together, discuss ideas and share responses. The use of assessment has improved but is inconsistent across the school. Inspectors saw appropriate use of peer- and self-assessment and evidence from books showed that teachers provide students with helpful feedback on how to improve, which in a few instances develops into an effective learning dialogue between the teacher and the student. While students are aware of their numeric targets they are not always clear about what they need to do to achieve them or how to reach the next level; nor do they take sufficient responsibility for their learning by setting and reviewing their own personal and specific subject targets.

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Senior leaders, in their efforts to secure improvement, have communicated their vision for the school and galvanised the enthusiasm of staff very effectively. As a result, all staff who returned their questionnaire said they were proud to be a member of the school. The use of challenging but realistic targets, and careful monitoring of students' progress and attendance led to a significant rise overall in progress and attainment in 2010, and notably for the less able and those attaining the highest grades at GCSE in 2011. School self-evaluation is accurate, and involves leaders and managers at all levels. Rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning by both middle and senior leaders, while securing improvement, particularly for some individual teachers, is not consistent across the school. Consequently, capacity for sustained improvement is satisfactory.

Up to 40% of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory may receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is consistently good and a higher proportion is outstanding, so enabling all students, especially those who are more able, to make at least good progress, by:
 - raising teachers' expectations of what students can achieve
 - sharing best practice more widely
 - increasing the amount of active learning in lessons
 - tailoring activities to meet the full range of students' learning needs
 - giving students more opportunities to work together, discuss ideas and share responses.
- Sharpen the use of assessment and encourage students to take greater responsibility for their learning, by:
 - developing the dialogue between students and teachers through verbal and written feedback so students in all subjects know how to improve and when they have done so
 - ensuring students routinely set personal and specific learning targets which help them to improve, and checking whether they have met them.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

3

The attainment for Year 11 students for the last two years has been broadly in line with the national average. In 2010, the progress of more-able students was less than for those of middle ability who made satisfactory progress. While attainment overall rose slightly in 2011, the progress of more-able students improved, with a higher proportion achieving A* and A GCSE grades in most subjects. Senior leaders have sharpened their focus on the progress students make towards targets, in particular for the more able. School progress data for current Year 11 students suggest that a

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higher proportion of average and more-able students are making better progress based on their GCSE assessed work to date and half-termly subject assessments. This, together with the effective use of interventions to tackle any underachievement, is raising the attainment of most students. As a result, the school is successfully narrowing the attainment gap with national averages for less-able and potentially vulnerable students, such as those who are known to be eligible for free school meals. The small number of students at the early stages of speaking English are well supported both in and out of lessons and make good progress. However, students’ achievement overall is satisfactory. In a large number of lessons observed by inspectors, students were keen to learn, responded well to tasks and felt confident to ask questions but they are not always sufficiently challenged to achieve their best. In the strongest lessons seen during the inspection, such as in English, science and physical education, students made good and sometimes outstanding progress. In these lessons varied learning activities engaged and challenged them and they were fully involved in a highly active and participative way, as independent and responsible learners. However, this effective practice is not embedded across the school.

Students continue to enjoy and participate in the wide range of sports activities. They develop a good awareness of how to live a healthy lifestyle, through learning opportunities across the curriculum, such as in physical education and drama. Students’ literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills are good, and stronger than those in numeracy. Students learning to speak English as an additional language rapidly improve their English language skills through carefully targeted support, which includes the provision of laptops and same first language student buddies. Students develop good moral, social and cultural understanding. However, their spiritual development is satisfactory because opportunities for reflection are missed in lessons, tutorial time and around school. Students show they develop strong work-related skills. This was exemplified during the inspection in an outstanding drama lesson, students’ responsible participation in a Key Stage 4 business and enterprise day and in the cooperative working of the Year 11 prefect team. The school council remains a strength and students routinely contribute to improving teaching and learning. Students also contribute in other ways, such as the Year 11 career mentors who help Year 9 students with their option choices.

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	3
The quality of pupils’ learning and their progress	3
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
The extent to which pupils feel safe	2

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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Pupils' behaviour	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community	2
The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attendance ¹	2
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2

How effective is the provision?

The quality of teaching and the use of assessment have improved since the last inspection, in particular in relation to the use of questioning and the way teachers plan what students will learn during lessons. However, they are satisfactory overall, because practice between and across subjects is inconsistent, resulting in the uneven progress of students. During the inspection many of the lessons observed were too teacher-directed and opportunities were missed for collaborative activities and structured discussion, to develop students' subject understanding and speaking and listening skills. While tasks and resources are often engaging and varied they are not always sufficiently customised or structured to meet the needs of all ability groups, in particular to challenge and extend the learning for the most able. Learning was most effective when expectations were high and good account was taken of students' levels and abilities both in planning and lesson delivery. Nonetheless, a consistent feature of planning is the identification of the learning needs of individuals within classes and the effective deployment of teaching assistants. Teachers develop positive relationships with students and use their good subject knowledge well in planning the content of lessons. Students across the school told inspectors that they trust their teachers and know that they are always here to help and support them; a significant contributory factor to the often good behaviour for learning seen across lessons. Displays are not always used effectively to raise aspirations and support learning. While there are good examples of assessment and marking, the overall quality of oral and written feedback on students' work, including marking, is still too variable. While the learning outcomes for lessons are well crafted they are not consistently used to fully inform lesson planning and enable both teachers and students to effectively assess how well they are learning.

The varied and well-tailored curriculum is regularly reviewed and refined to provide a wide range of vocational and academic courses to meet the full ability range. Religious education is now taught as a separate subject alongside history and geography in the global learning curriculum. New technologies, provided as part of the technology status and involvement in the Diploma programme, are used effectively to support courses in creative media, engineering, and design and technology as well as teaching and learning in other subjects. Development of basic skills across the curriculum is effective, with a more coordinated approach being taken to enhance progress in literacy. Extra-curricular provision remains a strength

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with high participation by different groups closely monitored and targeted provision put in place, such as a football club for Nepalese students.

Excellent transition arrangements from primary school, which were commended by parents and carers in their inspection questionnaire responses, ensure Year 7 students make a good start to their secondary education. Improved and effective home-school liaison, very good partnership work with a range of outside agencies and services and highly targeted support for all groups of students has led to improved attendance and achievement. The school can point to telling evidence which demonstrates how they support individuals who face challenging circumstances.

These are the grades for the quality of provision

The quality of teaching	3
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	3
The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships	2
The effectiveness of care, guidance and support	1

How effective are leadership and management?

The headteacher and senior team have worked purposefully to secure improvement and develop the leadership skills of pastoral and subject leaders, who are increasingly taking responsibility for the outcomes of students both academically and personally. Leaders and managers at all levels are tracking the progress of students through careful analysis of performance data, in particular to ensure that students who are capable of achieving GCSE grade C or better, especially in English and mathematics, do so. Consequently ambition for students is securely embedded and all staff feel fully involved in driving improvements, as seen in the rise in attainment over the last two years. Self-evaluation at whole-school level, while accurate, tends to identify provision rather than impact. Action planning at school level is better than at subject department level; nonetheless both reflect the need to raise attainment. At subject department level, actions are not always linked to success criteria and monitoring progress. Several joint observations by inspectors with senior staff showed they have a good understanding of what constitutes effective teaching and learning. Rigorous monitoring and the successful introduction of coaching for individuals have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. This can be seen in teachers' more effective use of questioning and a common approach to lesson planning. However, teaching and assessment remain uneven because improvements are still to be consistently embedded across the school. Collaboration between subjects is developing, although the sharing of good practice is not yet fully capitalised on.

Governors are committed and currently provide satisfactory support. The new Chair

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of the Governing Body is driving forward rapid improvements through: training in understanding performance data; ensuring statutory requirements are met; providing increasing challenge on school performance; validating information by in-school visits; and self-evaluation. Safeguarding procedures are good with detailed recording and follow-through of procedures. Equality of opportunity is carefully monitored both in relation to achievement and participation in extra-curricular activities. Concerted actions have successfully tackled the poor attendance of specific groups and past underachievement, through personalised interventions and the well-tailored curriculum, for example, for young carers and less-able students.

Numerous partnerships, such as those with external agencies and with local schools and colleges, routinely enhance educational provision and students’ well-being. A wide range of actions promote community cohesion satisfactorily within the school, local community and international communities, in particular in Europe, as recognised by its International School status. However, this provision is not strategically planned, although actions are reviewed. Engagement with parents and carers has improved since the last inspection which has contributed to improved student attendance and more involvement in their children’s learning and progress.

These are the grades for leadership and management

The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement	2
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	3
The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met	3
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	3
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	3

Views of parents and carers

The percentage of parents and carers who completed questionnaires was below average. The large majority of these indicated that they are happy with their children’s experience at the school. Positive comments included the effectiveness of transition arrangements into Year 7 and the good quality of communication. A few parents and carers raised a number of different concerns, including the behaviour of

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students and the quality of teaching. These and a few other concerns were confidentially followed through with senior staff. The inspection team's views are included in the report.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Dorcan Technology College 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 102 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,023 registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	34	33	62	61	5	5	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	23	23	72	71	6	6	0	0
The school informs me about my child's progress	31	30	66	65	3	3	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	25	25	74	73	1	1	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	24	24	70	69	5	5	0	0
The school helps me to support my child's learning	16	16	77	75	7	7	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	9	9	81	79	7	7	0	0
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)	27	26	67	66	4	4	2	2
The school meets my child's particular needs	22	22	73	72	4	4	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	19	19	65	64	10	10	2	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	15	15	77	75	7	7	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	20	20	74	73	5	5	1	1
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	34	33	64	63	1	1	2	2

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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see 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">■ 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 pupils' 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.



25 November 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Dorcan Technology College, Swindon SN3 5DA

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to let you know that we enjoyed the time we spent with you on our recent visit. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and sharing your views with us in meetings, lessons and around the school. We found Dorcan Technology College to be satisfactory overall. Here is a summary of our main inspection findings.

- You all make at least satisfactory progress, while those of you with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who face other challenges such as learning to speak English as an additional language, make good progress.
- Teaching, while satisfactory overall, is improving but in some lessons you could make better progress.
- The good curriculum is carefully adjusted to meet your needs and interests.
- You feel safe in school because you receive excellent care and support.
- You enjoy coming to school and your attendance is now above average.
- Over your time in the school, most of you participate well in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school.

Your headteacher and the senior leadership team, year and subject leaders, teachers and other staff are all working hard to improve the school and they are keen to improve it further. To help them with this, we have said that senior leaders should:

- improve teaching so that you make consistently good or better progress in lessons by, in particular, providing you with more opportunities for active and collaborative learning to discuss and share your ideas
- sharpen the use of assessment through improved feedback on how well you are doing and what you need to do to improve further. We have also asked that you become involved in setting personal and specific learning targets for improvement and checking when you have met them.

You can help by taking more responsibility for your own learning and progress. We would like to wish you well for the future as the school becomes Dorcan Academy on 1 December 2011.

Yours sincerely
Angela Corbett
Her Majesty's Inspector

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