

Dorchester Learning Centre

The Old Rectory, Winterborne Monkton, Dorchester, Dorset, DT2 9PS

Inspection dates 5–6 March 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Senior leaders are well respected and provide confident leadership. Together, they and all staff skilfully inspire students to overcome difficulties in their lives. This helps them to return to mainstream school or stay on at the centre, make good progress and achieve the best possible GCSE results.
- Teaching is good. Staff are skilled at encouraging students who have previously been reluctant learners to see their potential. As a result, students respond with eagerness and enthusiasm and achieve well.
- Students' behaviour is typically good in lessons and around school. They are courteous and respectful of staff and each other. Relationships between adults and students are both supportive and productive.
- All students are assessed when they get a place at the school. This means the teachers know exactly what help the students need to help them make good progress from their different starting points.
- The range of subjects on offer enables students to study courses which are well matched to their needs and aspirations. They consequently develop the skills necessary for further education, training or employment.
- The school provides a safe learning environment that re-engages many students and allows them to build their confidence and self-esteem very well.
- The governing body has a thorough understanding and knowledge of the quality of the school's work. This enables governors to hold leaders to account and ensure that the school continues to improve.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching is not yet outstanding. There is not enough growth in students' skills, knowledge and understanding in some subjects.
- The school's tracking information does not define outstanding progress clearly enough. Targets are not sufficiently precise.
- Teachers do not consistently use written feedback or check that students act on the advice provided in order to improve their work.
- Students are not given sufficient opportunities to develop their literacy skills across the curriculum.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed 12 lessons taught by 10 different teachers, two jointly with the headteacher.
- An inspector visited two of the off-site settings, including the hospital classroom which is staffed and managed by the school.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, staff, two members of the governing body including the Chair of Governors, and the school's effectiveness partner.
- Inspectors held meetings with students, both as a group and individually.
- There were no responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View) but inspectors took account of a recent parent survey and the views of one parent who contacted the inspection team during the inspection. Twenty four staff questionnaires completed by staff were also taken into account.
- The inspectors looked at a wide range of documentation including: information on students' progress, behaviour and attendance and ways in which these are tracked and monitored; samples of students' work across a range of subjects; the school's self-evaluation and development plans; and a range of policies and procedures relating to the management of staff performance. They also checked the school's procedures for safeguarding, governing body minutes of meetings, and information about links with other schools and the wider community. The school's website was also taken into account.

Inspection team

Elizabeth (Liz) Bull, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Caroline Dearden

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Dorchester Learning Centre provides alternative provision for students who have been excluded, were at risk of exclusion or are in need of specific support to help them be more successful in mainstream education. The school also caters for students with medical conditions that prevent attendance at a mainstream school and a few students not accessing other education.
- The school uses three other sites to deliver its curriculum. These are all in or around Dorchester. No 51 is an art studio, Whitfield is a rural activity centre for young people who are in hospital and unable to attend their usual school and students also have access to education in a classroom at Dorchester hospital.
- The majority of students who attend the school are dual-registered (still on the roll of a mainstream school).
- Permanently excluded students are offered full-time programmes, and other students attend the school for differing periods of time. The dual-registered students' length of stay varies but for many is no longer than two terms. The vast majority of pupils are in Key Stage 4, of whom 42 are in Year 11. These students often complete their compulsory education at the school.
- Almost all students are White British.
- Over half of students are eligible for the government's pupil premium, which provides additional funding for children who are looked after and those pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals. This is well above average.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching so that it is typically outstanding by:
 - providing increased opportunities for teachers to work more closely together, to offer each other support and challenge to share best practice and develop their skills to a high level
 - ensuring marking and feedback highlight what improvements students need to make to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding, and that students respond to the feedback
 - extending the opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills in all subjects.
- Improve achievement by:
 - further refining the school's analysis of its tracking systems so that outstanding progress is more clearly defined
 - utilising teachers' understanding of individual students' needs to plan appropriate challenge for all individuals so that they aspire to reach their potential
 - setting more precise targets for individual students.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The passion and drive of the senior leaders have made sure that the school is constantly adding to its many strengths. Leaders are accurate in their judgement about how well the school is doing and what it needs to be better. They have high expectations and provide a clear focus on encouraging students to engage in learning. There is a positive atmosphere in the school. Staff are supportive and fully committed to the school's ethos. Morale is high and staff are proud of their contribution to the achievement of students.
- Teaching is good and is improving, being checked accurately and regularly. Staff performance is linked to pay progression. Staff have benefited from good training opportunities, particularly on building and sustaining positive relationships, safeguarding and emotional literacy.
- The emphasis on improving students' basic skills helps students to make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Their progress in literacy is less strong than in numeracy as there are fewer opportunities for students to develop their literacy skills in subjects other than English.
- Senior leaders are developing a system of tracking the progress being made by students and the standards they reach. Targets are set for individuals but are not precise enough. Analysis of students' performance gives evidence of good progress, but outstanding progress is less well defined.
- Subject leaders thoroughly check students' performance. They promptly take any required action to address any inconsistencies in order to sustain rates of progress and levels of achievement.
- Effective systems are in place to monitor students' progress, behaviour and attendance when they are away from the main centre. This helps to keep students' safe as the school always knows where students are and enables leaders to take prompt action to address any concerns. For example staff at the Art classroom communicate with the main school to report students' attendance at the start of each lesson.
- The school has a highly inclusive philosophy in which excellent relationships are fostered and equality of opportunity is strongly promoted. Inspectors found no evidence of any form of discrimination. Students learn to understand how their behaviour impacts on others and how they can become positive contributors to the wider community. Students respond well to the positive role models demonstrated by staff.
- Safeguarding arrangements promote good practice and help to minimise risk. They meet statutory requirements. Staff make extensive efforts to make it easy for students to attend regularly. As a result, attendance has improved considerably for most students and this contributes to their rapid gains in learning. Only a very small number of students miss out on their education through poor attendance.
- The curriculum meets the needs and interests of the students, providing them with a broad range of vocational subjects and GCSEs, including English and mathematics. Students are encouraged to lead healthy lives and access a range of outdoor sports awards, for example Royal Yachting Association powerboating. The extensive opportunities available are closely matched to meet students' needs, encouraging them to work hard in all areas of schooling through their improved general attitudes to learning. The school prepares students well for life in modern Britain through personal and social education, careers guidance, life skills and support for charities. Opportunities to take part in activities such as Sports Leadership and work experience and the use of visiting speakers are valued by students. British values, including tolerance and respect for differences, are promoted well and evidenced in the students' good behaviour and positive relationships.
- Additional funding, such as that provided through the pupil premium, is used well to provide additional support. Disadvantaged students and those with specific learning issues are provided with the help they need to make the same good progress as their peers.
- Parent surveys highlight the support and encouragement the school gives to help students and their families. Several parents commented that they wished their child could have attended the school sooner.
- The school works closely with careers advisors to provide students with good advice and guidance about the various options open to them when leaving school.
- The local authority is providing light touch support for this good school. They work with leaders and helpfully check that school self-evaluation is accurate.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors make a strong contribution to the school. They offer a wide range of relevant experiences and professional knowledge. They understand the school's key priorities and are focused on improving teaching to ensure students' progress is further accelerated. They know the school well, provide strong support and hold leaders to account.
 - They are fully aware of the performance management arrangements and ensure that processes are in

place to reward good teaching and tackle any underperformance.

- Governors have a good grasp of how funding is used, including how effectively the pupil premium is used to provide appropriate additional support.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Many students enter the school with a record of poor behaviour. Clear guidance and support are used effectively in developing positive attitudes to learning, as well as raising self-esteem and a personal sense of worth.
- Students demonstrate a commitment to their learning, as seen in the pride they take in their work. Generally, good relationships have been established with staff and with their fellow students. This has helped students to enjoy learning, build their confidence quickly and take part in the full range of opportunities available. Students also behave well outside lessons and while attending other sites.
- The school environment and attractive displays of work are well cared for and no litter or graffiti were seen during the inspection.
- During conversations with inspectors students were positive about the difference that they felt attending Dorchester Learning Centre was making to their progress, and how they were engaged with their learning. One student told the inspector: 'Attending this school has helped turn my life around.' Students have high aspirations, demonstrated as they talked with optimism about their futures. No significant concerns were raised about students' behaviour by parents, staff or students during the inspection.
- The attendance of students improves strongly when they join the school. Overall levels of attendance have risen year on year. The attendance of those who were persistent absentees in their mainstream school has also improved. The current student attendance level of 84% greatly exceeds the national average for pupil referral units.
- During this academic year, the school had two one-day, fixed-term exclusions in the autumn term and no permanent exclusions. There were no reported racist or homophobic incidents.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good.
- Systems for keeping students' safe are rigorous. Detailed risk assessments are in place and these ensure any risks especially for more adventurous activities are minimised.
- Discussions with students reveal that they feel well looked after by staff, and the views of parents and staff echo this.
- Students are aware of different types of bullying, including bullying through social media, and say that they know they can talk to their key worker or another member of staff if they have any concerns. They are confident that any issues will be properly dealt with. Students say that staff are quick to intervene to deal with inappropriate behaviour, such as name-calling, and any incidences of bullying are rare.
- Recruitment and vetting practices are secure, and the safeguarding of young people features regularly in staff training.

The quality of teaching is good

- The quality of teaching and its impact over time is typically good. This was evident from visits to lessons, inspection of students' work, information on students' performance, and discussions about learning. Classrooms are tidy and attractive displays enhance learning.
- The staff work hard to get to know their students well. They build positive relationships that help individuals to enjoy attending the school and learn a range of subjects. The positive ethos encourages and supports students, building their confidence and helping them to realise the importance of learning. The wide general focus on achievement supports students' good social development as well as their good academic progress.
- The calm, deliberate and persistent approach of teachers means that there are consistent and clear boundaries in classrooms and students are able to fully participate in lessons.
- Lessons are planned carefully and are usually well matched to students' needs so that new learning builds securely on what students already know and understand. Teachers use targets well to motivate students and monitor their progress over short periods of time, although they sometimes lack precision. Literacy and particularly mathematics are developed well in many lessons. The school recognises that literacy is

not consistently reinforced across all subjects in order to accelerate progress further.

- Good questioning and feedback to students help them to know what they have to do to accelerate their progress. Marking and assessment are increasingly thorough, but do not routinely provide well-defined ways for students to improve their work. Students are not routinely required to make essential corrections. The opportunities to respond to feedback are not always given a high enough priority.
- Teachers use a range of effective strategies to support learning and motivate learners. They, together with teaching assistants, create a positive ethos which encourages and supports students to build their confidence and appreciate the importance of learning. Some teaching has an outstanding impact, but not enough is outstanding across the school. Teachers' extensive and precise understanding of individuals is not yet used fully to challenge all individuals to aspire to their potential.

The achievement of pupils is good

- When students start at the school, at varying times throughout the year, their attainment is usually below that typically expected for their age. This is often because their circumstances have prevented the smooth flow of learning in the past. Once at the school, students rapidly begin to re-engage with learning and their rate of progress improves.
- On arrival, the abilities and needs of students are quickly and accurately assessed. Personalised programmes are sensitively and precisely tailored to individual needs. This includes effective planning for English and mathematics. Full account is taken of students' often complex needs and vulnerabilities. All settle quickly and happily, including those with anxiety issues.
- From their low starting points, students go on to make good progress. Students who are in the school for short periods of time before being reintegrated into mainstream schools get back on track by re-engaging with learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Those students who stay at the school longer, and those who go through Year 11, progress enough to achieve well in a range of GCSEs and vocational qualifications. Last year 100% of students gained one GCSE pass whilst the most able gained up to six GCSEs with good successes in mathematics, science and art. Students' achievements in these examinations reflect good achievement from the students' different starting points. The school does not enter students for GCSE early.
- Students make rapid progress in their personal development. They do this because they make good gains in their learning and staff are highly successful at helping students find solutions to their problems.
- Across all areas of the curriculum students make good progress including in literacy, although some students could do even better. Achievement in mathematics is good. Staff make topics interesting and provide opportunities to solve problems in practical ways. These reinforce students' grasp of using and applying mathematical concepts. Because students develop a wide range of skills in English and a good understanding of mathematics, they are well prepared for the next stages of their lives, for employment or for further or higher education.
- Excellent opportunities are provided for students to develop new skills in a broad range of activities, such as cooking, powerboat driving and RYA syllabus, and motorcycling. They respond enthusiastically to the high expectations and tough challenges set for them in a practical environment, including also a grounding in their own personal safety. This provides them with opportunities to find things out for themselves, for example by organising the sequence of preparing, measuring and cooking a variety of ingredients in cooking. Activities such as these enable students to gain a range of practical and personal skills that add to their self-confidence and resilience.
- Students' achievements in art have risen year on year. Students can choose to study for GCSE in art and design, photography, textiles, graphics or three-dimensional design. Last year all 16 students achieved a GCSE with grades ranging from A to D.
- The school's assessment, tracking and qualification results show that there is very little difference in the achievement of different groups of students, including those taught at other sites.

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	130316
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	447970

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

Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Pupil referral maintained school
Age range of pupils	10–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	77
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Carol Graham
Headteacher	John Taylor
Date of previous school inspection	2-3 November 2011
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