

Dorset Studio School

Kingston Maurward, Dorchester, Dorset DT2 8PX

Inspection dates

13–14 September 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Trustees, governors and school leaders have created a school with a unique character. They have ensured that the school's land-based specialism is central to its character and curriculum. As a result, pupils are motivated by the excellent opportunities and facilities and keen to do well.
- Pupils make good progress overall. Many join the school with relatively low starting points in English and mathematics but catch up well as a result of good teaching.
- Disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities do well. This is because teachers keep a close watch on the progress they make as individuals and help them when they struggle.
- Pupils are enthusiastic about their land-based and animal care studies. They respond eagerly to their teachers. As a result, pupils make very good progress in these subjects.
- Leaders have made it a priority to develop the confidence and self-esteem of pupils as they advance through the school. Consequently, pupils who enter in Year 9 with little self-confidence develop into articulate young men and women.
- Pupils behave well around the site and in lessons. They act sensibly and responsibly around the farm equipment and animals that are central to school life.
- The headteacher leads the school with much commitment and skill. She communicates her vision and expectations clearly and both staff and pupils respond well. Her understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is accurate and her vision and improvement strategy are ambitious but pragmatic.
- The school's strong and effective partnership with its two sponsors, a local training school and a land-based college of further education, is a key factor in the success of the school.
- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching and learning in the curriculum. English is a strength of the school. Pupils make less progress in geography and science.
- Pupils are not always given work that challenges them. When they are challenged, for example in English, they make good progress. However, there are not enough opportunities across other parts of the curriculum to extend pupils fully.
- Senior staff continue to lead improvements in teaching, learning and assessment. They have set expectations of teachers and are training them appropriately. However, there is more to do to ensure that all teaching is as good as the best. The development of middle leaders to support this improvement is at an early stage.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that the new teaching and learning policy is consistently implemented across the whole curriculum
 - ensuring that pupils are regularly challenged to extend and deepen their thinking.
- Improve leadership and management by developing the role of middle leaders across the school so that they can steer further improvements in teaching across the whole school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The trustees, governors and headteacher have successfully built a school that meets the needs of those pupils who want to work with animals, in agriculture or land-based industries. The rural environment permeates most aspects of the school's character. As a result, pupils and parents are enthusiastic about their school. They see it as unique and something to be proud of. Some pupils travel significant distances to attend.
- The headteacher is very committed to the distinctive character of the school. As a result of her effective planning and example of constant encouragement, pupils thrive in a caring atmosphere. She and her leadership team provide very good opportunities for pupils to develop academic skills alongside effective practical expertise from working with animals and in agriculture. Consequently, the school has improved quickly since her arrival in 2015.
- Senior leaders evaluate the quality of teaching and learning effectively. They monitor the progress pupils make carefully and work closely with teachers to improve the quality of learning. The performance of teachers is managed well by the headteacher. Leaders carefully align their priorities for school improvement with their knowledge of teachers' strengths and areas for development. They produce a comprehensive programme of training opportunities for staff. This is leading to ongoing improvements in the quality of teaching and hence the progress pupils make.
- The significant improvements in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment have not yet had full impact in raising achievement in all subjects. For example, the progress of pupils and the standards of their work in geography and science are not yet as good as in English.
- Middle leaders focus carefully on raising standards in their subjects. However, they have only recently taken up their posts and they have yet to make a significant impact on wider aspects of their roles, such as developing the quality of teaching across the school.
- Leaders have used the funding available to support disadvantaged learners effectively. As a result of good strategies to recognise and reward achievements, disadvantaged pupils attend regularly and make good progress from what are often lower starting points than other pupils.
- Leaders and managers have improved the quality of teaching through successful work with other local schools. For example, using the help of their sponsoring teaching school, they assess pupils' work with accuracy and confidence and have improved the teaching of mathematics.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress from low starting points. This includes a small number of pupils who have an education, health and care plan. Leaders use the additional funding for these pupils effectively to meet their differing needs and improve their progress.
- Leaders have carefully designed the curriculum to meet the needs and vocational intentions of pupils. The curriculum combines academic courses such as geography and

science with appropriate courses on animal care and land-based studies.

- Pupils benefit greatly from a wide range of well-planned, regular work experience and work-based learning opportunities. They also take advantage of the numerous opportunities to experience active outdoor learning via the physical education curriculum and on weekend trips. The result is that pupils are very engaged with their learning and are motivated to succeed.
- Leaders have correctly given prominence to improving literacy in the curriculum for all pupils and have developed a good programme of additional support for pupils with low levels of literacy. The specific attention is ensuring that pupils' levels of reading and writing are improving and therefore they are able to achieve more in their other subjects.
- Leaders have been successful in ensuring that pupils and staff actively follow the values of the school. A carefully planned personal development programme helps pupils to reflect on their own personal growth and put into practice the school's values of pride, teamwork and compassion. In addition, there are regular opportunities for pupils to develop their personal skills such as working cooperatively and listening to others. Fundamental British values, such as a respect for those who hold different beliefs, are also woven well into the programme.

Governance of the school

- The trustees and governors are highly effective in steering the development of the school. They acted swiftly to solve the problems faced by the school when it opened in 2014. As a result of their actions, all partners, including the sponsoring school and college, together with local businesses, share a clear vision of the school's purpose and work together energetically to achieve it.
- Trustees and governors know the school well. School leaders provide them with clear and detailed information about the performance of the school and they use it effectively in making sure leaders take the right decisions for the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- School leaders have successfully developed a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. They have in place appropriate measures to protect vulnerable pupils and counter additional hazards of working with animals and in the countryside. As a result, pupils feel safe and are well protected.
- Appropriate safeguarding policies are in place and managers make relevant checks when recruiting staff. Staff are well-trained and know what to do should pupils put themselves in an unsafe situation or disclose an incident. Relationships with external agencies are good and this helps to ensure that the school can access the support from social care or health professionals that vulnerable pupils sometimes need. Risks concerning working with animals and farm equipment are carefully assessed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good, because teachers motivate pupils to learn by teaching interesting lessons and giving them the right support when they need it.
- Teachers' planning for learning is effective because they know their subject and pupils well. For example, in English, teachers substantially improve the progress of pupils who are often well below national expectation when they enter the school. They support those who find reading and writing difficult, and enable the most able to extend their learning.
- Teachers accurately assess what it is that pupils understand and what they still find difficult. As a result, they adapt their teaching and provide the right support to pupils. Teachers receive good practical advice from the special educational needs coordinator about the individual needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Teachers use this information well to ensure that these pupils make the same progress as other pupils in the class.
- Pupils receive clear and helpful feedback on how to improve their work and this improves as a result. Many pupils whose self-confidence is low improve their progress and self-esteem through the reassurance and encouragement of teachers.
- Leaders and teachers set ambitious targets and expectations for pupils, many of whom enter the school with low academic standards. Most pupils respond positively to the challenge of their new environment and so make the progress teachers expect.
- Teachers improve the quality of their teaching and assessment by working alongside colleagues in other schools as part of their professional development. This has had a significant impact in English and mathematics and pupils have benefited as a result.
- The quality of teaching in animal care and land-based courses is good. Teachers are skilled specialists, and use the excellent resources well. Consequently, pupils are very highly motivated. In addition, pupils undertake regular work experience that allows them to put into practice the skills they are learning in their lessons. Pupils benefit from this winning combination and make very good progress.
- There is some variation in the quality of teaching across the academic, classroom subjects. Pupils make good progress in English as a result of high expectations, accurate assessment of progress and well-planned teaching. Teaching is also effective in mathematics, where pupils are well prepared for their examinations. Teaching is less effective in some other subjects because pupils do not have the opportunity to extend their thinking and challenge themselves to gain higher-level study skills. Consequently, they make slower progress.
- Teachers and leaders have in place appropriate plans for improving literacy across all subjects. They are having some success and pupils are improving their reading and writing skills. However, the strategy is not yet consistently implemented in all subjects and so its impact is not yet fully realised.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Leaders take advantage of the small size of the school to make sure that every pupil feels known and cared for. Teachers understand the pastoral needs of each pupil and work with them appropriately. Parents and pupils are unanimous in their praise for the school's work in this area.
- A high proportion of the school's pupils come to it with significant learning or emotional and mental health needs. Senior leaders have been very effective in putting in place a support structure for them and developing a nurturing ethos across the school. Staff successfully work with pupils who have anxiety issues and who need particular reassurance and guidance. The progress pupils make in developing their self-esteem and confidence as they move from Year 9 to Year 11 is very impressive. The same is true of their ability to talk about themselves and their life goals.
- Leaders have successfully established a caring school environment where pupils articulate the school's values as 'being kind to each other and working together'. As a result, bullying is very rare and when it does occur it is dealt with quickly. As a consequence of the school's work, vulnerable pupils flourish alongside their more confident classmates.
- Pupils benefit from a well-considered programme of careers guidance and advice. They are motivated by the school's specialism and many use the work experience opportunities and links the school provides to prepare themselves well for working in rural industries.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well as they move around the school site. They are calm and good natured. They have good, respectful, relationships with staff. They work well with each other and they are courteous to adults.
- Pupils' behaviour in lessons is good. When sitting in classrooms undertaking academic work, pupils are generally attentive and most are keen to do well. When teaching is not engaging pupils can lose interest but they always remain compliant. Pupils' behaviour in practical situations is very good. They are highly motivated, listen to their teachers carefully and carry out instructions promptly.
- Pupils' attendance is now broadly in line with the national average. This is a significant improvement on previous years. The number who are persistently absent has also dropped markedly. School leaders have been largely successful in overcoming the challenges caused by travel to the school's rural location. The attendance of disadvantaged pupils and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is no different from that of other pupils.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress overall. When they arrive in Year 9, many pupils are significantly behind national expectations. Many have made poor progress in Years 7 and 8. However, they make better progress once they arrive in Year 9 as a result of their keenness to work in the land-based environment and the nurture and individual care they receive.
- The school's first cohort of pupils took their examinations in 2017. This cohort of pupils have made good progress since their arrival and many have caught up in their core subjects. Overall, they had achieved in line with expectations in English and mathematics but been less successful in other subjects. Pupils were particularly successful in their land-based and practical subjects.
- The attainment of pupils was well below the national average in 2017. Fewer than four in 10 achieved a level 4+ in both English and mathematics and fewer than one in 10 achieved a level 5+.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress. Results in 2017 show that from their starting points in Year 9, disadvantaged pupils of all abilities made progress in line with other pupils. This is the result of teachers' work in providing additional support when pupils are struggling to keep up but also of leaders' efforts to improve attendance.
- The most able pupils achieve well, particularly in English. Their progress is slower in other areas where they are not given so many opportunities to think deeply or solve complicated problems.
- Pupils make good progress in English as a result of good teaching. Progress in mathematics is also good. Pupils currently in the school are making better progress towards their targets than those that took their examinations last year. This is the result of increasingly effective teaching.
- Pupils did not make such good progress in geography and in science in the 2017 examinations. Leaders and teachers have taken action and pupils are now making better progress in science. Pupils' progress in geography remains slower.
- Pupils make very good progress in their land-based and animal care courses. This is the result of a combination of their very positive attitudes to learning and knowledgeable subject specialist teachers working with very good resources.
- More than half of pupils who took their examinations in 2017 had special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils achieved well, given their starting points. The proportion who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is falling each year. These pupils continue to achieve well because teachers ensure that their needs are met and they are well supported.
- Pupils make good progress in improving their standards of reading and writing. Leaders have made this a school priority and the impact of their work is evident. Pupils also have significant gaps in their numeracy when they arrive. Teachers have yet to improve this as effectively.

School details

Unique reference number	140977
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10024904

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

Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy studio school
Age range of pupils	13 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	148
Appropriate authority	Academy trust
Chair	Mark Gibbens
Principal	Annetta Minard
Telephone number	01305 215028
Website	http://dorsetstudioschool.co.uk/
Email address	info@dorsetstudioschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school is much smaller than the average secondary school.
- The school is sponsored by The Thomas Hardy School, an outstanding training school, and Kingston Maurward College, which specialises in land-based studies. The school shares a campus with Kingston Maurward College.
- The school expanded to include a sixth form provision in September 2017. It had only just opened at the time of the inspection and therefore was not inspected.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils supported by pupil premium funding is broadly in line with the national average.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies

should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning across the range of subjects and age groups, and scrutinised a wide range of pupils' written work. Many of the observations were conducted jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation including minutes of governors' meetings, development plans, analysis of pupils' progress, attendance and behaviour data, safeguarding documents and the school's review of its own performance.
- Meetings were held with trustees and governors, the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and groups of pupils.
- An inspector spoke with the headteacher of the sponsoring school.
- An inspector listened to pupils read.
- Inspectors took account of 22 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and a letter. They also took into account the 10 responses to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Andrew Lovett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Peter Green

Her Majesty's Inspector

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